

City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting

Meeting Minutes – March 13, 2024 - 5:30-7pm

Hybrid Meeting via Zoom & at DPW - 147 Hampshire St.

Attendance (** indicates virtual attendance*)

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

DPW/City of Cambridge: Abby Bentley, Andrew Putnam, David Lefcourt, Kevin Beuttell, Kristen Kelleher*

Guests & members of the public: Charles Teague*, Bernice Buresh*, Cameron Bishop*, Heather Hoffman*, Jeb Mays*, Martin Bakal*, plus two in-person guests not identified

Meeting notes submitted by: Cindy Carpenter

Agenda items:

- February meeting minutes for review
- Urban Forestry Department Budget Review by Andrew Putnam
- Updates from City Arborist
- Update from each Sub-committee and summary of top priorities for the year
- Project update: Linear Park
- Other Business
- Public Comments

1. Approved the February meeting minutes, with three edits.

2. Urban Forestry Department Budget Review, by Andrew Putnam

- Total budget is \$3.8. Projects from Participatory Budget funding usually brings it up to around \$4M.
- Operating budget's purpose is to support a sustainable urban forest, not just planting more trees (e.g., pruning)
- Capital budget is almost \$1M in past years
 - This budget is funded by the tree fund, both TPO fees and commitments from large projects. The funds appearing beyond the current year are from the Cambridgeside Galeria agreement, spread out over multiple terms.
 - If adequate funds don't come in, Forestry will ask for funds from the city's discretionary funds.
 - Increasing funds for additional staff doesn't make sense at this time, because we currently have open positions that are hard to fill.

- Participatory Budget has two proposals where Urban Forestry team provided inputs, including a communications position to be shared between Urban Forest and community gardens (this is the first year that PB allowed proposals for operations vs. capital investments).
- Q&A
 - Contracts for pruning: Aim is to get every street tree pruned at least once every 6 years, and all park & cemetery trees every 8 years. Reactive pruning as needed, done by in-house crew. Young tree pruning is all proactive. Includes 22,000 trees all told, 14,000 street trees.
 - Everything that is not a tree (plazas and squares planting) is overseen by Parks, by Ellen Coppinger. Danehy Park is standalone, overseen by Human Services.
 - Why doesn't city have one overall department for all trees, planting, parks?
 - One of the bigger bottlenecks to tree planting is street repairs and sidewalks that are not ADA compliant.

3. Updates from City Arborist, provided by David & Abby

- Spring planting
 - Goal this spring is to plant 734 trees, to reach goal of planting 1,000 this fiscal year
 - All street locations have been identified, except ~25 that need tree well repair and ADA chapter 90 reconstructed streets. Still looking for open space trees, have 88 locations identified so far.
 - Species are from tree planting list from last May CPP meeting.
 - Don't yet have Bag & Burlap vs. bare root, probably 50/50, based on contract.
 - 60% of ROW trees are in proposed new tree wells (where there is no record of a tree being planted there before), 40% in existing wells/replanting. Trees under warranty replacements don't count as "new" trees.
 - Tree map is on the website, red dots show proposed trees. New planting locations are marked with stickers on sidewalk (although sometimes removed by residents).
 - Q: Can people refuse street trees? A: The street trees are on City property, and legally, residents can't refuse. Reasons for not wanting a street tree include not wanting to rake leaves, bird pooping, squirrels, anxiety about a tree branch falling on their house or roots damaging their foundation. Abby has been able to address concerns sometimes, by, for example, planting an understory tree.
 - If there is documentation of someone damaging the tree, they will pursue it.
 - Anecdotally, in the past, some in the East Cambridge neighborhood wanted to clear cut all trees, now really support more trees. Overall, refusals aren't as much of an issue as they've been in the past (current issues in Strawberry Hill are outliers).
 - Q: What about using i-Tree tags to educate residents about economic value of trees? A: Did use the i-Tree tags on an Arbor Day in past, haven't done it recently.

- Pruning: City has pruned 1,844 trees since Jan. 1. Focus is on young tree pruning to train them for height over sidewalks and parking spots.
- Arbor Week plans
 - Agenda of events & activities reviewed earlier are now all set. Have new supplies, including table flags, coloring books, etc.
 - Cindy to add mid-day slots to CPP signup sheet so that David & Abby don't have to pick up and bring back tables and materials.

