

City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting

Meeting Minutes – March 9, 2022 - 5:30-7pm

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Attendance

CPP Members: Vinita Bhaskar, Maggie Booz, Cindy Carpenter, Sara Cohen, Paula Cortes, Chantal Eide, Sophia Emperador, Sandra Fairbank, Michael Hanlon, Joan Krizack, Ahron Lerman, Tracy Orr, Ruth Loetterle

DPW/City of Cambridge: Kevin Beuttell, Kate Riley, David Lefcourt, Abby Bentley, Erik Thorkildsen

Guests & members of the public: Brendon Roy (PM), Kris Bradner (Traverse), Lisa Pecora (Perkins Eastman), Augusto Trento (Project Manager, City of Cambridge), Evan Silva (Project Engineer, City of Cambridge), John (No Last Name)

Meeting notes submitted by: Sophia Emperador & Vinita Bhaskar

Agenda Items:

1. Presentation: Tobin School Project - updates of the landscape plan
2. Review minutes from January and February meetings
3. Updates from City Arborists
4. Updates from CDD Rep Erik Thorkildsen
5. Updates from CPP Subcommittees

1) **Presentation: Tobin Montessori & Vassal Lane Upper School** - Kris Bradner, Traverse Landscape Architects (TLA)

Pre-Construction and proposed changes to tree plans for Tobin and Vassal were presented as a follow-up to their presentation last June (2021).

Larger canopy trees were added, as well as changes to the tree species choices (Tulip Poplar, American Linden, American Holly) were added to the list.

CPP Comments/Questions:

When is the site work scheduled to be completed? / Brendon (PM): Early summer for plantings, and school will open September 2025; availability has been a challenge, similar to our experience with King Open.

I appreciate your clumping strategy. Where will the larger shade trees be? / Kris (TLA): The larger trees but will be planted on an elevated mound; more emphasis on larger shade trees.

What is the soil situation? / Brendon (PM): The site was a former dump in the City, capped back in 50s/60s, and a lot of mitigation had to be done.

How does that affect your planting strategy? For example, when thinking of the amount of water the trees would absorb. / Kris (TLA): We are selecting species that fit certain conditions.

Could you elaborate on species that are on the north side near the car repair location? / Kris (TLA): Evergreen trees for screening and shade trees along that corridor, more of a combination than we had before.

I know you are using some natives but wondering how you thought about that and where you landed. / Kris (TLA): That is a big part of every project we work on, and there are some instances of a really green screening evergreen that may not be native, but we try to reach over 90% (also down to

shrub and perennial layer.) Provides great learning opportunities for the kids to learn about seasonality and color and texture.

Have you heard what the maintenance plan will look like? / Kris (TLA): We are working with David Lefcourt on contracts with the city, so including two years of establishment for contractor to make sure they do a good job; that gets you through most of the warranty issues, where plants die of shock within first two years. / Brendon(PM): Longer term maintenance falls on DPW and Dave Webster and his team. The school primarily handles up against the building and clearing sidewalks, but the grounds primarily will be handled by the DPW.

Is there a lighting plan, taking into consideration safety, birds, etc.? / Kris (TLA): They are meeting the minimum requirements for pathways and building lighting; they will use the City-standard for pathways. There will be some pedestrian scale lighting.

What about fencing? / Kris (TLA): Yes, there is a plan for fencing to be included.

2) Review previous meeting minutes:

Meeting minutes from January and February will be reviewed online and finalized at the April meeting.

3) Updates from City Arborists:

No planting updates were available for this month.

DPW is working to confirm the details of the canopy flyover (LiDAR), for the change in canopy analysis that is overdue for the City. The same group will be conducting the analysis who completed the prior study.

4) Updates from CDD Rep Erik Thorkildsen

• MXD Project- Kendall Square

The existing parking garage is being replaced with a large underground Eversource vault. The plaza is not happening yet, and that is where the bulk of landscape attention needs to be. / No comments from the CPP

• 160-180 Fawcett St in the Alewife Quadrangle

Summary: There is a mix of existing and mostly small proposed trees. They are putting in new trees on the North and East side, and they do need to leave some space on the North for an Eversource transformer. There is a considerable amount of green roof, which we were interested to see. Usually, they reserve that space because of lab equipment needs. There is a bike lane, pedestrian sidewalk, and we are getting some questions on overhead railing. They do have a lighting plan, but it's very small in scope.

CPP Comments:

- Do we know the width of the planting bed? / Erik: It should be about five feet wide.
- On the east side, how realistic is growth, as it will be in constant shade? / Erik: It will be shaded past noon, but given pressure for development in this area, that building will probably not be in the area forever. Erik will ask them about their shade assessment in that area.
- There are five Kentucky coffee trees, and I believe it's the last tree to get leaves and the first to lose them. You don't get a lot of bang for your buck, so not sure why that's going in. I would go with a tree that has more foliage for a longer period. / Erik: We can review that. What would you suggest instead?
- If someone could do a soil analysis of that land, I know at Spinneli Place, people told me the buildings are falling apart because they never put in proper footings because it's all bog. I would try to find trees that like the bog feeling, white oak, elm; I don't know about the coffee tree or Hawthorns. I think that land tends to be pretty wet. I think it's actually like peat bog. I ended up putting in a willow oak that likes those conditions, and it's doing very well.
- I agree about the Kentucky coffee tree, and in some situations that can be a good situation, I'd be disappointed if it was removed completely but I do think it's an important tree. It's native, it's

highly rated for future climate expectations, and wide zone tolerance, relatively disease and pest free.

