

City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting

Meeting Minutes – December 10, 2025, 5:30-7pm

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

Attendance (* indicates virtual attendance)

CPP Members: Ahron Lerman, *Cindy Carpenter, Chantal Eide, Christina Mann, Cynthia Smith, *Eva Tine, Gretchen Friesinger, *Maggie Booz, *Paola Massari, Robb Johnson, Rob Vandenabeele, Sara Cohen, Sophia Emperador [*Members not in attendance: Carrie Burke, Ray Fahrner, Tracey Orr*]

DPW/City of Cambridge: Abby Bentley, *Kevin Beuttell, David Lefcourt, Andrew Putnam, Cortney Kirk (CDD)

Guests & members of the public: n/a

Meeting notes submitted by: Maggie Booz

Agenda Items:

1. Review and approve November Minutes
2. Review Google doc on CPP comments to Reed Hilderbrand to assist their update of the Urban Forest Master Plan

Meeting called to order at 5:30 pm.

1.) Review and approve November Minutes. The group read and reviewed, voted to approve.

2.) Discussion around the comments that have thus far been made on the shared Google doc that will become a submittal to Reed Hilderbrand.

Sophia explained that we will have another week to add to the document, it will then be edited and prepared for our January meeting, and submitted to RH afterward. She then asked that Cindy lead the conversation about the document.

Cindy explained that the document is divided into 3 categories of comments:

- What we suggest be added to the UFMP
- What we suggest be deleted or changed
- Issues or Concerns we have within the UFMP

She began to address the bullet points within category 1, which began with a suggestion to analyse other towns'/cities' community engagement strategies and inform of tangible, successful efforts. Our committee responded in discussion by throwing out ideas about community engagement (having an official GreenCambridge liaison, concentrating on

further development of our website, advertising upcoming garden/growing programming at the Library, convening with science teachers, nurturing our DCR relationship, getting a CDD rep back to our meetings).

We then tried to identify what constituent groups we wanted to reach (citizens, business owners, college populations, biking committee, pedestrian committee, politicians). And identify what the goals of such engagement are (tree preservation, trees in the public realm as utility, care of trees, survival of trees).

Cynthia pointed out that Up-Zoning has put enormous pressure on main thoroughfares, that there is no guidance/regulation for developers even though they are almost always involved in repairing their streetscapes because of the damage done during construction. She described the lack of guidance as a “Wild West” situation. Gretchen suggested that the CDD/UFMP/DPW might do a Case Study on North Mass Ave, trying to optimize the intersection of private and public realms. Courtney began to describe the process that a property developer goes through when addressing the public space, informing us that they have meetings with DPW about sidewalk construction, but that ultimately the Planning Board makes the decision about whether their proposals will be accepted. If their proposals are accepted, they proceed with Building Permitting. David interjected that structural soil below the sidewalk is required if no back-of-sidewalk has been allowed in the property development.

Maggie remembered that, after sitting on the Tree Task Force (RH’s “client” during the year of research and writing they did to assemble the UFMP), she and the rest of the TTF was informed that the UFMP was going to be a book of best practices and suggestions for Cambridge, but that implementation was in the hands of constituents and the City Council to codify through regulation. Robb asked that, if the CDD were to come up with a public realm diagram, whether in tandem with a development project on private property or not, could it “become” a regulation.

Sara (I think?) pointed out the successes of the UFMP, and wants our comments to acknowledge them: the influence of the document on quantity and quality of tree planting by our Urban Forestry department.

Sophia mentioned that there might be a reason to break the CPP into two groups, one that deals with civic engagement and outreach/education/information, and another that deals with zoning/planning/regulation/politics. In reacting to a bullet point, Robb mentioned that fighting the battle of the Up-Zoning (due to the fact that it makes no allowance for trees) is “out of touch”. Gretchen emphasized that she would like to see the UFMP double-down on public realm planning, esp in light of the allowance of higher buildings and no setbacks.

The issue of further strengthening the Tree Protection Ordinance came up. Sophia

reported that the Fresh Pond citizens group (name?) wanted to point out to us that the TPO should not cover invasive trees (Ailanthus, Norway Maples), and that a reservation land such as Fresh Pond should not be subject to it since their mission is to responsibly manage their land with best forestry practices anyway. The CPP is considering strengthening language (perhaps requiring public notification of a tree on private property in advance so that neighbors are informed).

It was agreed that CPP members would continue to add and comment on the Google doc, and that it would require editing.

Public comments:

None.

Adjourned at 7:00.

Next meeting: Our next meeting will be held on January 14, 2026 at 5:30pm and will be advertised to the public in advance.

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.

Attachments: CPP brainstorming document referenced during this meeting.