4. Update from each Sub-committee:

- Outreach (Cindy):
 - Working on Arbor Week PR (flyer for schools) and CPP participation
 - Participated in Mystic Charles Pollinator Pathways Informal Tree Summit
 - Q: Can we test for gas leaks when planting new trees? A: UF has done this in the past, but takes extra time/effort to do this. Will look into newer tools.
 - Linear Park clean-up - reported that See Click Fix is working.
- Implementation (Robb)
 - Looking at where CPP could be most valuable, based on data they've been reviewing
 - Sent questions to David for review, and next steps.
- Policy (Cynthia)
 - 4 members, including Archana, Maggie and Sandy
 - In the short run: reviewing the UF technical report, looking for low hanging fruit. Also looking at how City operates, from Planning Board to Zoning Board, article 22, affordable housing and impact on UF.
- Governance (Sara)
 - Reviewing UF plan, looking specifically at recommendations about strengthening the CPP, including ideas about how to address citizen resistance to trees.

5. Project update: Linear Park

- Status update by Kevin Beuttell
 - Continuing to coordinate with MBTA, no new comments yet.
 - Working with consultant team on soil analysis and decompaction.
 - Met with Forestry team to discuss most effective soil strategies for decompaction and nutrition.
- Linear Park Project Review Group update
 - CPP LP Project Review group has seen drawings marked as 100% progress drawings from November 2023 (77 pages), that were not shared with CPP.
 - At the November Long Term Planning city council meeting, commitments were made that the drawings would be shared with CPP when available, and would not go out to bid without CPP review.
 - These progress drawings show that many more trees are at risk than were previously shown.
 - Q&A

- Q: Is this a real set? A: Yes, the “100% submission” is marked as “100% submission” because it’s the last deliverable from the consultant, but it’s an interim deliverable. The grading info in this set is old.
- Q: This set shows much more damage along multiple paths. A: We think that this approach balances path expansion and protecting trees, will not expand where it will be harmful. Trying to optimize for multiple interests. Want to do other things that benefit the park.
- Q: What drawings were shown to the MBTA? A: This is the set submitted for MBTA review process. The comments received so far include no irrigation, need signage for emergency purposes, maintaining egress, want to avoid digging that will impact the T infrastructure.
- Q: Can CPP group meet with the consultant? A: Yes, not looking to do an end run around the CPP or the general public. Will have a special meeting if necessary.
- Q: If CPP job is to review plans, and at November Council meeting, we heard they’d be available soon, why are we not seeing them now? A: Taking longer than hoped, but funding is not at risk. There is no hard date for the construction. One reason for the delay is the T review. Our agreement says we only need Chief Engineer sign-off, but they want us to go through full permitting process, and that has slowed it down.
- Group will follow up with CPP.

6. Other Business:

- GSD conference – Forest of the Futures.
 - Fabulous exhibit there, open to the public, everyone should go.
 - Great conference – Mayor Wu from Boston came, fantastic advocate. Several people who were involved in UF, Arnold Arboretum, USDA participated.
 - Big takeaway for Cynthia was that street trees are great, but it’s the forest that is getting whittled away. How do we create more forest?

.....

Public comments:

- James Williamson (signed in as Cameron Bishop). Concerned about the Linear Park plan, feel that it is not responsive to the people who walk along the path, except for the people on cyclists and motorized vehicles. I worry that there’s not a full plan for cyclists, widening the path doesn’t help people like me – in my 70s. I avoid walking on the paved area.

Next meeting: Our next Zoom meeting will be held on April 10, 2024 at 5:30pm and will be advertised to the public in advance

Attachments:

-Presentation: Urban Forestry Department Budget Review, by Andrew Putnam.

Urban Forestry Operating Budget

- Other Ordinary Maintenance (OOM): Includes the 3 existing pruning contracts & a portion of the tree planting (\$500,000.00)



PUBLIC WORKS - URBAN FORESTRY

MISSION & SERVICES

The Urban Forestry Division is responsible for implementing a program of arboriculture for over 20,000 public trees. This program includes planting, cyclical pruning, and responding to service requests and tree-related emergencies. The City continues to implement the Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP), which guides the development of Cambridge's tree assets into the future. As articulated in the *Healthy Forest, Healthy City* report, the City's efforts to reduce canopy loss and increase canopy growth is guided by a focus on equity, shared responsibility, and resilience. In the coming years, this will require the City to pull from a menu of 47 strategies in four key areas: policy, design, practice, and outreach/education.

