

City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting

Meeting Minutes – December 18th, 2024 - 5:30-6:30pm - Special Meeting

Hybrid Meeting via Zoom

Attendance

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

DPW/City of Cambridge: David Lefcourt, Andrew Putnam, Cortney Kirk (CDD)

Guests & members of the public: James Williamson, Charles Teague, Nathan Andac, Rob Vandnabeele

Meeting notes submitted by: Sophia Emperador

Agenda Items:

1. Meeting Minutes:
 - a. Review and approve CPP Page Turn - Linear Park mtg min (Nov 21) (10min)
2. Document Review:
 - a. Review and approve CPP letter concerning Linear Park design and review process to CDD (45 min)
3. Public Comment (5 min)

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1. Meeting minutes were reviewed. Gretchen requested that we also include all the studies relative to the Linear Park design review generated by Ruth and herself as attachments to the Page Turn Mtg minutes. Ruth moved to approve the Minutes; Maggie seconded (Robb-abstained).
 2. Document review
 - The contents of the letter outlining the CPP's overall review of the Linear Park design was discussed, such as including additional statistics and facts to support some of the arguments or provide additional context or details. It was decided that the letter would be better as a succinct summary of our two main concerns, particularly since this was being sent in the late stages of the project.
 - Additional discussion was had on the width of the proposed path

- A suggestion was made to add the project name and number to the subject line.
- Another suggestion was provided to add a sentence in the letter offering to sit down and further discuss these concerns with the City Manager and associated group.
- The list of folks receiving the letter via email was discussed and it was determined that the following people/departments would be included: City Manager, City Council, CDD, Owen O’Riordan, Melissa Peters, Julie Wormser & Kathy Watkins.
- Not all CPP members agreed on the letter's content, so it was decided only to list the names of those members who supported the letter.
- All present members voted to send the letter with the suggested adjustments. (Archana abstained from voting)
- A question arose about who would attend the meeting (if any) with the City Manager. Would this have to be a meeting open to the public? Unknown - Sophia indicated that she would have to look further into the rules about this type of meeting if the opportunity arises.

3. Public comment

- James Wiliamson – Noted that it would have been better to provide comments before the committee voted on approving the letter and that the committee should have requested a meeting in person with the City Manager. He felt that the City isn’t responsive to the people who live here, and that the City determines how they want to get things done.
He also noted the bicycle agenda is leading the City, and it will continue to cause further damage.

Meeting ended at 6:05pm

Attachment:

-Final draft of CPP letter sent to City Manager concerning the Linear Park Design

December 20, 2024

Yi-An Huang, City Manager
City of Cambridge
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Re: Linear Park Redesign Project

Dear City Manager Huang,

Over the past year, the Committee on Public Planting has actively participated in the review of the Linear Park redesign, where the Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP) has proven to be an invaluable guide and benchmark. Throughout this process, we have worked to advocate for the protection of the existing trees at Linear Park. Despite these efforts, we remain deeply concerned that the preservation of our existing forest is not consistently prioritized in City projects. Mature trees, which take decades to reach their full ecological and climate benefits, must be recognized as essential infrastructure, and their protection should be paramount as we strive to safeguard our community against the effects of climate change.

The current Linear Park redesign proposal falls short of aligning with the UFMP's core principles and the City's long-term environmental goals. Specifically, the proposed design raises two significant concerns:

1. **Path-Widening and Increased Pavement:** Path widening will significantly increase pavement at the expense of existing trees. This expansion not only jeopardizes critical root systems but also increases the area of impermeable surfaces. Within this context, such changes exacerbate stormwater runoff and intensify the urban heat island effect.
2. **Tree Loss and Canopy Reduction:** The proposed modifications pose a clear threat to the health and longevity of existing mature trees. Any loss of these trees would undermine the City's stated commitment to increasing canopy coverage.

The redesign of Linear Park should advance Cambridge's urban forestry and climate resilience goals. This can only be achieved if the protection of mature trees and the minimization of additional hardscaping are treated as **central** priorities. North Cambridge is a dense neighborhood of heat

islands with rare public parkland. By aligning the redesign with the principles of the Urban Forest Master Plan, the City can ensure that Linear Park remains a cherished green space and becomes a thriving and resilient park for generations to come.

We ask the City Manager to pause CDD's plan to put the project out to bid in January. We would like to see a path no wider than 12' (current path is 10.5'), and the elimination of the stone dust shoulders, since its detail is problematic for maintenance and essentially must be considered hardscape.

The Committee on Public Planting takes its responsibility as advocates for trees and green infrastructure seriously. We would like to see every Cambridge open space project be one that epitomizes environmental responsibility and is the pinnacle of green design principles. Please help us help Cambridge to do just that. We would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss our concerns in greater detail.

Respectfully submitted,

The Committee on Public Planting

Ahron Lerman, Chantal Eide, Cindy Carpenter (Co-Chair), Cynthia Smith, Gretchen Friesinger, Maggie Booz, Ruth Loetterle, Sandra Fairbank, Sophia Emperador (Co-Chair), Tracy Orr, Robb Johnson, Sara Cohen

CC:

Owen O'Riordan, Deputy City Manager ooriordan@cambridgema.gov

Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development cddat344@cambridgema.gov

Cambridge City Council Members citycouncil@cambridgema.gov

Kathy Watkins, Commissioner DPW kwatkins@cambridgema.gov

Melissa Peters, Chief of Planning Strategy mpeters@cambridgema.gov

Julie Wormser, Chief Climate Officer jwormser@cambridgema.gov

Andrew Putnam, Superintendent of Urban Forestry & Landscapes aputnam@cambridgema.gov