

Cambridge Committee on Public Planting | Minutes for Meeting on April 8, 2015

Attendance

CPP: Florrie Wescott (FW), David Davis (DD), Michael Hanlon (MH), Chantal Eide (CE), Maggie Booz (MB), Paula Cortes (PC), Wayne Marshall (WM), Emily Axelrod (EA), Carolyn Matthews (CM), Jonathan Lewis (JL)

City of Cambridge: David Lefcourt (DL), Catherine Woodbury, Gary Chan

Eversource: Bob Allen, Paul Sellers, Chris Gonzalez

Meeting called to order at 5:35pm

March minutes

March 2015 minutes were reviewed and approved after the following conversation:

DD noted that at the March meeting DL was asked if a homeowner can prevent the city from planting a street tree in front of his/her home. DD asked DL to report back to CPP on frequency and process. DL replied that it happens all the time and used Spring Street c.2013 as an example, when about 10 out of 40 trees were not planted due to resident opposition. DL tries to negotiate (e.g. by suggesting a smaller tree) but precedent is that he should move on if opposition is firm. DD asked DL what he would do if opposition became commonplace?

Arborist update

Pruning: Spring pruning contract should be awarded by early May.

Planting: Huron A project planting to occur by late April. Maggie asked why so many trees (~140) are involved? Catherine Woodbury responded that (1) lots of trees were removed as part of project and needed to be replaced, and (2) city also added a bunch of tree wells. City worked with residents who wanted trees in places where that weren't any trees previously; a few people didn't want trees for maintenance, safety, or aesthetic reasons. DL was asked about the use of serviceberry as a street tree. Woodbury was also asked about the number of trees involved in Huron B project / Huron Ave.

New tree notification: DL showed the sticker that the city will use to let public know that a new tree is going in. Sticker indicates species and expected date of planting, and provides contact info for input on species.

EAB: Purple traps to be hung around the city to give DL sense of the directionality of EAB incursions. DL said Cambridge is only municipality in New England taking a proactive approach to EAB. DL wouldn't be surprised if EABs are here already. MB asked if there's a mechanism for informing nearby residents if EABs are found in a particular trap, in order to alert them to the threat posed to privately owned ash trees. MH suggested a door tag and wondered if Cambridge's robo-call system could be used; PC suggested a notice in the Cambridge Chronicle; MB suggested an information booth at Danehy Family Day.

Gary Chan reported that there are no new applications for development projects.

FW circulated copy of the letter that CPP sent to Planning Board about tree plan for 305 Webster. FW and MB also attended the March 31 meeting and reported that this sort of engagement (letter and attendance) was useful; CW agreed. FW thinks that this project falls within CPP jurisdiction as a (c)(2)(B) project.

Pruning Discussion

Bob Allen, Paul Sellers, and Chris Gonzalez of Eversource discussed the electrical utility's pruning practices.

Introductory comments

- Eversource works throughout MA, NH, CT; spends \$120M/yr on pruning; employs 25 certified arborists on staff, plus outside arborists from various vendors. Cambridge is part of the "Somerville" service area.
- Pruning is necessary to ensure safety and reliability. 25% of outages are tree related (leading cause). Eversource has 9.6 miles of line work to complete in Cambridge in 2015.

Eversource uses a Four-Year Cycle, which it characterized as a best management practice.

- Pruning frequency is based on reliability concerns and monitoring data.
- Ideal clearance: 10' below – 10' to the side - 15' above (but Allen acknowledged that's not achievable in Cambridge).
- ANSI voltage safety protocols require a minimum of 6' to account for sway/sag. Annual growth is assumed to be ~1'/yr, so 10' is cleared to accommodate 4yrs of growth.

Eversource and City Arborist

- DL noted that he takes pruning concerns into account when choosing new trees.
- MGL Ch. 87 requires utility to communicate with Tree Warden about yearly operational plan (YOP) and hazard tree plan (defects, decay, infestation, proximity to conductors).
- Tree removals involve permission/consent of homeowners and consultation with warden; Eversource said it circulates mailers to inform residents about future work.

"Right Tree, Right Place"

- Allen said Eversource's goal is for trees to be an asset, not a liability.
- The proposed Utility Arboretum at UMass-Amherst would help people understand relationship between different tree species and wires. Similar facility in Portsmouth NH.

Q&A

MB asked whether Eversource has done an economic analysis of burying wires. Allen responded that (1) the current system works (MB disputed this point), and (2) pruning is less damaging to trees than underground work like line burial.

Sellers added that the reliability of underground and overhead systems are comparable. Overhead outages easier to spot and repair. Burying electrical wires is \$1.5M per mile, and you need to find locations for transformers that are currently hanging on poles. Additional cost for the cable/phone/other utilities that use the poles.

DD asked about insulating the lines: Is there technology that can be used to insulate instead of pruning? Allen said Eversource is not aware of permanent options, but will look into it. PC asked if there is any advantage to Eversource sharing information about different circuits and pruning schedules? Allen said they can't because it involves "critical infrastructure" and is therefore confidential for security reasons.

In response to the Committee's general complaints about recent pruning problems, Allen said Eversource now inspects 100% of the work done for the company, notes trends, and evaluates the pruning crews.

Meeting participants reviewed pictures of Cambridge trees that have been pruned. MB told Eversource that the city is struggling to get trees to grow and can't afford the branch-taking that's occurring. She said a compromise is needed and suggested more oversight of crews.

MH described his effort to plant a tree that would grow over the wire (75yr process), but it was topped by utility pruners and not given a chance to be an over-wire tree.

Allen's preferred species include red oaks and white oaks; honey locust works well because it can be manipulated nicely. He will try to send CPP a copy of the PSNH handbook, which lists 5 good underwire trees and 5 good overwire trees. Added that sugar maples and Norway maples are tough but can be trained/shaped, and that oak trees can work as shields. Good underwire trees include dogwood and sophora japonica. Allen said Dirr thinks cherry bark oak will cope nicely with changing climate.

EA urged Eversource to exercise discretion with respect to its pruning guidelines, in order to account for the particularities of Cambridge. Allen said he agrees and that picking the right crews might be one way to do that. Sellers added that Eversource is executing longer term contracts in order to improve its relationship/oversight of pruning crews. If it can find a company that does good work in Cambridge, it'll keep them here.

MB read excerpts from a letter from Arborist in Princeton NJ about "light touch" pruning techniques.

Meeting adjourned.