

CAMBRIDGE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC PLANTING  
Minutes – September 9, 2015

In Attendance: Maggie Booz, Florrie Wescoat, Paula Cortes, Michael Hanlon, Chantal Eide, Wayne Marshall (minutes taker), Dave Lefcourt (DPW), Owen O’Riordan (DPW), Melissa Miguel (DPW), Ellen Coppinger (DPW), Gary Chan (CDD), Jason Bobowski (Chester Engineering)

Meeting called to order at 5:37. Approval of July minutes was tabled by the 6 members of the CPP present, as there was a question of whether a quorum was in effect. (There was no meeting in August.)

City Arborist Dave Lefcourt began the meeting by introducing Melissa Miguel, a new representative from the engineering division (in place of Catherine Woodbury). Miguel oversees some of larger areas in city: Main St, Kendall Sq, Cambridge Common.

**Agenda Item #4:** Dave introduced landscape architect Jason Bobowski of Chester Engineering (formerly Bioengineering Group) to report on the revised Planting and Maintenance Specifications for City Trees. As the process is just beginning, Bobowski’s presentation outlined the plan as currently envisioned. The firm’s previous work in Cambridge includes work for the DPW, the Water Dept, and DCR, including the Alewife storm water wetland, CAM004 (Huron A/B/Concord Ave), and several sites at Fresh Pond (Glacken Slope, Kingsley Park, Black’s Nook).

For this project, they aim to update the city tree specifications through a collaborative process. The approach has 4 steps: 1) Review current standards (e.g., those used in CAM004, Western Ave, Mass Ave; also, Standard Chapter 90 specs, Standard Urban Forestry Divisions specs, Harvard and MIT standards); 2) Identify areas for improvement and best management practices, including stakeholders’ concerns; 3) Set goals and objectives; 4) Revise the specifications, according to variety of scenarios, present them for review, and incorporate feedback into final draft for adoption.

Bobowski suggests this could be a 4 month process, including subcommittee meetings, aiming for a presentation to the full CPP in Jan 2016. Maggie suggested it might make sense to consult other cities and towns about specifications. Florrie asked whether he would deal with species; Bobowski replied that he hasn’t been tasked with that but with standard tree specifications. Maggie asked about the size of the subcommittee; Bobowski left it up to the CPP but suggested 2-3 to ensure “a broad range covered.”

**Agenda Item #3:** Ellen Coppinger of the DPW reported on the Spaulding site along Cambridge Street and the possibility of a collaborative design/planting project with the CPP for a block-long continuous planting strip. She reported that today they met with the property owner who still needs to run it by his partners but “conceptually” agreed to the project and, likely, to adopting the site toward longterm maintenance. Coppinger reviewed the present conditions, including the compacted grass strip between the sidewalk and the curb, with differing degrees of compaction based on location of parking meters. Present use patterns suggest obvious places to situate the trees (i.e., where the trunk of one car meets the nose of another). Because the grass on the property is already irrigated, there is potential for irrigation of the site. The constant number of people getting in and out of cars, stepping on the grass, and piling things on the grass strip all suggest that very hardy, salt tolerant plantings will be required. Coppinger envisions the possibility of tree wells in the 3-6’ range.

Florrie asked whether some of the 8ft sidewalk might be reclaimed and opened up, perhaps also making more room for the trees and getting them further from car doors. Owen O’Riordan replied that narrowing a heavy-use sidewalk in front of two hospitals might not be a good idea, especially when there is snow. There was discussion of alternate groundcover plantings, especially given the greater soil depth and possibility of irrigation. Florrie discussed forming a subcommittee to discuss the plans as they move forward, perhaps including Chantal (who lives nearby).

**Agenda Item #2:** Gary Chan (CDD) reported that the CDD has reviewed MIT’s application for their development plan in East Kendall (6 new structures, many on current parking lots), and further details of the plans, including landscape plans, have been requested. Also in Kendall Sq, the Volpe Center (federal building on Broadway) is looking to partner with a private company to rezone and redevelop the site. Further, the citywide planning process continues, including hiring a consultant to help develop the plan. Maggie asked who in the city negotiates in such situations for, say, green space. Owen reported that the DPW often gets involved for storm water issues and permeable surfaces, but also that open space discussions are often a part of it. Gary reported that most of this is specified in the language of the zoning; developers then work within those parameters and present their plans for approval.

