

City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting

Meeting Minutes – January 10, 2024 - 5:30-7pm

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

Attendance (* indicates virtual attendance)

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

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

Guests & members of the public: Sarah Adkins, Green Cambridge, Jeb Mays, Cambridge4Trees, Rebecca Ramsey, Charlie Teague, Cambridge4Trees, Rob Vandenabeele

Meeting notes submitted by: Ruth Loetterle

Agenda Items:

1) Review prior meeting minutes for December and Linear Park Site Visit

Chantal moved and Tracy seconded a motion to approve the December minutes.

Gretchen moved and Maggie seconded a motion to approve the November site visit minutes. The Committee voted to approve both minutes.

2) Update from City Arborists

No updates at this time of year; routine pruning is being done and preparations for spring are underway. pruning following the storm of the previous day,

CPP Comments:

A question was raised about the damage to trees from recent storms. David Lefcourt reported that a couple trees were lost in the storm earlier in the month.

A question was raised about the ability to straighten young trees following a storm. David Lefcourt responded that they can be reset if the ground is not frozen.

3) Other Business

a. Linear Park - updates on timeline for plan revisions by Kevin Beuttell

Kevin Beuttell reported that they have not advanced the drawings very far. The MBTA is requiring a full formal review process that could take up to four months, possibly until April. The city does not want to advance the design until the MBTA comments have been received. This review should not affect the construction schedule significantly and should begin mid-summer. The MBTA plans to shut down the section of the Red Line at Linear Park sometime during the summer, and the park must be kept open during that time. The City does not want to wait until after this shut down.

CPP Comments:

A comment was made that the schedule seems tight to get from 25% to 100%, have a review period and begin construction. Kevin Beuttell stated that the schedule was unknown, but that he would provide the CPP with regular updates.

A question was raised about the current % level of completion of the drawings. Kevin Beuttell responded that they have received a 25% submission, and the next official

submission is 100%. They have received interim submissions. The city is committed sharing the design with the public and the CPP when the work is done.

A question was raised as to whether the schedule will allow enough time for the CPP to review the drawings, given that the CDD had stated in the Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning Committee meeting that the drawings would be far along at the end of the year. Kevin Beuttell responded that the full design plans would be available to the CPP to review and comment on and leaving enough time for the city to incorporate.

A question was raised as to how the schedule would work with the summer recess taken by the CPP and about the previous statement that interim drawings would be provided to the CPP; to date no information on grading and drainage has been presented to the CPP for review. Kevin Beuttell responded that only when the whole design was worked through would it be presented. If that timing did not work with the CPP's schedule, the members could be notified and the submission that is shared with the public would be available to the CPP as well for their individual review.

A question was raised as to what changes would the city be open to following the 100% submission. Kevin Beuttell responded that the city intends to proceed with the same design direction pursued to date and that they are not planning on making significant changes to the design.

A question was raised about how the full design plans would address the concerns about the trees in the park. Kevin Beuttell responded that the city feels that it is doing a reasonable job of balancing multiple interests.

A comment was made that the previously discussed letter to the council needs to be revisited in light of this update to the schedule and review process.

DPW Comments:

Andrew Putnam stated that Urban Forestry position is that they will be doing anything they can to protect the trees slated to be preserved in the park. Dave and Andrew will be involved during construction and as things pop up, such as an excavation that will impact the roots of a tree to be preserved, the plans will have to be changed. They will push back on the proposed path width where it will impact a tree. Commission Watkins has reiterated this position.

A question was raised as to who will alert UF during construction when they need to be involved. Andrew Putnam responded that there would be regular site visits and that the city will have a project manager who will alert UF. Kevin Beuttell identified himself as the project manager and added that a Clerk of the Works will also be making daily inspections, and he/she will also flag issues.

A question was raised as to the source of the damage to the tree along the path near Harvey Street that was recently removed. Ellen Coppinger and Dave Lefcourt replied that it was storm damage.

Ellen Coppinger raised a question about expanding the City's specification for tree protection beyond wrapping the trunk. Kevin Beuttell responded that the specifications will include requirements for watering, addition of nutrients and root protection. Dave Lefcourt reported that DPW's current tree protection specifications addressed protection of street trees, not trees in open space. Specifications for tree protection in open space has been requested from other tree wardens and incorporated in the city's specs to ensure that the trees are protected . A pre-construction meeting will be held at which

time the contractor will be read the riot act regarding the protection of the trees. Contractors are continuously reminded to get UF's direction when working around trees.

Public Comment:

A question was raised as to whether the survey for Linear Park had been updated. Kevin Beuttell reported that it had been corrected in-house but that it had not and would not be officially corrected by the surveyor.

