Cambridge Committee on Public Planting | Meeting Minutes – November 21, 2017

Attendees CPP: Maggie Booz, Janet Burns, David Davis, Chantal Eide, Jonathan Lewis, Carolyn Mathews, Nancy Phillips, Florrie Wescoat
City of Cambridge: John Bolduc, Gary Chan, David Lefcourt, Kathy Watkins
Cambridge Plant & Garden Club: Marty Mauzy
Green Cambridge: Susan Labandibar, Elena Saporta, Quinton Zondervan
Stoss: Alex Marchinski, Tim Wilson

Cambridge Tree Canopy Change Assessment Webinar – University of Vermont

-Jarlath O'Neil-Dunne, Director of the University of Vermont's Spatial Analysis Laboratory, joined by phone to present findings from UVM's analysis of tree canopy change in Cambridge between 2009 and 2014.
-UVM analyzed Cambridge's tree canopy area using 3-D elevation data captured by LiDAR; the data can be sorted in a variety of ways (e.g., by 250ft x 250ft grid cells, census block groups, neighborhoods, property types, etc).
-According to UVM's analysis, tree canopy area in Cambridge decreased from 30% coverage in 2009 to 28% coverage in 2014 (6.7% relative loss).
-Among property types, residential land is losing the most canopy (relative loss of 11%).
-Trees planted during historic building booms (e.g., in late 1800s, early 1900s, 1930s) are mature and dying; O'Neil-Dunne suggested that residents should be thinking now about how to replace aging canopy, so as to minimize gaps.
-UVM's analysis can generally distinguish between publicly-owned trees (including street trees) and privately-owned trees.
-O'Neil-Dunne said the study does not take land use changes into account. Assuming property use is stable, he said development typically causes a loss in canopy followed by an increase in canopy.
-In response to a question about whether he has data on surface permeability for Cambridge, O'Neil-Dunne said he does—but the data are not in the canopy assessment. O'Neil-Dunne said there is probably some correlation between permeability and canopy coverage (e.g., increased development often results in new impervious surfaces)—although sometimes what appears to be an increase in impermeable surface area is actually the exposure of impervious surface to LiDAR after the loss of tree.
-Bolduc (Community Development Department) said that Cambridge plans to collect another round of canopy data in Spring 2018, which it will ask O'Neil-Dunne to analyze. Bolduc said the City collects canopy data in part because it is useful to policy initiatives like the City's climate resilience work.
-Lefcourt said UVM's data will be used to inform the long-term goal for canopy area in Cambridge's urban forest master plan (35%?). With respect to the timing of the master plan development process, DPW is reviewing proposals over next few weeks, plans to begin work in early 2018, and is hoping to finish within 18-24 months. A multi-stakeholder process is envisioned.
-The UVM study has not yet been made publicly available; Lefcourt said he would confer with Bolduc about the release date.

Binney Street Park Project – Stoss Landscape Architects

-Wilson (Stoss) presented an overview of the project at Binney Street. The concept involves a multi-use trail (Grand Junction Greenway), fenced dog park, plaza-type seating areas, and elevated/graded areas.
-Chan (CDD) said the parcel is owned by Cambridge Redevelopment Authority but will be transferred to the City, and that there is significant demand in the neighborhood for a dog park.

-Existing trees in the park area include sycamores, lindens in the elevated section, large cottonwood, and several self-seeded trees along railroad track. Some trees are in poor condition; others are healthy.
-There are several existing utilities in/under the park area, including water, telcom, and steam. There are plans to add a stormwater removal system.
-Stoss's proposed tree removal plan would keep 4 lindens in graded area and remove all trees along the new multi-use trail (next to railway). The proposed tree/shrub additions include: 54 small trees/shrubs around the 4 lindens (possibly witch hazel), 16 columnar English oaks along railway boundary, and 2 London planetrees along Binney Street.
-Wescoat noted that several of the self-seeded trees along the railway are thriving (pear, pin oak, a young linden); she had counted 13 good trees during a recent visit. Wilson responded that some are doing poorly (particularly the red oak). Wescoat urged Stoss to conduct a survey of large trees and thriving small trees along the railway, and examine options for keeping some/many of those trees. Wilson responded that keeping the existing trees would require shifting the multi-use trail away from the railway and shrinking the size of the dog park. Chan said that the City wants the bike trail to be 14ft wide, as that is consistent with the width of other sections of Grand Junction Trail.
-Booz asked how much of the additional 'caliper inches' would result in new shade trees. Stoss did not have that information.
-In response to questions about whether the amount of hardscape could be reduced, Wilson noted that the hardscape in dog park will be water-permeable, and noted some of the other hardscape is necessary for utility truck access.
-Wilson was asked whether the lindens will survive being surrounded by a dog park; Wescoat noted that there is a lot of compaction around the trees at the Central Library; several Committee members discussed a new dog park with a thriving oak in Arlington.

Triangle Park – Cambridge Community Development Department / Stoss Landscape Architects
-Chan (CDD) said the goal of the Triangle Park project is to create a seating plaza with a lushly planted edge, and said that a fuller presentation of the project is forthcoming.
-The large gravel area in the parcel can be "infiltrated."
-Soil in a portion of the area with existing trees may need to be remediated (possible lead, etc), which could necessitate removal of the trees.
-Chan said that Stoss is trying hard to either retain the existing trees or figure out an alternative plan for tree coverage.

City Arborist Update
-Lefcourt reported that the City had mostly wrapped up fall planting (~150-160 trees planted, another 5-7 remain from main planting list). Some replacement plantings will have to wait until Spring 2018.

Removal of Large Trees on Cambridge Housing Authority Property
-Booz reported that Cambridge Landscaping had recently removed three large shade trees from CHA's property in the Strawberry Hill neighborhood, for no obvious purpose.
-Lefcourt responded that trees on CHA property are not within his jurisdiction, and that he doesn't know why CHA removed the trees.

Minutes taken by Jonathan Lewis