

Cambridge Pedestrian Committee
Draft minutes – May 27, 2010

City Staff in Attendance: Rosalie Anders, Cara Seiderman, Iram Farooq, David Lefcourt

Members In Attendance: Amanda Trombley (chair), Sean Peirce, Debby Galef, Stephen Keen, Pete Kane, David Loutzenheiser, Kobena Bonney, Thomson Kao, Andrea Yoder, Robin Finnegan, Rona Gregory, Joe Rose, Eran Segev, Helen Rose

Introductions, review of minutes and agenda

David Lefcourt, city arborist

Iram Farooq: city plan for Charles river front

Pedestrian crash at Mass and Pearl

Updates: golden shoes, city smart

Walks: summer and north Cambridge

Western Avenue

Jeff Parenti prep

David Lefcourt, city arborist

Amanda tells David Lefcourt how much the pedestrian committee as a whole values trees. Committee on Public Planting also wants to enhance sidewalk environment and promote trees in the city. Cara asks him to give a brief explanation of how trees go in (street reconstruction, infill trees) in the city. Sean wants to know about urban trees. Rosalie asked about trees that overhang the sidewalk.

If there's a "botanical obstruction" on private property, Lefcourt inspects location, DPW sends letter to property owner. Tree issue usually resolved by property owner. City can go in and do the work (fines) but the City doesn't want to get in the business of pruning private property trees. If the issue is about a City tree, contact Lefcourt and the City staff will take care of it. There's no official ordinance in city for overhanging trees, but the state says 8 feet over sidewalk; 14 feet over roadway, to avoid them being hit by trucks.

Lefcourt: 617-349-6433, cambridgetree@cambridgema.gov or send request to theworks@cambridgema.gov .

Tree Planting: David works with DPW streets and sidewalks staff when a new tree gets installed in the sidewalk or when replacing a tree. They are no longer replacing trees where the sidewalk is less than 5.5 feet. If there isn't enough space, the City tries to find locations on nearby private property. They've only been emphasizing planting on "back of sidewalk" for the past 1-1.5 years.

If there is a 6-ft sidewalk but 3.5 ft diameter tree, the city has to get creative to try to reconstruct the sidewalk around the tree, including bump-outs, putting sidewalk on private property, etc. Contractor pulls up sidewalk and David checks root structure, and if possible they cut, then put asphalt patch over the tree roots.

Construction plans come across Lefcourt's desk; he sees the plans and walks the area. He marks every potential location for a tree, but many end up not working out because of objections from residents or utility conflicts. Works with contractors throughout project, determining tree well sizes.

City has set precedent for abutting property owner to have final say in street tree request. City will make decision for city open space.

Spring & fall are the tree planting seasons.

City has list of suitable trees for planting, depending on locations, desire for flowers, big leaves, etc. Overhead utility wires make a difference. City pressures utilities not to aggressively prune trees.

David Loutzenheiser asked how many trees are removed & planted each year. They removed 100 trees in 2009, 100+ in 2008. Most of those locations were replanted. City council wanted 500 trees planted this fiscal year, was ~575 in FY10, goal for 300 in FY11.

Most tree removal is because of disease or risk to public safety.

Trees have a one-year warranty from the contractor.

New trees get gator bags, and the city would like abutting residents to keep them filled with water. They have a 20 gallon capacity, 4-12 hours for water to flow out.

Loutzenheiser asked about property owners who don't want trees in front of their house. He asked what percentage of residents refuse trees. Lefcourt estimates 1-5 residents per reconstruction project decline an abutting tree.

Rona Gregory asked if there was any talk due to climate change to encourage more tree planting and not giving abutting residents the option to decline a tree. It would require educating people about the benefits of street trees from an environmental perspective.

Gregory pointed out that Boston has watering trucks to fill gator bags on young trees and wonders why Cambridge doesn't have the same thing. Lefcourt thinks the budget aspect means there would be little support for the same type of program as in Boston. Some big reconstruction projects result in in-street irrigation.

Lefcourt estimates there are 15,000 City trees (street, park, cemetery). Number is constantly changing. Tree inventory originally done in 2005. Of the 15,000, 11,000 are street trees, 3,500 park trees, 600-800 cemetery trees.

Rosalie Anders said that a tree canopy study was done a few years ago; tree canopy (public and private) covers approximately 23% of the city.

Debby Galef asks about empty tree wells and wants to know if an effort is made to fill empty tree wells. If a tree is removed from the sidewalk, Lefcourt gets in touch with the abutting property owner to talk about species. With some older tree wells, residents slowly call in, others picked up by street reconstructing. Due to high demand, Lefcourt does very little scouting for new locations. At last count, 170-180 people on waiting list for trees. Galef's neighbor should call and request a tree.

Amanda asks how long it takes for a request to be filled. Lefcourt wanted to fill her request through the Rindge Ave project but wasn't able to, and promises to go back and fill that tree well.

