

Committee on Public Planting  
Wednesday January 9, 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, David Davis, Thomas Flynn, Paula Cortes, Julianne Schwarzer

Minutes from the December 2012 meeting were unavailable at the time of the meeting with the prospect of their being produced prior to the February 2013 meeting.

The meeting was called to order at 5:30

Agenda Items and Discussion:

1. Zoning Ordinance – an e-mail message was sent out to Committee members and David Lefcourt and Taha Jennings regarding a provision in the city's Zoning Ordinance requiring applicants for building permits in certain zoning districts (specifically districts C-2B, BB-1 and BB-2) to obtain approval from the Committee on Public Planting prior to permits being issued. (See section 5.31 Table 5-1 footnote "k" for reference to development standards of residential buildings in Business districts.)

Taha Jennings picked up on the issue prior to the meeting and produced a zoning map showing that the districts involved are small and may have shown little or no activity over the last few years. Committee discussion centered on the considerable authority the ordinance gives the committee regarding private construction projects in those few districts contrasted with the lack of authority in other parts of the city. For the February meeting, Taha offered to research construction activity in those districts to seek an explanation as to why so few permit applications/planting plans had been brought before the committee from those districts in the last 2 to 3 years.

2. FAQ and Website Updates – At the December meeting, David Lefcourt urged committee members to look at the website and make comments. Maggie Booz, Emily Axelrod and Paula Cortes all submitted written comments on the website prior to the meeting which David Lefcourt circulated. Lefcourt mentioned that the website is a work in process and can be easily updated at any time. Discussion ranged from very detailed observations to the very general. As an overall observation, Lefcourt was encouraged to improve the site's accessibility to the public by simplifying language and providing brief explanations for recommendations along with links where more information might be wanted. One suggestion was to see if an analysis could be done on what subject areas of the site receive the most 'hits' so that greater effort could be concentrated on those areas of the website. Similarly, that Lefcourt could look at his e-mails and phone traffic to see whether or not by improving subject areas in the website responses

might have been provided by the website thereby reducing some aspects of Lefcourt's workload.

Lefcourt encourages further comments.

3. Alewife Project – The Alewife Reservation Stormwater Wetland Project was added to the agenda at committee member Tom Flynn's request as it is a public project on city lands with a considerable amount of new plantings. However, at no time during the lengthy history of this project has any plan been presented to the committee. The project is apparently under the direction of DCR and the MWRA with collaboration from the Cambridge DPW because the project deals with the disposal of stormwater from Cambridge Street in the Huron Avenue watershed. Janet Burns stated that the Cambridge Conservation Commission has a long history of oversight with the project. The project fell outside of the City Arborist's jurisdiction since the land is owned by DCR.

A planting plan was shown as was an overall plan of the site on the westerly side of Rte2/Alewife Parkway adjacent to the Little River which flows out of Little Spy Pond to Alewife.

The Alewife discussion led to a wider conversation regarding what projects might come to the attention of Taha at Community Development and Lefcourt at DPW where the Committee could become involved if at no other level than to make recommendations.

Three parks renovations, well underway, were referenced with which the Committee has had no role whatsoever although among Committee members, there is a strong feeling that the Committee should be very much involved whenever any public project is done in the city that involves or could reasonably involve a planting plan. The three parks referenced: (1) Alberico Park (Allston at Pleasant) (2) Fullmore Park (Between Peters and Sidney) (3) David Nunez Park (Brookline at Allston). Park projects currently in the planning stages where the Committee might be able to play a role are at (1) Hurley St – East Cambridge and (2) Raymond Park (Raymond at Walden).

4. Arborist Updates (i) the issue of balanced city geographical representation on the Committee, Lefcourt displayed a map of the city with flags showing that current membership is well distributed. However, there are still some gaps that it would be desirable to fill: (a) the Harvard Square Area extending out between Brattle and Mt Auburn Streets, (b) the Cambridgeport/Riverside Neighborhoods;
  - (ii) Lefcourt reminded us that this is budget submission time. When asked if the Committee could be helpful to the process by writing a letter or otherwise, Lefcourt stated that he did not feel that such a letter would be useful at this time. One focal point in this year's budget is a request for an allocation to deal with the problems posed by tree grates.

Lefcourt has produced for the DPW a precise estimate of the costs involved showing where the priority areas.

- (iii) Lefcourt joined by Committee members spoke to the value of identifying Landmark trees. Lefcourt had gone to the Historical Commission and obtained photos of the Washington Elm at Garden Street, which he showed to the meeting. The idea was presented of adding similar photos to the website.
- (iv) Lefcourt produced packages of all the minutes from Committee meetings in 2012 the purpose, as proposed by co-chair David Davis, being to create some kind of annual summary or report of the activities of the Committee in 2012. Paula Cortes agreed to do a summary of the months of January, February and March; Florrie Wescoat for the months of April, May and June; David Davis for November and December. It was not immediately clear to any of those present whether any meetings were held in July, August or September. October's meeting was cancelled.