

Committee on Public Planting Meeting Minutes April 12, 2017

Present: Maggie Booz, Janet Burns, Gary Chan (CDD), Paula Cortes, David Davis, Chantal Eide, David Lefcourt (City Arborist), Michael Hanlon, Dennis Jen, Kathleen Kelly, Jonathan Lewis, Nancy Phillips, Florrie Wescoat

Minutes from the March meeting were read and approved. Gary clarified that a Volpe Working Group exists, members and meeting times can be found on the City's web site. [Gary followed up with a site link and dates of upcoming meetings].

1. January 24th U.S. Forest Service Workshop at MIT -- report by Dave Davis

The workshop addressed climate change impacts in the Boston region and preparing and adapting urban forests to climate change. David Lefcourt was a presenter. Dave distributed three handouts: "Climate Change Vulnerability of Trees Common to the Boston Region or Likely to Gain Habitat", graphics on heat zones and hardiness zones, and "A Summary of Urban Forest Adaptation Strategies and Approaches". Projections for number of days over 86 degrees: 1980-2009, 14-30; 2010-2039, 30-45; 2040-2069, 60-90; 2070-2099, 90-120. And during the 2040-2069 period the hardiness zone will shift up from low temps of 15-20 degrees to 20-25 degrees - 8b to 9a. Dave noted that a meeting was taking place concurrently on climate change preparedness and resilience for the Alewife/Fresh Pond area.

2. City Arborist Update -- David Lefcourt

Tree Hearing April 19 Types and condition of trees posted for removal were discussed, and the suggestion was made that removal may be premature since the motivating Binney Street construction project is some time off.

Spring Planting has not yet started. 400 trees will be planted, 100 were planted last fall as part of the Participatory Budgeting program. This year a consultant from Chester Engineering will provide oversight during planting. Tree well size adjustments will be made where feasible.

Arbor Week April 24-28, starts with an information table outside City Hall, with a seedling give-away, to be repeated later in the week at the Main Library. Among other events, a tree will be planted at Sennott Park and the Adopt A Tree program will be launched. Adopt A Tree involves creating a data base of participants and tree locations, providing hoses if necessary and staying in contact a few times a year with advice and alerts. There was discussion about how the program will be promoted. David said in various ways, including social media and distribution of the new Urban Forestry brochure (available soon).

Green Cambridge Biochar Test Plots: David is working with Green Cambridge on side by side plots, with and without biochar to see if adding biochar is advantageous for trees over time.
Back of Sidewalk: Green Cambridge is interested in expanding back of sidewalk tree planting through flexibility in siting beyond what the City can do legally. No traction yet but being explored.

Huron Ave Project Maggie asked if there would be the same or more trees than before the project, the answer is more by far. Bump-outs as opportunities for tree planting were discussed. David said it's difficult but not impossible because of extensive infrastructure

underneath. The Shared Street idea would be appropriate in some places. An example is Longfellow Road off of Mt. Auburn St., it is a short dead- end with very little traffic.

3. Raised Planters Around Trees in Inman Square-- Florrie Wescoat

The Beautification Committee of the Inman Sq Residents Association would like to plant around street trees. Using tree wells to create planters has had mixed results. In general it's not good for the trees to have soil added on top of roots or up against the trunk. At one time the City denied raised planters for horticultural reasons and as a trip hazard, but curbing and various constructed edges are common now. The City may need a policy or guidelines addressing raised planters around trees. Florrie will continue the conversation about this with the group.

4. Discussion on Task Force Consensus Letter and CPP's Goals for a Task Force

The Tree Advisory Committee of Green Cambridge drafted a petition to City Council to ask the City Manager to form a Tree Task Force, which they did. The mission of the task force, if there is one, would be defined by the manager and Owen asked the CPP for input on any aspect of the idea and possible goals. A draft letter by Maggie and Florrie, based on email comments from members, was the starting point of discussion.

Green Cambridge is a citizen activist group able to push in various directions while the CPP is a City advisory group (with one mandated responsibility), set up by ordinance to focus on the Urban Forestry program with a structure for membership and continuity.

In general there was support for a task force if it could show ways- with paradigm shift ambitions- big ideas- around trees as part of how city infrastructure and management might need to change. Otherwise the City is currently in the midst of in-depth planning through the Envision Cambridge initiative which will address quality of life and the environment among other things, and in long term climate resilience planning. The Urban Forestry Dept. itself is already committed to developing a master plan, which will in part reflect a new tree inventory, also in development, able to be updated and monitored continuously.

There was discussion about issues the committee could focus on including: modern construction methods and standards and mechanized maintenance harmful to tree longevity and health; de-icing; soil volume is still a problem; many sidewalk issues- how to work around, where else to plant; develop more channels of collaboration.

David pointed out that Urban Forestry is trending in a good direction. Over his nine years as City Arborist he has seen trees move up as a municipal priority, he is now brought in early on projects, and we have a reputation as a difficult place to work regarding tree specs!