

Committee on Public Planting
Minutes
Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Members Present:

Seanna Berry, Maggie Booz (co-Chair), Paula Cortes, Chantal Eide, Sophia Emperador, Michael Hanlon, Nancy Jordalen, Joan Krizack, David Lefcourt (City Arborist), Ann MacAdam, Nancy Phillips, Andrew Putnam (City Supt. of Urban Forestry and Landscapes), Cynthia Smith, Erik Thorkildsen (Urban Designer, CDD), Florrie Wescoat (co-Chair)

Guests: Karin Weller

1. Review of November Minutes – The committee voted to approve the minutes.

2. Updates

Arborist

- David Lefcourt updated that the FAQs for Adopt-a-Tree will be posted on the website this week.
- January 9th there is a tree ordinance meeting that proposes revised language around permitting of tree removal on private property. See December 7th email sent to the committee for further information. Committee members are encouraged to attend as individuals, but this proposed language change is beyond the purview of the CPP because it discusses tree removal on private property. Regular CPP meeting to be rescheduled.
- 55 Wheeler Street project forgot some trees on the initial survey submitted to the city and will submit a revision. The committee was saddened to learn of the removal of so many specimen trees. Property owners are required to submit existing conditions, removal and protection plan, and a mitigation plan. Some of the property will become public right of way. The project has already gone before the planning board and been approved nearly a year ago; plans can be found online under special permits. There was considerable discussion on whether there is any kind of municipal tool as to tree removal on private property –as the ordinance is currently written there is not, and the planning board is the only recourse. Urban Forest Master plan is encouraged to make policy tool recommendations, looking at best practices from other municipalities.

Community Development Department

- Project 1 FYI: New marijuana dispensary on O'Brien Hwy will need screening between parking lot and sidewalk as per requirements for new parking lots, and will be interfacing with proposed street trees and new bike lanes along O'Brien. DOT will do the planting plan, as well as the addition of street trees. These will not be maintained by City of Cambridge.
- Project 2 FYI: There is a proposed amendment to change 3rd floor retail at the Cambridgeside Galleria to office space. There will be negligible impact except to the lobby for offices, and a street entrance at Cambridgeside Place (across the street from Charles Park). This street has tree wells, but instead has large potted plants that are maintained by Galleria property management. There was discussion about why trees languished and did not survive along the street, and why the property management requested removal and replacement with large potted plants. It was asked if there is a MOU/formal agreement about the pots or could trees be alternated? David can check into it and report back.

Urban Forest Master Plan

- Research Report: Reed Hilderbrand (landscape architecture firm) are wrapping up the research phase of their 12-month project and moving to recommendations phase. Climate modeling indicates future impacts to urban environment will be extreme weather events in addition to a slower shift to a warmer planting zone, which will impact mortality of trees through pests and disease (significantly) and drought (moderately). Soil analysis done across the city (20 sites, 5 samples at each site) shows fair to poor quality. In 2030, only 56% currently canopy left if we continue on the current course (4.5% annual mortality rate). Majority of current canopy loss is on residential property. These statistics generated a feeling of urgency within the task force, and the need to move fast enough in the next 6 months to come up with a mitigation and action plan.
- Preliminary recommendations to stop loss of canopy are to nurture and preserve current trees, build soil quality (improve nutrients and permeability), determine appropriate and diverse tree species for future plantings, and grow the canopy. Reduce the rate of loss to 3%, and plant 2500 trees per year to trend positive. Policy tools need to include penalties as well as incentives. There was discussion of impacts of leaving leaf litter in place for trees, mulching and composting, and what happens to municipal leaf bags and compost collected and taken to different cities.
- Next meeting of Urban Forest Task Force is Thurs, 12/20, CRLS Media Cafeteria , 6-8pm
- Documents available at:
<https://www.cambridgema.gov/Departments/publicworks/urbanforestmasterplan>

3. Kudos

- Fall planting is officially finished
- Greene-Rose Heritage Park has 16 new trees planted and they look beautiful

4. Summary and Accomplishments 2018

- Andrew Putnam hired as Superintendent of Urban Forestry and Landscapes
- Erik Thorkildsen joined CPP as new CDD representative
- 4 new CPP members were recruited and joined: Joan Krizack, Seanna Berry, Ann MacAdam, Nancy Jordalen
- Urban Forest Master Plan and Task Force launched
- Increased awareness of salt damage to trees, and a pilot project launched in North Cambridge along linear park to reduce salt application by 50%
- Improvements in watering of new trees
- Neighborhood walk in Strawberry Hill was a success – will do more as weather warms up
- Outreach about Adopt-a-Tree added for SeeClickFix tree planting requests
- List of tree removals has been posted on the website

5. Setting Agenda for 2019

- In-depth discussion of tree planting budgets, costs per tree, number of trees planted – to be done in January/February
- Review pruning specifications
- Develop City-wide landscaping guidelines and outreach plan to developers and private land owners –correct planting and mulching methodology, lessening salt application, and preservation of trees

- Install temporary fencing to protect new trees in heavy pedestrian areas
- Recommend largest possible tree well size to maximize soil volume and water uptake
- Purchasing trees locally
- Schedule a walking tour and a field trip
- Increase CPP visibility through public outreach
- Each month send CPP minutes to City Councilors and City Manager
- Other ideas:
 - Conduct a special meeting to see if DCR is interested in partnering around land along the Charles, and other properties
 - Look into other landowners/businesses to partner with to create urban forests, (Cambridge Cemetery, Housing Authority, North Cambridge Catholic Cemetery, DCR, MIT, Harvard, corporations)
 - Revise/improve Memorial Tree program so that it is less time-intensive for staff and that appropriate expectations are set
 - “Tree autopsies” to find out why street trees are dying and if there is a pattern
 - Better understand the mandate and purview of this group, when and how CPP fits into the CDD process
 - Update CPP website with current members and minutes
 - Development of a CPP guidebook

Next meeting will not be January 9th; to be rescheduled.

Submitted by: Seanna Berry