

Committee on Public Planting
Wednesday, December 11, 2013
5:30-7:00, DPW, 147 Hampshire St

Minutes

Present: City Arborist Dave Lefcourt, Community Development representative Taha Jennings, Janet Burns, Florrie Westcoat, Gitte Venicx, Chantal Eide, Michael Hanlon, David Davis, Thomas Flynn, Paula Cortes, Nancy Phillips, Jack McGrath

Minutes from the November 2013 meeting were accepted

The meeting was called to order at 5:30. Minutes taken by David Davis

Agenda Items and Discussion:

1. Arborist Updates - (a) Re: Committee membership Enquiry by David Lefcourt ('DL') revealed that the three year appointments of all Cttee members had expired by the first of December. DL will oversee advertising in Cambridge Chronicle, the notice board at City Hall and various city websites. The notices will invite those interested, including former members of the Cttee, to write a letter of interest, which will be followed by interviews in some instances, all of which is to completed early in the New Year. The idea of staggered 1-3 year terms was recommended. Random selection would determine the length of each appointed member's term.

(b) DL discussed revenues available to his department for the planting of new trees. The single greatest source comes from construction work on private property where private trees are removed by the contractor and the owner reimburses the city according to a formula. A current Lesley University construction project has contributed to the tree planting fund.

(c) The contract with a private entity to plant the city's street trees expires in December. A new contract will be put out to bid. DL has tightened up the contract provision requiring a certified arborist on site [ISA, MCA or equivalent with a continuing education requirement].

(d) Cttee member discussion followed regarding whether or not the contract includes a watering requirement. As at previous meetings, questions again asked about water truck donated to the city for the purpose of watering street trees but which truck remains for the most part idle. DL referred to cost issues of having a driver for the truck who would have to be a union member. DL spoke in favor of a second 'water by bike' program worker. DL's intern Jack McGrath suggested that "water by bike" program may have outreach value that a truck does not have and also may be a more efficient way of watering as a truck would tend to obstruct traffic as it makes it rounds.

(e) DL mentioned a recent finding of Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) in North Andover and that under DL's jurisdiction in Cambridge, there are approximately 950 ash trees. With respect to those under DL's control, he will rank them according to his assessment of their condition as good, fair, and poor. Those determined to be in poor condition will be removed. The City hopes to treat those in good and fair condition with a Neem based systemic every other year. Neem is organic.

2. Community Development Update - (a) On behalf of the Cttee, David Davis reported having sent to the Planning board the letter discussed at its October meeting regarding 15-33 Richdale Ave, a proposed project which had come to the Cttee's attention. The letter was circulated and a copy forwarded by e-mail to each Cttee member subsequent to the meeting.

(b) Taha Jennings reported on the application for a Special Permit by developers who had purchased the Thorndike Street Courthouse from the State to be converted to commercial and residential use. As now private property Cttee and City has little authority with respect to plantings. A hearing on the application for a Special Permit will be held before the Planning Board on January 7, 2014.

(c) Discussion regarding draft of letter to be sent to Community Development with respect to the 'demonstration' block of pavement, street trees, etc. planned for Massachusetts

Avenue between Harvard and Porter Square. Discussion again focused on whether or not the letter was still timely as well as specific issues such as bicycle racks and the 'ticket on dash' system to avoid individual meters' impact in reducing tree pit space.

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.