

## **City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting**

Meeting Minutes – February 12, 2025 - 5:30-7pm

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

### **Attendance** (\* indicates virtual attendance)

CPP Members: Ahron Lerman\*, Chantal Eide, Cynthia Smith, Gretchen Friesinger, Maggie Booz\*, Ray Fahrner, Robb Johnson, Ruth Loetterle\*, Sandra Fairbank\*, Sara Cohen\*, Sophia Emperador, Tracey Orr\*

Absent: Cindy Carpenter; Archana Venkataraman

DPW/City of Cambridge: Ellen Coppinger, Kevin Beuttell\*, David Lefcourt, Andrew Putnam, Kristen Kelleher\*, Cortney Kirk\* (CDD)

Guests & members of the public: Laura Tenney\* (MIT); Todd Robinson (MIT); Green Cambridge\*; Charlie Teague\*, Marc Levy\*; James Williamson\*

Meeting notes submitted by: Robb Johnson

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### **Agenda Items:**

1. Review agenda (Sophia) - 5 min.
2. Review & approve January meeting minutes (Sophia/all) - 5 min.
3. Updates from City Arborist (David, Andrew, Kirsten) - 15 min.
4. Design reviews
5. Other business & announcements - 5 min.
6. Upcoming meetings
7. Public comments - 5 min.

### **2) Review prior meeting minutes**

Chantal moved, Sandra seconded. Unanimously approved.

### **3) Updates from City Arborist** (David, Andrew, Kristen) - 15 min.

- Update on process and timing for Urban Forest Master Plan 5 year review (Andrew) – Two strong bids from Weston and Sampson and Reed Hildebrand – preferred consultant selected. Expect to be able to announce the contract at March meeting, and talk more about the role of CPP in the update process.
- Update on spring tree planting plan on Cambridge-owned land (David). No pit prep yet – hope to start in late Feb/March. By March should have better numbers for street and park trees.
- Update on MOU with DCR re: City planting trees on DCR land (Andrew); Meeting tomorrow on this with Ruth Helfed [DCR Landscape Architecture Section Head], Elizabeth Walsh, Paul Fahey. So far, they have shared some concepts in broad

strokes. City would handle planting, early care for five years, then handoff to DCR). Tomorrow hopefully will have more clarity about who will do the first draft of the MOU, who else at DCR needs to be involved.

- Update on Urban Forest Friends newsletter, Forest Friends numbers and CPP website, 2025 goals, and requests to CPP members (Kristen) – Feb edition just went out this evening. 930 are registered to get that. Website for CPP now has an alphabetized list of CPP members, and live links to CPP meeting agendas and meeting minutes. Kristen is happy to add other things that people think would be helpful. She's happy to add buttons for outreach events, e.g. Arbor Week, etc.
- Arbor Week: Dave shared a proposed schedule for a week of activities (See attachment). Urban Forestry and Green Cambridge will team up for tabling outside the Main Library. Kicks off April 28 (later due to school vacation week); New project: Notable trees by the public – the public is invited to email a picture of a tree they consider notable, with a note about why. Launch it during April. Also will share fun facts about the trees around the library. Flowering trees map; As was the case last year, a group will be there on Thursday afternoon inviting people to do block printing from sections of tree trunks. There will also be grafting demonstrations. Some additional ideas under discussion. Seedlings distribution again but this year people will have to sign up as an Urban Forest Friend to get one. Some other giveaways, including lawn bags, stickers. Sign up sheets for tabling volunteers will be available at the March meeting.

#### **CPP Comments:**

Ruth asked if Grow Native could join as they did last year? Dave said yes, but make sure they get in touch to confirm in case they need tables/chairs.

Cynthia commented that it should be made clear that the notable Tree project is about trees in the public realm, so folks aren't encouraged to go on private property.

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#### **4) Design reviews**

- MIT Campus-Wide Planting Update (Laura Tenney & Todd Robinson, MIT )

Slides were shared – will be available after the meeting.

Laura and Todd are both Landscape Architects, Senior Campus Planners in office of Campus Planning. They said they were pleased to join us to share good news updates about recent planting projects.

Todd: MIT's goals include looking for spaces to replace dead or hazard trees, fill in canopy gaps, ID new planting locations. MIT recently made a commitment to plant 500 new trees. (See slides for more info.) Todd clarified that commitment is above and beyond trees related to project trees that were already in the pipeline when the commitment was made. MIT is trying to use more green infrastructure, and some examples were shown. Laura shared information on MIT's new Tree Management Inventory Tool, which gives them a much more robust database

and management tool than they had before. The prior version from 2017 was not as robust as they wanted and had some outdated field info. In 2024 they defined key needs and metrics, and hired Bartlett to update the field inventory (completed last summer) and build the updated database, called Arborscope. It rolled out in late December and includes 2,650 trees from 54 Genera/100 Species.

#### **CPP Comments:**

Robb asked about photos of street trees shown on the slide, and Todd clarified that MIT only plants street trees on private ways (MIT-owned roads) or on Vassar St, where MIT has a 75-year maintenance agreement with the City.

Ray complemented them on the recent planting outside the police station, which was shown on one of the slides.

