

Committee on Public Planting
Department of Public Works, City of Cambridge, 147 Hampshire St

Minutes of the Committee Meeting on Wednesday, February 9, 2011, 5:30 – 7 pm

Attendees:

Margrit Betke, committee member and scribe
David Davis, committee chair
Bill Deignan, Transportation Program Manager, Community Development Department, Cambridge
Denise Heintze, citizen of Cambridge
David Lefcourt, City Arborist
Julianne Schwarzer, committee member
Cynthia Smith, landscape architect for the Cambridge Common and Flagstaff Park improvement project

Summary:

The discussion of the Cambridge Common and Flagstaff Park improvement project dominated most of the meeting. The committee then talked about its process management.

Since there was no voting quorum of committee members at this meeting, a vote on the minutes of the previous meeting was postponed to the next meeting.

Cambridge Common and Flagstaff Park Improvement Project

- Cambridge Common is located between Massachusetts Avenue, Garden Street, and Waterhouse Street. It has historic significance for Cambridge (it was a cow pasture as early as 1630) and includes the Civil War Monument. Flagstaff Park is located at the south-east corner of Cambridge Common between Massachusetts Avenue and Cambridge Street.
- Bill Deignan and Cynthia Smith presented the park improvement project to the Committee on Public Planting using several architectural drawings and an aerial photograph.
- The project was discussed by the Committee on Public Planting over two years ago. Progress in executing the project has been slow due to funding difficulties.
- Construction drawings are expected to be completed by summer 2011 and made available for public review in spring 2012.
- The parks contain approximately 167 trees; approximately 65 % are Norway maples. Only approximate numbers could be presented by the landscape architect, because these numbers, established at the beginning of the planning phase, have likely changed due to tree failure.
- The project plan includes a proposal to plant 94 new trees and remove approximately 20 trees.
- Flagstaff Park, currently containing mostly Norway maples, would be enlarged, and 8 red oak trees would be planted. Red oak, *Quercus rubra*, is a native plant in the Northeast.
- Red oaks would also be planted in the Common along Massachusetts Avenue and Garden Street.
- The importance of planting native trees and inclusion of the following species was discussed:
 - Sweet gum: Cambridge is at the northern edge of its range. In places near roads where sweetgum balls are undesirable, *Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Rotundiloba,' a fruitless sweetgum, which does not produce sweetgum balls, may be an option.
 - Tulip tree: *Liriodendron tulipifera* is native to eastern North America. The city arborist has planted tulip trees in the past, for example on Huron Avenue.
 - Sugar Maple: *Acer saccharum* is a native to the northeastern North America. Some sugar maples already exist in the Cambridge Common.
 - American elm: *Ulmus Americana* is native to eastern North America. Cultivars are available that are resistant to the Dutch elm disease.
 - Kentucky Coffeetree: *Gymnocladus dioica* is a native to the Midwest of North America.
 - Honeylocust: *Gleditsia triacanthos* is native to eastern North America. The project plan proposes planting honey locusts along Waterhouse Street.

- Only deciduous trees were included in the landscape plan. The park improvement plan does not include evergreen trees.
- The inclusion of non-native trees was also discussed, in particular, for the proposed “Memorial Walk” alley:
 - Chinese elm: *Ulmus pumila* will not be planted based on experience of tree failure due to ice storms.
 - Zelkova: The committee discussed pruning issues for these trees, which are native to Europe and Asia.
 - Silver linden: *Tilia tomentosa*, a native to Europe and Asia, is a popular tree for allees.
- Cynthia Smith, the landscape architect of the project, welcomes ideas for species to plant (email her).
- The project plan includes removal of trees that are so close to the Civil War Monument that they obstruct its view. A 10-foot treeless perimeter would be created around the monument, potentially in stages, depending on the conditions of the current trees.
- The current main alley of Cambridge Common starts at the entrance of the park at its southeast corner, where Massachusetts Avenue and Garden Street intersect, skirts the Civil War Monument Plaza on its eastern side, and connects with the northeast corner of the park at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Waterhouse Street. The project plan includes removal of the southern-most trees of the alley and shifting the alley westwards. This would create a direct connection between the southeast corner of the park and the Civil War Monument. The new Memorial Walk alley would then provide a view axis towards the monument.
- The project plans include removal of the baseball field in the northwestern part of the Common. The soccer field would remain and would be surrounded by new trees.
- The fence that encloses Cambridge Common would remain to allude to the historical function of the park as a pasture. New openings could be created to make it easier for pedestrians to enter the park, especially along Garden Street, which does not have a sidewalk on the side of the park. Creating additional entrances to the park could be done without having to remove trees. Accessibility guidelines will be considered.
- Cambridge owns the park lighting, which was installed in the 1970s. New lighting, similar to the lighting at the Cambridge library would be desirable, but funding may not be available. There are no street lights on the side of the park along Massachusetts Avenue. The park improvement plan includes adding lighting there.
- Traffic patterns at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Cambridge Street and a curb change on Waterhouse Street were discussed. A bike path that provides much needed northbound access for bikers along Massachusetts Avenue would be part of the enlargement project of Flagstaff Park.

Process Management for Planting Committee

- The committee talked about the inaccessibility of email discussions among committee members to the public. “The Open Meeting Law of Massachusetts requires that most meetings of governmental bodies to be held in public.” According to the law, “the democratic process depends on the public having knowledge about the considerations underlying governmental action.” However, the intent of the law is to not “unduly hamper.” For now, the committee will refrain from discussing the preparation of brochures via email. In the interest of efficient committee work, however, the committee requested that the City of Cambridge inquire whether the committee could use public electronic bulletin boards for their discussions. The use of Google docs was also proposed.
- The committee recommends that a list of action items from previous meetings is maintained with the date and name of the person who was charged with the action. This would simplify the review of the progress on action items. David Lefcourt will prepare a list of action items from the minutes of the last few meetings.

Action Items

1. David Lefcourt will ask city staff if public electronic bulletin boards may be used by the Planting Committee to conduct business in accordance with the Open Meeting Law of Massachusetts.
2. David Lefcourt will prepare a list of action items from the minutes of the last meetings.