Items for further/future discussion:

Kevin Beuttell will provide an update on the Linear Park schedule at the February meeting and all subsequent meetings.

b. IQHQ - implications/impacts of current construction on Linear Park

Andrew Putnam reported that UF had reviewed the project early on with Dave Croce at IQHQ regarding the pruning of trees along Whittemore Ave. No new trees are being planted in the sidewalk along Whittemore Ave. New trees at the back of the sidewalk at the large parking area with solar canopies are within the project.

Andrew will forward an email to Dave Croce that was sent to him by Ruth Loetterle expressing concern about the interface of the IQHQ project with Linear Park. On the available IQHQ plans reviewed, which may not be up to date, IQHQ's proposed 14' wide pathway entering Linear Park very close to Harvey Street and a very large expanse of concrete pavement on the other side of the park fence do not make them a good neighbor to the park. The character of this portion of Linear Park has suffered greatly due to IQHQ's removal of two park trees and a row of large shrubs, and now the loss of the storm-damaged tree. Andrew will share Dave Croce's response. If his response does not adequately address the concerns raised, IQHQ will be invited to present to the CPP.

Items for further/future discussion:

IQHQ's response to the concerns raised about their connection to the park and the expanse of pavement adjacent to the park. If the response does not adequately address the concerns raised, IQHQ will be invited to present to the CPP.

c. Tree planting rates in the city

A question was raised about the factors preventing the planting of the recommended 3,000 trees each year. Andrew Putnam responded that the biggest bottleneck is finding locations, often having to be coordinated with future capital projects where walk modification was required. A second obstacle is the logistics of increasing planting three-fold.

A question was raised about the causes for the current 25% loss of new trees. Andrew Putnam and David Lefcourt responded that it reflects UF's growing pains associated with ramping up planting so quickly and recent droughts, but that lessons have been learned and are being corrected, such as increased watering in the first weeks following planting. Cambridge is among the best in terms of low attrition rates.

Ellen Coppinger commented that DCR, MIT and Harvard properties and parks offer opportunities to plant more trees.

A question was raised about data on current practices such as extended tree wells and improving the soil. Andrew Putnam responded that adjacent impervious surfaces and salts in soil were the biggest contributors to mortality. This year marks the time for the 5-year assessment of the UFMP; a report by consultants will be forthcoming.

A question was raised by the public about how Cambridge residents can help motivate Harvard and MIT to increase their planting. David Lefcourt did not have suggestions for residents, but that UF could talk with their counterparts at MIT and Harvard.

A question was raised about the relation of the City and Green Cambridge and GC's source of funding that could enhance planting in the city. Andrew Putnam responded that GC has applied for various grants and the City provides the trees free of charge, which is the most they can do given that GC is planting trees on private property. The city needs to help GC find the mechanism for getting permanent funding. The advantage to GC's tree planting program is that the trees that they plant as a non-profit would not require the City under Chapter 87 to have a tree hearing if the property owner wanted to remove the tree. Under the previous program, trees planted by the city in the 20' beyond the back of sidewalk were subject to Chapter 87. The data on the GC planting is not known. Andrew will reach out to Steve Nutter of GC to gather this data and learn if there has been an increase in planting since the program moved to GC, and if not, what could be done to boost the program.

Items for further/future discussion:

UF's success with talking with counterparts at MIT and Harvard.
Steve Nutter's numbers on Green Cambridge's tree planting and input on what is needed to increase planting.

d. Jerry's Pond

A question was raised about the recent City Council decision regarding the IQHQ project at Jerry's Pond. Kevin Beuttell reported that IQHQ had committed planting trees on the south side of Rindge Ave. The project is due to come before the ConCom shortly.

e. Letter of support for the Municipal Reforestation Program

A question was raised if each of the members could be emailed a letter giving them the opportunity to sign as individuals in support of this program. Andrew Putnam responded that this could be done. A discussion of the program's status at the legislature indicated that the program needed to be voted out of committee prior to the next meeting of the CPP, and that its inclusion in the Environmental Bond bill would occur later in the year. A reading of minutes from September 2023 indicated the CPP's approval of sending a letter of support at that time, and the motion to vote on signing the letter from the CPP as a whole was moved by Ray and seconded by Maggie. The CPP voted to have the letter signed by the CPP. Each member would also have the opportunity to sign the letter as an individual via a forthcoming email.

f. State Ethics Training

CPP members were reminded to take the State Ethics Training ASAP. Dave Lefcourt offered to ask Diane LeBlanc's office to resend the link.

Next meeting: Our next meeting will be held on February 14, 2024, at 5:30pm and will be advertised to the public in advance.