

Committee on Public Planting
Wednesday, 10 December 2014
5:30-7:00, DPW, 147 Hampshire St

Minutes

Present: City Arborist Dave Lefcourt, Community Development representative Gary Chan; Members Janet Burns, Maggie Booz, Paula Cortes, Chantal Eide, Michael Hanlon, David Davis, Kathleen Kelly, Jonathan Lewis, Wayne Marshall, Carolyn Matthews, Nancy Phillip, Florrie Wescoat

The meeting was called to order at 5:30. Minutes taken by Kathleen Kelly.

Minutes from the meeting of 12 November 2014 were accepted.

Agenda items and discussion

It was determined that the January meeting is the designated “annual meeting” for the Public Planting Committee, and therefore the appropriate time for elections. The Committee agreed to hold Co-Chair elections at the 14 January 2015 meeting.

The Arborist reported that, at season’s close, around two hundred trees were planted. Around 5% had to be revisited because of improper siting and other issues. Pruning in North Cambridge is still underway.

The Committee discussed NStar’s unfortunate pruning of a handful of trees around Market Street this past fall. The Arborist reported that he and Dave Webster (DPW, Supt Parks & Forestry) had a discussion with NStar about the situation, and described the pruning incident as an anomaly, given that the crew is usually more diligent.

One of the results of the DPW discussion with NStar is that it has agreed to send representatives to a CPP meeting to discuss their practices.

In the context of pruning concerns, the Committee discussed the pros and cons of removing and then replacing trees that interfere with wires with smaller, more appropriate trees vs. the process of directional pruning, which might actually serve in-place, outsize trees well. It was argued that, when pruning, it is crucial to take in account the tree species and its branching habits and therefore how it responds to pruning; for example, pruning lateral branches of such species as pin oak is very effective. It is important to pay attention to trees with central leaders in order to accommodate their particular challenges.

Questions were raised with respect to the inventory: the contractors that NStar employs might consult the inventory to determine precisely what species they are confronting, and proceed accordingly.

Jonathan Lewis volunteered to collect examples of substandard pruning around Cambridge, and asked the Committee to share photographs with him. The idea is to make an album of what to avoid when pruning, and to share it with NStar and anyone else who contracts for pruning in Cambridge.

Also discussed was the problem of “glazing”; i.e., compacting the sides and bottom of a planting hole so that water has difficulty percolating through, thus depriving the tree of water and nutrients. Glazing is remedied by using a fork to break up the soil. The Committee wondered if this was done routinely. In addition, the Committee took up the issue of creating favorable conditions for fostering beneficial fungi when planting trees. Broadly, the committee was interested in knowing what specifications there were, if any, for creating optimal planting holes. It was agreed to determine what guidelines existed, or, in the absence of guidelines, to develop best practices for planting.

The Committee returned to the ongoing discussion about the benefits of enlarging the CPP’s role with respect to ongoing urban planning. Drafting a mission statement was discussed.

A question was raised with respect to how we might develop liaisons with private owners and others, such as the Water Department (Fresh Pond), in order to collaborate on landscape planning. As it was noted, there is no requirement to review landscape plans on private land.

Action items:

Revisiting the tree species list (Lefcourt)

Drafting a mission statement (Davis)

Bad pruning practices illustrated (Lewis)

Reviewing (or creating) guidelines for planting holes