

City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting

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

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

Attendance (* indicates virtual attendance)

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

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

Guests & members of the public: Charles Teague*

Meeting notes submitted by: Robb Johnson

Agenda Items:

1. Review agenda (Sophia) - 5 min.
2. Review/Approve October Meeting minutes (Sophia/all)- 5 min
3. Updates from Urban Forest team (Abby, David, Andrew & Kirsten) - 10 min.
4. Updates on CPP park design review projects - 30 min.
5. Health & Environment Committee meeting on Urban Forest Master Plan update (Sophia, Cindy, Andrew, David & Abby) - 30 minutes
6. Other business – Municipal Reforestation Bill – 5 min.
7. Public comments - 5 min.

Meeting called to order at 5:34 pm.

1.) Review agenda. Sophia reviewed our agenda for today.

2.) Review of October meeting minutes

Discussion: Sophia noted that she has updated spellings on some presenter names that were incorrect in the first draft. Cynthia asked whether a summary of comments made in the chat could be reflected in the minutes. They mostly had to do with questions of what role CPP might have in pushing the City to be more proactive in benefitting the urban forest. Sophia proposed that we not approve the minutes until we see whether that language can be added. Everyone agreed.

3.) Updates from Urban Forest team (Abby, David, Andrew & Kirsten)

- Updates on 2025 tree planting goals and progress to date (Abby)

Abby reported that tree planting continues. Leahy about 2/3 done with ball and burlap. In-house crew about half through planting the bare root trees. Water has been reasonable. Counting trees at new Tobin School, fall planting total will be about 700 trees. Chantal asked about status of de-paving in sidewalk area on Broadway at the Longfellow School. Abby said it is being done in-house – waiting for de-paving crew. Working with Ellen Coppinger on design plan. 11 trees will go in there – hopefully this fall. There is also a sunken area there with three red maples that has been a bit problematic – trip hazard. Will wait for the trees to die before considering what options might be best for there. Building only partially in use right now. May be pre-K site in the future. Maggie asked about trees that didn't make it at Cushing Plaza – Abby said they'll be replaced this fall. Gretchen asked about opportunities to plant trees in a little triangle at the high school – has one redbud now. Abby indicates that she has been looking at that and intends to – plant a tree or two there. There is also a nearby mound that used to have a beech -- no plans for a tree at that one this fall. Maggie asked if they confer with Friends of Joan Lorenz Park when they plant there. Abby says in this case where its closer to the school, Abby conferred with Elena Saporta, who is regularly in touch with Friends of Joan Lorenz Park. Cynthia noted she worked on a plan for Joan Lorenz back when she was working.

- Update on goals and progress to date for trees adopted and Forest Friends newsletter subscribers. Kristen was present to give an update on Forest Friends numbers, but Sophia noted that Abby is the one who writes the newsletter. Everyone thanked her for that. Abby noted that folks should send any content ideas to her at any time. It goes out third Thursday of every month. She normally organizes it the second Thursday, and sends it to Kristen for publishing. Give her ideas anytime. There's a new counter on the page that shows how many trees have been "friended" by a Forest Friend.
- Other updates, events, news: Dave shared that there's a tree hearing coming up on December 2nd (hybrid). City is recommending removal of a big oak at 77 Grozier Rd. Abutters have expressed concern over the years because of how big it is. 45" pin oak with a slight lean toward the houses. When they were doing sewer separation several years ago, it was evaluated and judged to be in good condition. No need to remove – they did do some pruning over the years. In 2018, an abutter brought in a consulting forester who brought in a consultant from UMass Ext. to use tomography to evaluate internal decay. In 2018, they all agreed that decay wasn't that bad and tree could stand. Did some pruning, put a cable in. Done again in 2023, 2025. Decay is accelerating – and more fungus is fruiting at the base. Also some stress cracks. Decay concentrated on the side where the tree leans toward the houses. Neighbors are beginning to see that the pros of removal may outweigh the cons. The hearing will help to inform everyone about the reasons before it actually comes down. They believe abutters understand the situation. Tracey asked if there are other trees that are getting this much analysis of their condition. Dave responded that there are other trees around the City that they are watching, and they sometimes bring in consulting arborists. This one got more attention because it's very big, and had abutters. The City has paid for the UMass tomography. Gretchen is asking about snags – in particular in particular large beech that is no longer growing. Abby is looking at replacing that with two trees to get some canopy back in there. At Fresh Pond they do let snags stand for wildlife habitat. Some of the greenways also have them.

4.) Updates on CPP park design review projects

- Rafferty – heading towards construction bidding (Cortney)
- Clement Morgan – heading toward construction bidding (Kevin)
- Raymond Park – in construction (Kevin)
- Linear Park – in construction (Kevin)

- Gold Star Mother's Park – closed (Kevin)
- Ahern Field and Playground – feasibility (Kevin)
- Danehy Master Plan – wrapping up plan, future community meeting (Kevin)
- What's coming up in 2026?

CPP Comments: Cindy pointed out that these are all projects that CPP has reviewed. These status updates are for CPP benefit, particularly for new members.

Rafferty – landlocked. some process with Sancta Maria around new walkway from Concord Ave that will save people from walking through parking lot.

