

Committee on Public Planting Minutes
11-17-20
Submitted by: Maggie Booz

Attendees:

David Lefcourt DPW, Abby Bentley DPW, Andrew Putnam DPW, Owen O’Riordan DPW, Gary Chan CDD, Eric Thorkildsen CDD, Paula Cortes, Chantal Eide, Sophia Emperador, Nancy Jordalen, Joan Krizack, Ann McAdam, Cynthia Smith, Maggie Booz

The meeting was called to order and the September 2020 minutes were approved.

Owen O’Riordan updated the group on the status of the tree-cutting ordinance which is a temporary ordinance whose end-date has been postponed twice and as of 11-16-20 has been postponed again, until February 28, 2021. The purpose of the extensions is to give the DPW time to formulate a permanent private property tree-cutting ordinance and for the Health&Environment and Ordinance Sub-Committees of the City Council to consider and deliberate before sending it to the full City Council for voting on.

On 11-16-20 the DPW presented a list of suggested changes to the Ordinance, in general strengthening it, to the Health&Environment Sub-Committee. The Ordinance Committee will meet in January of 2021 to deliberate about the strengthened Ordinance language, and then the changes will be drafted for the presentation of the permanent Ordinance to the City Council. There will be public comment opportunities in City Council meetings, and there will be time for public comment by letter as well.

OO asked the CPP to, in particular, consider the different options for a strategy of “tree replacement” for trees removed on private property or on development projects smaller than the already-established large projects’ requirements. The four options being floated by DPW, the Urban Forest Master Plan, and a City councilor are:

- 1) remove a tree; replace with any size replacement tree or pay fee
- 2) remove a tree; replace with identical quantity of dbh or pay fee
- 3) remove a tree; replace with 50% of dbh or pay fee
- 4) remove a tree; replace with any percentage of dbh plus pay the remainder of the dbh percentage in fee

Exceptions for Affordable Housing Projects, citizens who qualify for reduced taxes, and Veterans.

Reactions:

Cynthia Smith questioned exemptions from the regulations, made the point that small stature trees don’t replace large shade trees, and that caliper inches can be increased so the replacement of identical dbh with equal dbh does not necessarily mean unreasonable quantities of trees to replace one.

Paula Cortes asked about the tone of the City Council Sub-Committee’s reactions. OO responded that while most all Councilors see the benefit in protecting trees they were “alarmed” by the financial burden it might put on citizens.

David Lefcourt reported that the City is putting out a request for members for the Committee on Public Planting on 11-18-20, and will be advertising the open seats for 4 weeks.

Erik Thorkildsen reported that the project proposed for Alewife Triangle Northwest (near Blair Pond) will be heard by the Planning Board on December 8th.

Gary Chan reported progress on the Triangle Park landscape project, on the island at Land Boulevard and Binney Streets. Stoss Associates responded to comments by CPP at the last presentation of the project, and with significant input from Ellen Coppinger and Andrew Putnam, developed a planting plan that is part of 90% complete Construction Documents. Salient design choices:

- bermed land along Land Boulevard and somewhat at Binney Street end too
- diagonal traverse of path across island, thus removal of two existing trees
- districts of planting are Urban Grove, Park Edge, Land Boulevard Edge, Midland, Lowland

- Urban Grove: River Birch and Kentucky Coffeetree, stone dust ground surface, moveable furniture seating area
- Park Edge: Hornbeam, Arbor Vitae, Sedge/shrubs
- Land Edge: high density planting of bareroot trees, Black Oak, Shagbark Hickory, Striped maple, Serviceberry
- Midland: Elms and Smoketrees
- Lowland: Birch, Witch Hazel, Magnolia, Cypress

Some discussion between PC and AP about multi-stemmed trees in Urban Grove area. Ann McAdam expressed satisfaction at diversity of species.

Abby Bentley updated the CPP about Urban Forestry planting progress this fall:

- 250 bare root trees planted (85 street, 22 Donnelly Park, 13 Library, 18 Dana Park, 17 Russell Field, 10 back-of-sidewalk)
- planters re-planting 150 trees that didn't make it and are under warranty
- no watering spring and early summer resulted in about 10% tree loss
- 100 trees unplanted this fall are healed in until spring

PC pointed out, as CPP has done in the recent past, that 2-stake staking doesn't keep bare root trees upright, AP said that Urban Forestry considering tri-pod method

AP said that 850 trees were planned for planting in 2020, 250 were accomplished (due to Covid), hoping to plant 900 next year and ramp up asap to 1200 yearly.

Maggie Booz reported that City revisiting the 19th Amendment Memorial because artist selection process inadequately encouraged artists-of-color to propose works. CPP hopes that NOT siting the memorial on the Cambridge Common will also be part of revisiting of this project.

Sophia Emperador asked DL about memorial trees at Fresh Pond in honor of volunteers there (3) who have passed away. DL replied that the land proposed for the trees belongs to DCR and the City has had a very difficult time working with DCR on tree efforts, citing Magazine Beach trees. OO offered that it may be easier to forge relationships with DCR through Harvard (Tom Lucey) and MIT (Sarah Gallup).

SE and MB would like to similarly try to forge relationships with the City of Cambridge School Department to plant trees on street frontage owned by schools. MB pointed out non-thriving/slowly dying Ginkgos at Haggerty School; DL and EC have a plan to get those trees replaced, though MB pointed out that the pieces of land they're planted in are full of concrete construction debris from school construction in 1995. OO said that soil removal/excavation there may be hard to accomplish. OO also said that he would make a note of forging a relationship with people at School Dept.

Action items:

1. CPP to consider tree replacement strategy options described by OO, comment
2. OO to work on a method of systematic informing of CPP of relevant public meetings in advance of those meetings
3. DPW will interview candidates for membership on CPP
4. OO will share with the CPP the presentation he made to the Health&Environment Sub-Comm 11-16-20
5. Members should encourage those they know who are interested in trees and the environment to join the CPP
6. MB to write letter on behalf of CPP to urge not siting 19th Amendment memorial on Cambridge Common
7. DL/EC to look at replanting trees in front of Haggerty School
7. OO to contact School Dept

Our next Zoom meeting will be held on December 9, 2020 at 5:30pm and will be advertised to the public in advance.