

Cambridge Committee on Public Planting  
Wed 13 January 2010  
Minutes

1. Placing utilities underground – Discussion with Owen O’Riordan and Lisa Peterson

There was an extensive discussion regarding the possibility of placing utilities underground as well as adding street tree concerns to the long term planning of major projects.

Owen O’Riordan, the city engineer, pointed out several issues with this scenario

- a) the city doesn’t pay for utility burial, the residents do
- b) Cambridge will engage the utilities to discuss the request with residents but past experience indicates that the utilities are reluctant to comply -- and they are not legally required to do so
- c) prices are as high as \$1000 per linear foot plus connection to the utility (eg, the bottom line was \$4.8M for 3300 linear feet on Vassar street)
- d) burying utilities includes concrete casing, which takes up more space and constrains the ability to handle emergencies involving utilities; gas mains, water mains, and sewer lines together create a “jungle” which makes it both difficult and dangerous to add anything else to the mix

Lisa Peterson, head of the Cambridge DPW, suggested that the Committee view the five year plans online and work with jointly the Pedestrian Committee on input to those plans.

2. The City’s Zoning Ordinance requiring Planting Committee review of the adequacy of proposed landscaping for certain new developments in the Residence C-2B zoning district.

Footnote (k) Yard Requirements states:

“Plans for landscaping and maintenance shall be approved by the Committee on Public Planting as appointed by the City Manager. No Certificate of Occupancy may be granted until landscaping under the terms of this section is completed.”

Les Barber of the Cambridge Development Committee indicated the areas to be considered:

- Cambridge street from Inman square to Boston
- Broadway and Columbia
- Massachusetts avenue between Central and Harvard squares

3. Update on street tree planting

The City Arborist is rewriting the contract specifications for planting and will send to the committee for review.

4. Update on street tree pruning

There was a report of NSTAR pruning problems on Channing street and Lexington Avenue. The City Arborist stated that the utilities have more constraints in Cambridge than in other municipalities.

Upcoming pruning is Magnolia avenue as well as Avon Hill and Upland road.

There was a mention that the city is trying to budget for a six year pruning cycle.

5. Update on park and cemetery pruning

On hold until 1 July 2010 when capital projects funds become available again. Fresh Pond will be a priority.

6. Update on the Street Tree Inventory

The inventory is ongoing. GIS location of empty tree wells is complete but the question remains whether to reuse or close many of them.

Service requests have all been tabulated and handled.

7. Next meeting is at 5.30pm on Wednesday 10 February 2010 at 147 Hampshire street

8. New business and other agenda items

The Pedestrian Committee and Climate Protection/Climate Goal for Cambridge were discussed. One reason mentioned for the increase in emissions in Cambridge is the many biotech companies in the city. Another issue mentioned was urban heat island effect.

The Climate Emergency Initiative (climate experts/congress) are interested in vegetation and its uses in mitigation.

Streets with high pedestrian traffic may be candidates for enhanced tree plantings.

Perhaps a member of the Pedestrian Committee should also sit on the Public Planting Committee?