

City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting – Linear Park Site Walk with CDD

Meeting Minutes – November 6, 2023 – 8:30 to 9:45am

Linear Park

Attendance

CPP Members: Gretchen Friesinger, Maggie Booz, Ray Fahrner, Ruth Loetterle, Sandra Fairbank, Sophia Emperador, Tracy Orr [*Members not in attendance*: Ahron Lerman, Amira Valliani, Angela Zhong, Archana Venkataraman, Cindy Carpenter, Chantal Eide, Cynthia Smith, Robb Johnson, Sara Cohen, Uriel Bulow, Vinita Bhaskar]

DPW/City of Cambridge: DPW staff: Abby Bentley, David Lefcourt, Ellen Coppinger, Kevin Beuttell; CDD staff: Charlie Creagh; and City Council staff: Patrick Hayes

Guests & members of the public: Candace Young, Charlie Teague, Jeb Mays, Neheet Trivedi, Nick Fernandez, unnamed others

Meeting notes submitted by: Ruth Loetterle

Purpose of the Site Walk

The purpose of the site walk was for the CDD and Kevin Beuttell to meet with the CPP on site to review the committee's concerns regarding the trees impacted by the proposed Linear Park path widening. The meeting was offered by Kevin Beuttell in lieu of the staking of the proposed path edges by the CDD, which had been requested several times previously by the CPP.

The CDD's proposed plan for Linear Park is to widen the existing 10.5' wide pathway through this narrow park to a 14' wide pathway with two 2' of stone dust shoulders, for a total of 18' of paved surfaces or 7.5' of additional pavement and disturbance. The proposed plan is of concern to the Committee given that:

- 70 existing trees are located within 3' of the existing path edge.
- The trees of Linear Park create a "cool corridor", maintaining this condition is a top recommendation of the UFMP.
- The proposed widening is in direct conflict with the UFMPs directive for depaving.
- Linear Park is a beloved park, easily accessed from the adjacent neighborhoods, and used by many residents. It offers the feel of a walk in the woods along with all the physical, mental and emotional benefits now widely recognized to be accrued from contact with nature. Indeed, it is unique in North Cambridge; and its value is further increased because its tree-lined path provides direct relief from the designated heat corridor of North Mass Ave.

The following list documents the City's stated commitments to protecting the trees in Linear Park that were made during the site walk. During the walk, Charlie Creagh stated that construction costs are of concern and will affect decisions. As the City has not had any pricing input for the proposed project, it is possible that the construction costs will exceed the project budget. It was requested that none of the stringent procedures for tree protection described by the City at the site walk shall be subject to deletion in an effort to bring the project to budget.

At the site walk, the City committed to taking the following steps:

1. The City will hold tree preservation as their highest priority for the project.

- The path will be adjusting to the trees, not the other way around.
- The path width will be reduced or maintained at its current width where the proposed path width of 14' cannot be achieved without negatively impacting tree roots. The roots may not allow the path to be widened even a foot or so. The path will be reduced rather than compromising the trees, given that the park trees are currently stressed by foot traffic, compacted soils and lack of water. In addition, a number of the trees are ashes, which are susceptible to the Emerald ash borer, further diminishing their resilience.
- The 2' stone dust shoulders will not be constructed where space is inadequate.
- No large roots will be cut, and any root pruning will be done by an arborist.
- The growing medium for the trees will be enhanced through decompaction and the addition of amendments.
- The construction specifications and details will carefully document the care and precautions to be undertaken by the Contractor during construction. These will be available to the CPP for review along with the drawings.

Note: The total length of the 12' path width in this area was estimated by the CDD at the site walk as between 500 and 700 feet. *[The total length is 397' as confirmed by Ruth Loetterle following the meeting.]*

2. Further air spading during construction will inform the final decision regarding the path width.

- Air spading will be conducted during construction to reveal root growth to determine the impact of construction on the tree.
- Assessment of the root mass will be evaluated by an arborist.
- Where necessary to avoid any negative impact to the tree, the plans will be revised and the path width narrowed.

3. Changes will be made if tree roots are encountered under the pavement where excavation for the repair or installation of utility lines—irrigation, drainage, or electrical—is proposed.

- Per the recommendation of park staff, the existing sprinkler irrigation system will not be restored. The existing system will be examined to determine the location of the leaks in the main line so that it can be repaired and the line reused for the proposed combination drip irrigation/quick coupler system. The location of the main line is unknown but may be under the path; repairs to the line will require excavation.
- The existing drainage system will be investigated to understand needed repairs. Areas for infiltration that are not above the subway tunnel will be sought to expand the existing system. Any new drain lines will require excavation. Note: Ruth Loetterle had commented that the existing drainage system consists of two drywells. *[Her closer review following the walk identified four.]*
- The existing park lighting will be replaced and relocated to respond to the wider path. Any new electrical service would likely be run under the path and require excavation.

- 4. There will be no filling within the root zone of existing trees.**
 - No trees will be subjected to filling within their root zone, recognizing that the addition of soil in a tree's root zone restricts the movement of oxygen through the soil and its uptake by the tree's roots, effectively choking them.
 - A "top dressing" of topsoil will be the extent of changes to the grade at trees.
- 5. No additional trees will be removed between Mass Ave and Harvey Street beyond the five identified.**
 - Only 5 trees will be removed. They are the five cherries identified on the 10-6-2023 Path Alignment Plan.
- 6. One tree will be transplanted.**
 - One 4" tree will be transplanted to provide maintenance access to a sewer manhole for a sewer cleanout truck, requiring the addition of a pull-off approximately 10' x 30' in size.
- 7. The growing conditions for the existing trees will be enhanced.**
 - The drainage properties of the soil will be improved so the water is able to penetrate further into the soil and so that its water retention capacity is increased.
- 8. The current path alignment will be refined.**
 - The current alignment of the pathway will be revised to maintain the character and craftsmanship of the existing path. The alignment shown on the 10-6-2023 plan has not been drafted to the same standards as the existing path—numerous tangents connected by small radii create a kinked alignment.
- 9. Wayfinding signage will be included as part of the project.**
 - It is unclear if the wayfinding will include adjacent bicycle routes

CPP member asked a question about user data. Current data collected by the City for the project regarding the number of park users is only available for one day in May at the Harvey Street location. The videos taken of the meeting provide additional data regarding the number of park users. In a 20-minute span between 9:00 and 9:27 am on Monday, November 6, 2023 there were 37 bicyclists, 5 runners, 11 walkers (one with a stroller) and 2 motorized scooters.