- A project like this really hits home for me. The fact that our zoning ordinance doesn't include greenery is really frustrating. / Erik: They are reducing the car count, so the garage fits entirely under the building.
- Is the multi-use path in between the planting strips permeable? Erik: they have now labeled everything permeable, the bike path and sidewalk.
- I was going to put another vote in for the Kentucky coffee tree, but if you are looking for another oak, the swamp light oak would be another good street tree.
- Should we also submit public comments? / Erik: Yes, that would be great! If you want to send me a few sentences, I can build them into the memo.
- I'd like to see a section on the raised planter along the street to see how big it is, how deep it goes, to see if it will actually work; there is a lot we can't see here. / Erik: It's more or less at grade.
- What does it look like down below? / Erik: I don't think they included planting standards, but DPW will have a role in this. There are city trees provided by the project, but DPW will manage.
- Will this happen before more proposed changes made to the Triangle? / Erik: we just don't know, that's a question for the law department and City Council. At the Planning Board meeting last night, people outlined complicated scenarios that will affect current projects. It's quite possible it will be held up, if the petition even passes. We did the Alewife District Plan and guidelines at the end of 2019 and there were recommendations for changes to zoning, as there is a long and complicated process. The intent of the moratorium is to create an incentive to revise the zoning, open space issues, and encourage that zoning does get updated.
- Erik, when do you get these drawings? Again it would be helpful to get these ahead of time. That was terrific from the first presentation, because some of these are quite complicated and it's hard to comment on the spot.

5) Updates from CPP Subcommittees:

Governance and Communication Subcommittee

- Discussion was had concerning a more standard template for the meeting minutes. Similar approaches were discussed for establishing guidelines for notetakers and delivery time frames, to complete both the notes and any other correspondence in a timely manner.
- Interactions with other groups in the City was also brought up, such as coordinating or linking efforts with MIT, Harvard, Green Cambridge, the Bike Committee, etc.

Zoning

- A short discussion was had concerning properties being bought by developers who pave all available open space, potentially for parking. The Building Department doesn't inspect the landscape so there isn't an entity that inspects open space requirements after the fact. Does this require a permit? Should this be up to Inspectional Services or Zoning
- Have there been any additional requests for back-of-sidewalk trees? **DPW response:** only one.
- Cindy: One of the things we talk about at our Outreach Subcommittee, is that the name and outreach materials are just coming out. There hasn't been any Marketing or Comms about this in a widespread manner.
- Homeowners are weary about their obligations to have a tree.
- How do we impress upon the problems around being completely paved, climate change issues on rainwater, and there must be a way to link up with other groups to advocate for open planting. In Somerville, they do a green score for homes and that might be an interesting place to start with zoning code.

Outreach

- Meetings were had with a Lexington group, they have a mix of non-profits and government committees and are doing a lot more formal communications than we are doing here in Cambridge. It may be good to create a list of all organizations, and if we do want to put out a message to these groups, we are able to get that out and amplify that. That's one of the things we wanted to start. We also wanted to think about ways to volunteer now that things are opening up, but maybe we can spread the word and sit at tables to discuss our work, the

Arborist, and a broader community support for more trees and native plants. We also discussed looking at our own personal networks. We discussed that a lot of us are interested in putting in a requirement for native plants and policy or approach; this was not part of the Urban Forestry Plan. We would also like to do some sort of official communications newsletter, and we would like to look at that in the third quarter.

- DPW: That is something we've tried several different ways, and that is just one extra thing that falls off the plate.
- This idea may help with misinformation and making what we do put out more accurate.
- Action Item: Ruth is putting together a list of similar organizations and will send a reminder to the group to help complete the list.

6) Other business

City Manager search: Sophia, Maggie and Sandra will be writing a letter to the search firm to let them know of the CPP's concerns for the new city manager. They have already spoken to many groups, but they seem to have missed groups concerned with open space/trees/etc.

In-person meetings: Kate R. Reminds the group that the State has changed the Open Meeting law, and opened in-person meetings as of July 15. You can reach out to the State to place a more permanent policy on hybrid meetings. Andrew: the plan is to meet outdoors in July, break for August and resume in-person for September.

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March Action Items:

- Sophia and Erik will coordinate ahead of time to share any upcoming Planning Board projects of interest to the committee in a timely manner.

Public comments: n/a

Next meeting: Our next Zoom meeting will be held on April 13, 2022 at 5:30pm and will be advertised to the public in advance.

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NOTE: The foregoing represents our understanding of the discussions and decisions made during this meeting. The CPP requests permission to quote or reference these notes.