

City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting

Meeting Minutes – May 10, 2022 - 5:30-7pm

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

Attendance (**members who attended virtually*)

CPP Members: Sophia Emperador, Sara Cohen*, Ahron Lerman*, Sandra Fairbank*, Tracy Orr*, Ruth Loetterle, Chantal Eide, Maggie Booz*, Cynthia Smith*, Paula Cortes*

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

Guests & members of the public: Gretchen Friesinger, Charles Teague*, Amy Meltzer

Meeting notes submitted by: Sophia Emperador

Agenda Items:

1. Review of meeting minutes from March and April meetings.
 2. Presentation by Amy Meltzer on "Supporting Biodiversity and Addressing Climate Change with Native Plants and Trees" followed by Q&A
 3. Updates from City Arborists - Updated street tree species list
 4. Subcommittee updates
 - o Outreach Subcommittee: Report on Arbor Day activities from Forestry Team and CPP tabling members. What worked? What can we learn for other events and next year?
 5. Other meeting items
 - o Summary of Health & Environment meeting on April 25 & next steps
 - o CPP Membership - application update
 6. Public comments
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1. Review of meeting minutes

Minutes from March and April are approved without edits. Notes will be passed to Kristen to be uploaded to the City's website.

2. Presentation by Amy Meltzer

Presentation on biodiversity loss. In the US this includes a loss of 34% of plant species & 40% of animal species, while 41% of ecosystems are in risk of extinction.

- Overall decline in insect species
- Insects are important as: pollinators, as food (food web), for carbon sequestration & decomposition in soil
- causes of decline - main cause is lost of habitat (pesticides, loss of natives)
- specialized plan/insect relationships, plants are pollinated by a limited number of species (hosts)
- non-natives support 0-5 insect species; 70% native biomass in needed to support species
- Recommendations to the CPP:
 1. Develop policy to prioritize native tree and plants
 2. UFMP amendment - natives and straight species
 3. Include understory/layers, higher diversity
 4. 3y new planting watering & drought
 5. Advisory body climate & biodiversity
 6. Public education
 7. Municipal Reforestation bill - provides \$ to support to plant trees (Starting with 20% coverage or less), 3y to asses canopy and apply for money

CPP Comments:

- Ruth: commented that 2/3 of our planting list is not native and limited and suggested looking at NYC, which is doing a better job.
- Ahron: suggested looking at Somerville's planting guidelines - they prioritize using natives and must have a reason for not using them
- Ruth: agrees, we should be more collaborative with other cities
- Ahron: asked if this lack of native usage has been seen in Cambridge. He described the City as doing a good job and using a high percentage of natives. Even though the UFMP dismissed the value of using natives, he has seen the City going beyond this policy by incorporating natives. Cautions having an approach that is "anti-biodiversity."
- Maggie: comments on the good presentation, that it is great for those who don't know the value of biodiversity. She mentions that the CPP is positioned to evaluate the City but also ID what we can do to make it better. Ellen has made a point to plant mostly native gardens, pocket gardens, all over the City. Sandra & Maggie planted a native garden this morning! Understands the issue- distinguish the loss of canopy on private property is far greater than through street trees. This group is also trying to reach a wider audience. Some natives may not be a good native street tree but could be better as a back-of-sidewalk tree.
- Ruth: comments that the group is looking at a list that is non-native and perpetuating the use of non-natives for others to use around the City such as developers.

3. Updates from City Arborists

- Updated street tree species list presented. Recommendations are based on observation of current specimens and of local nursery availability.

CPP Comments:

- Cynthia: asks if cultivars - red maple/red glory would be natives? Not all cultivars found in nurseries are native.
- Ellen: mentions that given the choice, you should choose the native and not the cultivar.
- Ruth: mentions that using a cultivar with a different leaf color could be problematic. She also mentions that Amy Meltzer is working on a grant to grow plants from seed that would help maintain native cultivars.
- Ahron: asks which evergreens would do well.
- Ellen: Douglas firs, dawn redwoods, pine junipers - the list is just for street trees, not a list for park plantings. She mentioned that evergreens are tricky to get established - heat, water, etc., but is looking for suggestions.
- Ruth: suggests adding a column in the list to indicate if the species is native to help prioritize these plants.
- Maggie: asks when does it not work to plant a native?
- Abby: comments that situations such as next to a bike path could warrant using non-natives. For example, oaks make a mess, and cleanup is problematic, folks complain or could have accidents. A less messy alternative proposed is the ginkgo.
- Maggie: suggests steering the conversation - the bigger issue is people who want trees vs not wanting trees. How do we bring more people along? How do we bring along the nay-sayers who refuse to have trees planted in front of their properties in public tree wells?

4. Subcommittee: Outreach Summary

- Arbor Week events - lessons learned
 - Ruth: mentioned that folks were enthused, excited to pick up their tree, get other folks involved from other groups

- Cindy: mentioned that they didn't see Green Cambridge at the events; the Recycling Advisory Committee (compost bins, - good partnership) was @ the main library
- Maggie: commented that they had a great time at the main library- dozens of people and trees (40+), should get a big banner next year (private property tree loss - splashy)
- Ellen: it was a busy week; Gretchen and the Porter Sq Community Group received 30 bags of compost - for trees and outreach
- Cynthia: commented that the library experience was great, would be ready to read books about trees to toddlers - join forces with the kids next year
- Ruth: mentioned that we should be sure to cover all the libraries, such as those in East Cambridge
- Kristen: pointed out that Toddler time was set up outside and they worked with the librarians to present tree-focused books
- Overall reactions: the public was mostly interested in the small ornamental trees

5. Other meeting items

- Health & Environment Committee mtg: update
 - Andrew and Cindy presented at the meeting
 - Maggie: reminded the group that the UFMP isn't policy, it needs to be followed with written council orders, as stated in the UFMP
 - Sophia: mentioned that Patty Nolan has offered help to write policy orders. We need to create a subcommittee to help ID policy orders.
- Linear Park
 - Ruth: shared her research that has ID'ed trees that were in proximity to the path and calculated their survivability rate based on Bartlett's #s (root disturbance %) and those that are vulnerable to the new design. She noted that the stone dust shoulder could be problematic for it would further widen the path and ultimately lead to further compaction.
 - Kevin: commented that the paths will not be dug. The air spading that is planned will help inform the design; it should happen relatively soon and give us a better idea of where the tree roots are to modify the design. Until then we are guessing the impacts, exposing the roots will give us a better idea of the current conditions. He reiterated that they will not remove tree roots to add stone dust. Based on the report findings they might not add the stone dust if it would negatively impact the trees.
- Upcoming meeting items:
 - Fresh pond day - June 10 - 11am-3pm - sign up sheet available (see Cindy)

6. No Public Comments were given.

Next meeting: Our next meeting will be held on October 11, 2023 at 5:30pm, and will be advertised to the public in advance.