CPP Input to the Urban Forest Master Plan

NEW/ADD:

Things to consider *adding* to the next UFMP

- About Community Engagement - add examples of tangible community engagement activities or programs, look at successes from other cities - examine these in a general way
- Community Engagement
 - multiple themes: education, outreach
 - What does engagement entail? Goals for the CPP in relation to Engagement? How will engagement help achieve these goals?
 - Prioritization of proposed engagement strategies to engage more folks/interested groups
- Recommendations about how to incentivize businesses to plant more trees on their property.
- Tangible incentives for each land use to plant more trees
- Recommendations for CPP (or some of CPP) to play a role in advising and shaping zoning policies to minimize removal/destruction of trees, and Incentivize more plantings and green space
- In terms of the goal to “MAKE SPACE FOR MORE TREES by prioritizing better growing conditions in street redesign”, the plan could specifically recommend expanding the shared street model to more neighborhoods where sidewalks are too narrow for street trees.
 - Accelerate construction of shared streets - instead of waiting for full construction on a 5 year plan, can there be a quick build solution akin to bike lanes (with flexible bollards) to enable tree planting in sidewalk while slowing traffic?
- Reference the partnership with DCR as an example of ways the City might partner to expand planting on institutional lands.
- Develop a small set of metrics for monthly/annual reporting that give a snapshot of where we are against key dimensions of the UFMP (and can be easily produced here).
- Explore possibilities of food forests in Cambridge to address growing food insecurity, possibly in parks or through partnerships on private land.
- New practices - looking at other cities (updates since the last iteration)
- New practices in forestry/urban forestry/planting that can be incorporated/suggested
- Where are the other opportunities to plant trees - thinking beyond only city land
- What are current/new tree practices or how have the recommended practices in the old plan changed? This is critical for maintenance of the urban forest; how do those updates work into the design
- How can the City further support Green Cambridge?

CHANGE/END:

Things to consider *changing/ending*

- Change the Tree Protection Ordinance (TPO):
 - 1. Exclude Fresh Pond Reservation, and allow the reservation to self-manage.
 - 2. Add a requirement to post the permit onsite 3 days before the tree removal.
- References to the “Back of Sidewalk” program need to be replaced since the program has been discontinued. Perhaps replace with reference to the tree planting program of Green Cambridge.

ISSUES/CONCERNS:

Things to address in the update to the UFMP

- **The goal to “REFORM ZONING tools and revise Article 19 to encourage more trees in new projects” needs to be re-evaluated in light of the 2025 city-wide upzoning – which has the potential to substantially reduce tree planting in new projects (and potentially shade-out planting areas on adjacent lots.)
- We’re running out of space on city-owned land for new trees, so... how do we change/evolve the plan to increase trees on residential, institutional, and business owned land? These are the properties that either did not make their goal or just barely made their goals in the last 5 years.
- In light of recent zoning changes we need to re-evaluate the public realm/sidewalks - Re finding space on city-owned land: Can we double-down on the idea of public sidewalks as potential “green space”? Especially on the very wide sidewalks of major corridors (12’ and wider). What are the constraints and limitations on creating extended tree wells, aka, “tree lanes”?
 - Cool corridors - shade for pedestrians and cyclists
 - There are still blocks on Mass Ave and Cambridge St. that have very little shade - can this be prioritized? If there are utilities underground, can there be raised tree beds?
 - Waiting at intersections can be scorching
- How do we better coordinate all aspects of our urban forest, integrating city tree planting and care with pollinator gardens, rain gardens, hellstrip plantings?
- Would like to better understand what a “Tree Trust” is, and how that might intersect with programs of Green Cambridge. Should we talk about the City doing more to support their efforts?

- How have the liquid biological amendments been working since 2019? Update strategy in UFMP for improving soil quality in natural, sustainable, restorative ways (possibly including elements of this resource)
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/natural-resource-concerns/soil/soil-health>
- The UFMP frequently mentions supporting local wildlife as a goal of the urban forest. Update UFMP with a plan/strategy for assessing (and improving) how well the urban forest is meeting the nutritional and habitation needs of local wildlife. Possibly include strategy for increasing climate resistant trees and plants that support the needs of local wildlife:
<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/5540edd0-3e67-4745-985d-23d6158ac3d9/content>
- To support improved tree viability and the larger ecosystem, update UFMP with strategy for making Cambridge landscaping practices more sustainable and regenerative, and educating local landscapers in native wildlife-supporting climate-resistant trees and plants, alternatives to toxic chemicals and poisons, and sustainable and regenerative soil management and irrigation practices, including leaving leaves on the ground until spring wherever possible to support the health of trees, wildlife, and the larger ecosystem.
- Can **trees** be seen by the City as a **public utility**?
- What about planting shade trees under wires instead of ornamental trees?
- With the increase in development and upzoning (such as the removal of setbacks)- this puts more pressure on the main right of way corridors (such as Mass Ave). There seems to be no guidelines to design the back of sidewalk and areas for - this area needs to have more focus, prototypical urban streetscape details, etc. What will we require the public realm to look like?
- End of UFMP Technical Report 4.5 Strategy Toolbox: Prioritize these based on current City concerns
 - Which strategies have not been accomplished? Which are left and can still be implemented?
- Serious evaluation of the CPP. Has the group outlived its usefulness? Should it be converted into a group who focuses on the review of projects, in which the committee takes on a different set of members? (more similar to planning board)
- Design guideline that incorporates public real and right of way - further focuses
- Stronger recommendations and implementation plan that helps define a concrete path on how to implement the newer strategies.
- How to strengthen TPO:
 - Changes to regulations can go through public works not City Council
 - Exemptions - such as the CHA, who else?