V-150



City bare root nursery at Fresh Pond Reservation

URBAN FORESTRY DIVISION FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

EXPENDITURES BY STATUTORY CATEGORY	FY22 ACTUAL	FY23 PROJECTED	FY24 BUDGET
SALARIES & WAGES	\$1,839,580	\$1,981,835	\$2,095,985
OTHER ORDINARY MAINTENANCE	\$872,995	\$918,000	\$918,000
TRAVEL & TRAINING	\$0	\$0	\$0
EXTRAORDINARY EXPENDITURES	\$0	\$0	\$0
TOTAL BUDGETED EXPENDITURES	\$2,712,575	\$2,899,835	\$3,013,985
FULL-TIME BUDGETED EMPLOYEES	14	15	15

Urban Forestry Capital Budget



PUBLIC WORKS: URBAN FORESTRY PROGRAM

FY24 PROJECT DESCRIPTION						CITY COUNCIL GOALS
<p>The City's Urban Forestry Program supports the maintenance and growth of a healthy, resilient tree canopy. The Program is driven by the recommendations of the Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP), which identifies effective strategies to maintain and expand the canopy, be more resilient to climate change, reduce the urban heat island effect, and contribute to community well-being in all Cambridge neighborhoods.</p> <p>Tree Plantings (\$785,000): The goal in the UFMP is to plant 1,100 trees in FY24. Half of the trees will be planted by the Forestry Division crews (\$500,000 in the operating budget) and half will be planted by a contractor (funding included in this capital program). Newly planted trees receive extended watering, expanded tree wells, and soil amendments such as compost tea and biochar.</p> <p>Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Preventative Treatment (\$75,000) is critical, as the EAB insect kills nearly all trees that it infests.</p> <p>Tree Pruning (\$50,000) supports tree health and hazard elimination. The capital funding is combined with operating funds (\$500,000) to support the pruning of street trees, cemetery and park trees, and a new young tree training program.</p> <p>Technical Support & Community Engagement (\$25,000) supports efforts such as the adopt a tree program and the partnership with Green Cambridge on the Canopy Crew program to plant trees on private property at no cost to residents.</p>						
IMPACT ON OPERATING BUDGET						
Tree maintenance programs to support newly planted trees, EAB treatment, and tree pruning will reduce emergency service needs and promote better tree health.						
5-YEAR APPROPRIATION PLAN						
FUNDING SOURCE	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	TOTAL
Tree Program Revenues	\$935,000	\$985,000	\$260,000	\$260,000	\$260,000	\$2,700,000
GRAND TOTAL	\$935,000	\$985,000	\$260,000	\$260,000	\$260,000	\$2,700,000
FY25-FY28 FUNDING						
Future appropriations will support the continued implementation of the strategies identified in the UFMP.						
STATUS OF PRIOR YEAR PROJECTS						
In 2022, the City planted 1,385 trees (837 street trees and 550 open space trees). In FY23, \$175,000 was appropriated for the EAB treatment and \$105,000 for tree pruning. There was no appropriation for tree plantings as existing balances along with \$400,000 in the operating budget supported tree plantings.						

Existing Urban Forestry Contracts

Contract	Objective / Goals	Expires	Value	Option to renew?
Street Tree Pruning	Proactive pruning of ~2500 street trees a year	6/30/2024	537,525.00	No
Parks & Cemetery Pruning	Proactive pruning of ~800 park trees a year	6/30/2024	149,600.00	No
Young Tree Training	Proactive structural pruning of 1400 newly planted trees	9/1/2024	125,940.00	Yes
Emerald Ash Borer Program	Preventative treatment for EAB on ~400-600 Ash Trees per year	7/30/2024	174,755.00	Yes
Tree Planting	Plant 650 trees a year and water for two years after	Open for Bid Tomorrow	Estimated at 1,200,000.00	No