Maggie asked if MIT looks for opportunities to depave - to make new open space. Laura said they're definitely interested in that — to help with stormwater and more cooling. They may note such things as future potential. Also, sometimes a utility project may afford an opportunity – but they generally have to wait for a major construction project where they can redesign with less paving, use green infrastructure. Todd added that they have also experimented with non-stabilized stone dust and flexible paving systems to allow for infiltration.

Robb asked if they take input on planting locations. They said yes – people are welcome to send suggestions to Laura at [lltenny@mit.edu](mailto:lltenny@mit.edu), or Todd at [toddrobi@mit.edu](mailto:toddrobi@mit.edu).

Cynthia asked if there could be some trees along the Amherst Alley side of the of large playing fields. Laura responded they could potentially do more there when there is a major redesign. Cynthia commented that the fenced athletic fields create a very long barrier that prevents connectivity. Laura said they've thought about that and recognize the issue. The Music Center project will help a bit with connectivity on that end of the fields. They are definitely looking for more porosity, more greenery.

Maggie asked if they had any role at Volpe; they said no.

Cynthia asked if the City's master plan could interface with the new Bartlett database. Laura comments that it would be great, but they would need to explore what to show and how.

#### **5) Other Business and Announcements**

- Update from discussion with City Manager about CPP letter about Linear Park design (Sophia) - 5 min.

Cindy and Sophia met with City Manager Yi-An Huang, Melissa Peters (Chief of Planning Strategy) and Kathy Watkins (DPW Commissioner). There was not much discussion about Linear Park, as the Manager made it clear that decisions had been made and were considered final. So the focus was more on lessons learned, for future reference. Re: how and when meetings were held through the process, CPP members said it wasn't until very late in the process that CPP was able to meet with designers. Too late to have much impact. CPP members also said errors were found and pointed out, but not corrected – which further eroded public confidence. They also shared that it

was a public park project, but handled through transportation – which made for poor optics and again hurt public trust. In the design phase, when there was evident conflict and disagreement, CPP members suggested it would have been useful to bring in more of a facilitator with skills in conflict resolution. They also spent a lot of time talking about the CPP, where it's been the last few years, how it could be most helpful to the City going forward. There was agreement that CPP should take on an important role in review of upcoming Urban Forest Master Plan, and in outreach around that, to help the public understand how they can help. Cynthia and Sophia talked about the value of looking beyond trees to also consider shrubs, groundcovers, depaving, etc. One question was how CPP could support greater citizen involvement - even without the subcommittees we used to have.

#### **CPP Comments:**

Cynthia asked if they felt heard. Sophia said yes. She said they also talked about the value of having joint meetings with the Bike and Pedestrian committee once per year. Ruth asked if this was the last opportunity to talk about lessons learned. Sophia said she could always send follow-up notes. Ruth made the point that having a design spec for a 14-foot path width from the outset meant real options weren't explored fully. Survey specs written poorly, etc. Ruth will work on a 'lessons learned' memo and forward it to Sophia.

Ray commented that there's a difference between lessons we learned and lessons we want others to learn; how we get them to learn those may be a different conversation. Pounding on the desk may not make them learn. Maggie asked Ray how we could do it better? Ray commented that the facilitator idea was one tangible suggestion. Ray also mentioned that persuasion is an art, since the CPP doesn't have real control.

Sofia noted that the Urban Forest Master Plan is a great opportunity to try to have more impact. CPP will be playing the role that was played last time by the Urban Forestry Master Plan Task Force last time.

- Upcoming design reviews (Cortney) - 5 min. The City is planning to bring Danehy Park plans to the CPP at some point; Kevin commented that it could happen as soon as there is space on Agenda. Sophia suggested March. Weston and Sampson is the contractor for that.
- The City's Open Space and Recreation Plan has been in process for quite a while – trying to wrap that up and get it submitted. It will be presented to the Planning Board on February 25. 5:30 pm start via Zoom. Materials already posted on Planning Board website.
- Sophia: Linear Park is having an open house. St. John, 2270 Mass Ave, 5:30 - 7:30 pm.

#### **CPP Comments:**

Ruth shared that there is an upcoming opportunity to learn more about the Municipal Reforestation bill, which was recently reintroduced in the new legislative session. It will talk about what the bill does and how people can help advocate for it. CPP wrote a letter of support for this bill last year. Ruth said Info would be sent out.

**Public comments:**

James Williamson – lives at 30 Churchill Ave. Appreciates the interest of some CPP members on planting plans for public housing at Corcoran Park. There is a meeting on that tomorrow night. James is part of city wide ACT tenant rep. Group. Google “CHA Corcoran Park” for materials, including past meetings. Issues include density, loss of green space, planting plans. Residents have concerns, but plans are pushing ahead. One 6-story building, many 4-story buildings. The process doesn’t give residents much control.

James also expressed frustrations with the process around Linear Park and thanked the Committee – especially Ruth – for its efforts. Unfortunately, there won’t be a next time – for this resource. He said thank you for trying, but without power, you can talk until you’re blue in the face.

**6) Next meeting:** Our next meeting will be held on March 12, 2025, 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.*