Clement Morgan in The Port. bid opening is Nov 20th. Taking care to protect many of the trees that are in place. Soil remediation required due to prior gas station use on property. Some small trees will be removed as part of redesign and soil remediation. Doing lots of new planting of trees and perennials. Remediation involves scraping off soil and putting a barrier with new soil on top. A few trees will be left in place, but surrounding soil will get flexi-pave. There will be some storm management chambers under the basketball court (which will be replaced in kind).

Raymond Park – Neighborhood 9. Fixing basketball court, failing retaining walls, upgrading the community garden, perimeter path – improved soil at youth soccer field. Contractor (Phelan) will start mobilizing on site on Nov 17. About a year construction.

Linear Park (North Cambridge). In construction for several weeks now. Mostly at the Russell Field end so far. Widening the path, where they can without doing significant damage. Installing a 3-foot utility trench – probing for tree routes. D'allesandro is the contractor. Going well with them so far.

Gold Star Mothers Park (East Cambridge near Twin City Plaza). Had closed it off to do renovation of park. In the course of doing that, they found some asphalt and brick refuse – no one will take that without testing – they found high levels of lead and PCBs. Learned about site history --- big fire at pork processing plant on site years ago. Now looking at how to add protective layer in the playground area. Rest of site, need to come up with a remediation plan – and a plan for putting the park back in-kind. Some discussion about linking to the grand junction path. If they can do that, it won't change the design drastically. Park is closed to the public now.

Maggie asked whether budget-tightening will impact any of these projects. These projects have already had funding allocated, but Courtney said yes it's possible that future projects will be impacted. In January or so, she can give CPP an update on what projects might be up for design review in the next year.

Ahern Field at Kennedy Longfellow School. Park/schoolyard in East Cambridge. Plan is for synthetic turf to replace grass on one key field. About \$8 million in building improvements. Capital Building Manager is managing the park part of it too. They expect to come back before the committee when plans have come further along. A big project. Cynthia asked what they use for synthetic turf, and what's the rationale? Kevin

said it comes down to the heavy use the fields get – esp. due to growth in soccer popularity. Also, this one will be lit – which gives it even heavier use. Also, recovers from rain quicker to be used. Less toxic materials than they used to use. PFAS-free. Fibers also more reflective to be less hot as they used to be. Recycling plans. Cynthia asked what the new technology is called. Kevin said they haven't chosen final material. Rob asked about Dark Sky considerations around the field lights. Kevin said they'd be LED lights, pointing down. Throwing light on the field, not off it. Kevin would be happy to share more later.

Dannehy Park – over 30 years old, over 50 acres. Needs a lot of attention. Because it's so big, have a master plan process that would allow them to do necessary improvements over 20-30 years. Draft report coming out soon – will be reviewing it with community broadly. He hopes to share with CPP soon.

5.) Health & Environment Committee meeting on Urban Forest Master Plan update (Sophia, Cindy, Andrew, David & Abby)

CPP Comments: Sophia suggested everyone review the slides from Reed Hilderbrand that was shared last month. So that we can discuss, compile comments to share with Reed Hilderbrand.

Cindy and Sophia were invited to participate in a City Council Health and Environment Committee hearing on Oct 27. Point of the meeting was to review status of Urban Forest Master Plan, and introduce what is happening with the Update. Led by Patty Nolan. Councilor Cathie Zusy was also there. Councilor Siddiqui was there on line. Susan Rasmussen from Office of Sustainability. Stephanie from Reed Hilderbrand shared, and Andrew gave an overview of progress and purpose of the update. Not doing as well on business and private property as on City land. Also not as well on institutional land. Cynthia and Sophia spoke, stressing four main points: How do we increase canopy on private land? How do we move from general statements of community engagement to real engagement? Importance of understory. How do we effect policy (zoning to increase trees, etc.) Can we do a better job connecting the dots. Sophia added importance of measuring the success of latest planting methods (e.g. bare root, ball and burlap, structured soil). Can't keep planting on city land at same rate we have been. Cynthia: If that is the Council Committee that is going to lead on this, can we get more leadership from them by including them in Reed Hilderbrand's presentations? Co-chairs expressed willingness to help advance policy proposals if we have them. For example, on the Tree Protection Ordinance, what lessons can we draw from other places? Newton has a much more expensive mitigation rubric. Here is it functioning to keep people from planting trees because they don't want to have to pay to take them down later. Anecdotal yes – MIT for example. Could there be some exceptions?

6.) Other business

- Municipal Reforestation Bill

CPP Comments: Cindy said the bill was reported favorably out of Committee and is moving on to the next committee at the Statehouse. There was discussion about how

much to forward tree-related news that isn't directly related to committee business. Consensus seemed to be that some is welcome – but keep it to a minimum.

New Members of the CPP were invited to introduce themselves. Carrie introduced herself, from mid Cambridge. Rob introduced himself, also from mid-Cambridge. Rob mentioned he recently attended a DCR training program, which was great. Eva said hi – lives in the Port.

Chairs invited folks to send info they think the full committee may benefit from. Maggie asked for clarification about what can be discussed over email. Any type of substantive discussion can't be done by email. Can Maggie send suggestions to Sophia and Cindy? Yes, input that the chairs can bring back to meeting is OK -- but we can't start a conversation outside of a public meeting.

Public comments:

None.

Adjourned at 7:03.

Next meeting: Our next Zoom meeting will be held on December 10, 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.

Attachments: none.