

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC PLANTING: MINUTES OF JUNE 13 2018 MEETING (revised)

ATTENDEES: Florrie Wescoat, Chantal Eide, Michael Hanlon, Kathleen Kelly, Nancy Phillips, Sophia Emperador, Maggie Booz; David Lefcourt (DPW), Owen O’Riordan (DPW), Gary Chan (CDD); Karin Weller (public)

1. REVIEW OF PAST MINUTES:

- APRIL 11:
 - attendees included Carolyn Matthews;
 - page 2 under General Updates - Information: “Carol” not “Carolyn”
- MAY 9:
 - Arbor Day report, 2nd item: too “many” shade trees
- F. Wescoat moved and K.Kelly seconded motion to approve both minutes, as revised; CPP voted to approve.

2. 253 WALDEN STREET (“MASSE’S HARDWARE”) PLANTING:

CPP Revisited its May 9 concerns about this development. The Blair Hines planting plans (those dated 11-12-14; are there later plans?) showed a number of back-of-sidewalk trees (NOTE from Minutes-taker: these are not street trees, despite CPP’s recollection during this and the May 9 discussion) along Walden and Sherman Streets. However, billboard illustrations at the construction site show plants in on-site raised planters.

O. O’Riordan said that the project went through Large Project (not Special Permit) review, and that the developer is obligated to plant what was shown on the approved plans. He said that this can be enforced by the Engineering review at the time of sidewalk reconstruction. (Query from Minutes-taker: is this still the case given that the proposed trees were to be back-of-sidewalk?)

The Committee queried whether the sidewalk could be re-routed onto the property and, thereby, street trees planted on the public right-of-way.

3. ARBORIST UPDATES:

- SPRING PLANTING: D. Lefcourt reports that the contractor is roughly 2/3 through the spring planting program; ideally this would have begun earlier than it did. Contractor had anticipated a 25-day effort but it will likely take a little longer. “Hiccups” in the process: some stumps that should have been removed were overlooked; some abutters refused trees or wanted other species; some wells needed enlargement, which delayed the planting. Also there are some wells needing retrofit (i.e. lengthening, where possible), but there is disagreement about whether the contractor owns this additional excavation and debris removal.

- NOTE ON TREE WELL ENLARGEMENT: Where wells are being incrementally enlarged, the goal is 2'x8'x3' deep. They're placing loam into the extra space, which D. Lefcourt pointed out could create problems for water flow between the 2 different substrates. Similarly, the revised planting specifications call for excavating all soil and back filling with loam, which could cause the same difficulties for water infiltration. F. Wescoat stated that she had raised this issue when specs were being rewritten, and was told that the reason for soil replacement is to remove potentially contaminated soil.
- ADOPT A TREE website – DL is meeting w/ colleagues to work on expanding the website so that it will contain more information, plus monthly updates that will be sent to everyone who Adopts. M. Booz asked whether watering continues after a tree is adopted? D. Lefcourt: yes, in fact the effort now is to maintain watering of new trees for as long as 4-5 years after planting.
- REPLACEMENT OF LIBRARY BEECH TREE: An RFP has been issued by the Joan Lorenz Park Committee to 2 landscape architects to make proposals for that section of the park. There are several issues to be addressed, including replacement tree, pathways, bike parking, views, shade for the tot lot.
- QUERY RE TREE PRUNING HEIGHT: F. Wescoat provided photos of trees on Magazine & Forest Streets showing very high pruning (limbing up). D. Lefcourt said he isn't sure why these particular trees were limbed up. F. Wescoat stated her belief that the canopy doesn't need to be so high and asked if there are guidelines. Not specifically, according to D. Lefcourt. He said that In general, they try to prune to roughly 10' above sidewalk, 14' above street, but that this depends on how the particular tree grows. He says the street tree pruning is done by Cambridge Landscape, and that he has a strong positive assessment of the person running this work. He added that there's normally a reason when a tree is pruned high; that decisions are case by case, species by species.
- M. Booz asked whether the DPW accedes to business requests to prune up so as to expose shop signs. D. Lefcourt said that they do, to some extent, slowly...limb by limb; that it's a careful interplay between merchants and DPW to both maintain tree canopy and satisfy merchants' needs, especially while the tree is young.
- K. Weller inquired about a large tree-trunk on Huron Ave. near Grey Gardens that has many suckers. She wants it retained, as it's better than either no tree or a small new tree. D. Lefcourt said he would look at it, but that normally it's not good to retain a trunk with suckers because they're too weak. K. Weller also asked about a tree on Upland Rd.; D. Lefcourt said he would look at it.

