

Committee on Public Planting Meeting Minutes 8 March 2017

Present: Kathleen Caldara, Maggie Booz, Johan Paulson, Jonathan Lewis, Chantal Eide, Janet Burns, Florrie Wescoat, Nancy Phillips, Owen O'Riordan (DPW), Katherine Watkins (DPW), Jason Zogg (CRA), David Lefcourt (DPW), David Webster (DPW), Dennis Jen, Cynthia Smith, Carolyn Matthews, Jorge Nogueira (HomeWorks Energy), Steve Foley (HomeWorks Energy)

The February minutes were approved.

Jason Zogg of the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority gave a presentation on the Binney/Galileo/Broadway streetscape redesign project.

- These streets were built in the 1960's and 70's for truck traffic and are among the city's widest Rights of Way.
- Priorities are: Vision Zero, improve bike facilities, enhance and facilitate bus facilities, and to preserve street trees at the curb edges.
- A traffic analysis has been completed.
- Coordinated with EZRIde, the MBTA, bicycle committee, CDD, fire department, others.
- Bus stop conditions muddy, no shelters - consider floating bus stops.
- Raised and protected intersections (at Binney and Galileo) with corner refuge islands - 7 minute video on CRA website.
- Benefits and tradeoffs of keeping the median strip were considered. Median strip plantings are currently small ornamental trees of indifferent condition. Removal makes it possible to consider options such as a cycle track, a dedicated bus lane, and a wider tree planting strip at the curb. Median strips require wider paved areas for emergency vehicles to maneuver.
- Possible net gain of trees without a median strip
- OO - many of our major thoroughfares may change with respect to how they handle bikes
- A phased reconstruction process is envisioned which would use outside contractors and start in the 2020's.

The Volpe working group's #1 topic is replacement of large trees.

Arborist update:

- Working on the spring planting list: tagged 325 trees in New Jersey and chose 50 bare root trees and some one-off trees. 400 trees will be planted early to mid-April by Leahy Landscaping. OO: Chester Tree will manage and supervise planting to ensure it is done properly and will see that tree wells are expanded where possible.
- Arbor Day is now Arbor Week:
 - Monday - signs on trees at T stops explaining benefits of trees to the city
 - Tuesday - seedlings available at City Hall and Adopt-a-Tree
 - Wednesday - environmental and health benefits
 - Thursday - seedlings at library, books
 - Friday - plant a tree at a school or park. Graham and Parks school - planting rescheduled.
- Participatory budget: 100 trees planted last fall in the Harrington-Wellington, Cambridgeport, Port, and North Cambridge neighborhoods.

Public Tree Concerns:

There is a situation regarding the Stony Brook Conduit, a Cambridge Water Department Right of Way that goes through Watertown.

- 7 1/2 miles of pipeline laid 100 years ago. A survey 20 years ago found 30 of the 42 maintenance manholes. Others were not found, having been overgrown by trees or encroached by driveways, outbuildings, or other impediments.
- The condition of the conduit is compromised by extensive root systems in the seams between pipes. As the conduit is the sole source of water to Cambridge, consequences could be catastrophic.
- Trees were cut by the Cambridge Water Department (not DPW) in an attempt to find the maintenance manholes. Trees were volunteer Norway Maples but were loved by abutters.
- CPP recommends replacement with appropriate trees, not just grass.
- OO handed out survey maps and a map prepared by Watertown City Counselor Magoun was emailed to the CPP by MB.

Other public tree concerns:

- Crab apple trees taken down at city hall annex. New ones have been chosen by DL: sweetgum, ornamentals, and columnar varieties.

Inman Square and Vellucci Plaza: Kathy Watkins presented the four proposals for redesign of the Inman Sq. intersection

- High crash intersection; fatality last year.
- Four redesign options were presented with a strong commitment to pedestrian and bike safety; Bend Cambridge, Bend Hampshire, Bend Northside, and Peanut.
- Each has different advantages and implications to usable open space: some reduce Vellucci Plaza and offer sunnier space in front of retail. Others offer open space but not in usable areas. Maneuvering of the fire trucks must be considered.

Task Force on Trees

- “Green Cambridge member Susan Labandibar started a petition and gathered enough signatures (more than 150) in the last week to have a Councilor sponsor it. Councilor Devereux did so. Her petition is a request that the City form a Task Force on trees. Task Forces are an organized, time-limited gathering of qualified people, who try to drill down on an issue, problem-solve, and catalyze City action.” – Florrie’s email to CPP.
- This was discussed in relation to having the task force goal be Master Planning for a tree plan in Cambridge with the possibility of a professional longitudinal tree inventory. Move this forward and have it become policy.
- It would be useful to raise consciousness and have a comprehensive approach to the urban canopy. Envision Cambridge is not separately emphasizing the urban canopy. A sense of urgency has been building in the city.

Action Items:

- Forestry brochure needs updating.
- Maggie and Florrie will email us their idea of what the Task Force could be and get our opinions. Our deadline would be the April meeting.
- OO would like CPP’s collective opinion as early as possible because he needs to write to the City manager and have him weigh costs vs benefits and then OO wants to let Jan Devereux know before her Environment Committee meeting on April 26th.