Loutzenheiser said the City of Boston has a goal to put in 100,000 trees, increase of 33% over the next 10 years, or 10,000 trees per year. Cambridge is doing much less, in proportion to population. Loutzenheiser asked how the city can be more aggressive to plant trees.

Lefcourt said the Boston count includes public and private trees. Sean asks if Cambridge has propaganda for residents; Lefcourt has some for "back of sidewalk" trees but not for "back yard" trees.

What happens if a tree is planted but 10 years on, the roots disturb a house's foundation? Lefcourt says roots do not cause foundation or pipe problems, but accelerate existing problems. City takes no responsibility for future root trouble.

Sean Peirce asks what we can do to help trees along aside from watering them. Lefcourt has not put together information to hand out to residents but encourages Peirce to search online for information. Stick with information from universities; other information can be unreliable.

Eran Segev asked if there's a reason we don't have fruit-bearing trees. Fruit-bearing trees on sidewalks can cause trip hazards and rodent problems. Lefcourt passes along this sort of request to community development to consider in parks. What about fragrant trees? They do plant lilac, black locust.

Loutzenheiser asks if new developments are required to install street trees, and Lefcourt does not know that officially they are. If each development was required to install street trees where feasible, that would help the climate change situation.

Certain parts of the city have zoning that requires tree installation, including Prospect Street. For large projects if developer removes 100 inches of tree-caliper, they have to replace with 100 inches. If they only replace 50 inches, they have to pay into tree planting budget.

Segev asked if the City buys the trees or has its own nursery, and Lefcourt says the City purchases trees. There is no space in the city for a nursery. Cost is \$120-\$220 per tree

at present. Less than \$400 for shade tree, \$350-360 for ornamental.

Anders: There are places in the city where trees will not grow well along the sidewalk. What about encouraging trellises against buildings, overhanging sidewalks? We should all think of ways to add to the greening of the city. This happens in Europe or Japan.

City Plans for Charles River: Iram Farooq from Community Planning

Questions and comments for Iram:

Has the City thought of an underpass under Memorial Drive? Response: It would be very expensive, and disruptive, and there is not much room for the entrance and exit ramps.

Is the city willing to take over management of some of the DCR facilities, given how reluctant the DCR has been to make changes? Iram said the city funded improvements at Magazine Beach.

Lots of attention needed on East Cambridge waterfront, specifically crossing from East Cambridge to the river. Problem due to Land Blvd speed & signals.

Presentation is at: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/cdd/cp/zng/charles/index.html>

Pedestrian crash at Mass Ave & Pearl Street

Don Summerfield of the City's disabilities commission was hit at Mass Ave & Pearl Street. He was crossing Mass Ave at the unsignalized crosswalk. Anders thinks it would be helpful to ask the police to come in and talk in general about where crashes have been, what is going on with enforcement. Traffic department is working on 5-year summary of pedestrian crashes.

Seiderman thinks it would be really helpful to look at patterns rather than any one individual incident. Also think about the environment (e.g. Central Square has lots of pedestrians).

Gregory adds that the numbers of crashes are very low (and fatalities even lower). She thinks the reason there is not much effort on enforcement is due to the low number of incidents.

Anders doesn't know what time the crash happened.

We need to think about when we want to have the traffic/police talk to us because our meetings are already jammed up for June plus walking in July & August.

Updates & announcements

Golden Shoes: Stephanie Anderberg will send out updates for shoe pickups via email
Half of the sponsors came to us rather than us going to them for prizes.

We want to think about encouraging drivers to pick up shoes, not just pedestrians. It might encourage more drivers to get out of their cars.

CitySmart: Mailing to residents due to go out today or tomorrow. Next big occasion is June 12: CitySmart Family Day (behind Peabody School in play area). 1pm-4pm. Pedestrian materials are available related to CitySmart. Seiderman will send out flyer to pedestrian committee mailing list to spread the word. Intern has not had much luck getting coupons from North Cambridge businesses, but has gotten some from businesses elsewhere in Cambridge. Rona says that's typical for North Cambridge: the business environment doesn't seem to be vibrant.

Trombley did find the pedestrian committee's North Cambridge walk, but only on paper, not electronically. Who could lead the walk? Rosalie said Charles Sullivan might be amenable. Anders said she would contact him.

Summer Walks: We meet at City Hall Annex in June, but would walk in July & August. Perhaps Western Ave for one meeting. Planning process for Western Ave is on the fast track; we would have to look at the plans in June. All information about the project is on the web (<http://www.cambridgema.gov/cdd/et/infra/western/index.html>).

Meeting on June 22 to talk about streetscape between Porter & Harvard.

Do we need to have a project planning review meeting before June? It doesn't sound like it.

PSNA email list: one of the intersections on the PVIS list, Mass Ave at Linnaean Street, Linnaean functions like a T intersection. There's no sign that says "new traffic flow ahead" to warn of changes in the signals. Contact Jeff directly or talk to him at June meeting.

Send ideas for summer walks to the email list. July probably Western Ave with potluck at Rosalie's