**Agenda Item #4:** Dave, Owen, and Ellen started sampling the tree inventory this morning, going around the block of the DPW building (60-70 trees). Their aim was to establish a baseline for the health of the urban canopy. Using a tablet, they attempted to capture such things as condition (excellent, good, fair, poor), size of tree well, and adjacent space; they started to add info about overhead wires and wondered about girdling roots; then, they decided to go back to drawing board to decide on the right info to collect. Eventually, they want to get the CPP and other volunteers involved with data collection, sampling trees in their own neighborhood, but they still need to tweak the process, work out the technical issues involved, the different methods to use, etc. Dave promises to “do his homework” and figure out which plans might be most efficient for carrying out the project. There is a question of whether training will be necessary in order for others to assist with the project; training sessions may follow once they figure out the methods and techniques. 3 people seemed to be a good number for cross-checks.

Dave also reported on EarthWatch’s work here on new trees. Beginning in 2012, they re-surveyed the 2007 inventory from the iTree study (1800 trees, or 15% of the population); the following year they started to measure all the new trees planted since Dave arrived, revisiting the trees every year (hence, some trees have been visited 3 times). The data show that, among other things: trees planted in spring tend to fare better with caliper growth than those planted in fall; certain species put on more growth than others; honey locusts seem to do well in confined tree well spaces; etc. Florrie argues that our main focus should be vigor – “are the trees thriving?” – so that determination should be crucial in the ranking system.

**Non-Agenda Item:** Michael explained that he lives on Blakeslee Street, where they’ve put in “apron strips” or lawn strips (with deep loam) at the end of the sidewalk, as on Fayerweather, etc. During recent construction, contractors took out the concrete and apron strips, filled it with crusher run (an impervious barrier), then topped with 4 inches of top soil. One property had a 400ft strip and a beautiful lawn, but now there’s no

permeable substrate, no moisture to wick, no way to grow a lawn, and no reasonable way to remediate it oneself as it would require a small bucket. Michael talked to a contractor on the job who said "it's in our specs" and offered to drop them off tomorrow. Melissa suggested that on some streets these specs were for sidewalks, but late breaking requests for grass may have muddled the execution. Owen says an immediate spec change could be possible. Melissa offered to look into the situation in Huron B.

**Agenda Item # 1:** Dave's Arborist updates: he is finalizing the fall planting list (80-100 trees), then there are about 60 replacements from the past 3 seasons to be replanted. This fall is the end of the planting contract, so he's trying to "button that up." Other bigger projects: Western Ave is planted, "looks great"; Cambridge Common will be ready for some planting this fall, and Dave already tagged the material, similar to Western Ave, and same is true for the Main Street project. The tree inventory intern just finished looking into 100 locations for the participatory budget planting and came up with 140-150 possible locations. One water-by-bike intern did a "great job" for 9 weeks; there is now a second intern, but he had an accident and is recovering from an illness; it's hoped he'll continue into the fall. Re: pruning, Cambridge Landscape took off the summer months, but will begin again in October, continuing in Neighborhood 9; Northern Tree "hit a ton of locations for me...pruning fires I had to extinguish," mostly in parks/cemeteries in the city. Re: tree grates, he's working to get rid of priority tree gates that pose safety hazards or are damaging trees, now down to 175 (from 385), with goal to finish by 5 years (currently "way ahead" of schedule). Re: stumps, Dave's putting together a list once the tree inventory intern is done with the participatory budget project, hoping to knock out as many stumps as possible before 2016 spring planting.

Finally, there is a public hearing at City Hall next Wednesday with the Health & Environment Committee (chaired by Leland Chung), followed by a short tree walk in Avon Hill. Maggie explained that the "hearing" is an attempt to bring forward concerns about the urban canopy and present the CPP as a resource for the City Council.

Meeting adjourned at 7:02.