4. CDD REPORT:

- 50 Cambridgeport Drive will be the subject of a zoning hearing on July 10.
- The Envision Cambridge Advisory Committee's next meeting is July 8 at the Cambridge Senior Center.
- On June 6 there were updates on Envision Cambridge to the City Council and the Planning Board. The Planning Board update can be found on line.
- F. Wescoat asked about the piles of soil at the Binney Street Park. G. Chan replied that these are temporary and are from other nearby projects.

- F. Wescoat also asked what will happen to the urban wild at Binney Street Park that adjoins the railroad track and is full of trees . G. Chan says that this needs a closer look because it's at a different grade from the rest of the site.
- CDD has received updated construction documents for the Rogers Street park. These are now circulating at CDD and after CDD's review will come back to CPP.
- M.Booz asked about the review process for public-park plans. G. Chan said that these go first to the interested public, then to CDD and its in-house Landscape Architect; then to Engineering. As to aesthetic review, the lines of responsibility aren't entirely clear. An example of this is the Triangle park design, where healthy trees were to be removed and there's a perhaps inappropriate long concrete walkway proposed. G. Chan responded that CDD is working with the Landscape Architect to improve the design in response to CPP's objections.

5. NEW CPP MEMBERS:

There are 6 potential new members, from diverse parts of Cambridge (but none, still, from East Cambridge). They are being interviewed by D. Lefcourt and O. O'Riordan prior to decisions about their selection.

6. URBAN FOREST TASK FORCE MEETING:

- The first Task Force meeting was June 12. M. Booz and F. Wescoat attended and reported on it.
- Reed Hilderbrand described to the Task Force their intended master plan process, which will involve, initially, a public survey and a random sampling of 400 acres throughout Cambridge, with D. Lefcourt inspecting and collecting tree data for each of the selected acres.
- The attendees broke into 3 discussion groups:
 - Issues group: among the issues discussed were sidewalk construction, which now entails 2' depth of excavation & compaction -- and the need to determine another way of building sidewalks so that tree roots can grow beneath them.
 - Advocacy group: discussed educating children, and the general public, about the importance of trees and what their needs are.
 - Analytics & Practice group.
- M.Booz and F Wescoat said that the Task Force were clearly knowledgeable about trees but less so about the City's role and responsibilities regarding Cambridge trees.
- Task Force meetings will be on the last Thursday of each month, going forward.

7. CPP LETTER(S) TO URBAN FOREST TASK FORCE:

- F. Wescoat and C. Eide have drafted letters. F.Wescoat will compile and submit them to the Task Force.
- K.Kelly proposed urging the Task Force to recommend that CPP be given broader authority, for instance (1) over plantings other than trees and (2) on other than public and Special Permit projects.

8. CPP JULY MEETING:

M.Booz proposed that the July meeting take place in West Cambridge and end at her house. D.Lefcourt will check on whether this is consistent with public meeting law. K. Kelley suggested an alternative: a meeting starting at the intersection of Huron Ave. and Cushing St., followed by an informal get-together (not a meeting) at M. Booze's home.

9. OTHER MATTERS:

- A "tree rally" was scheduled for June 14, 5pm to 6:30pm, at City Hall, in connection with 3 orders submitted to City Council by Councillor Zondervan.
- It was noted that an issue to be faced in coming months and years is the conflict between solar panels and trees as the former become more common.

10. ACTION ITEMS:

- Letter from CPP to Urban Forest Task Force
- Clarification of July meeting location.

[Minutes submitted by N.Phillips]