

**Committee on Public Planting
Minutes
10 January 2018**

Present: Maggie Booz, Gary Chan, Paula Cortes, Chantal Eide, Sophia Emperador, Dennis Jen, Kathleen Kelly, David Lefcourt, Cynthia Smith, Florrie Wescoat

Guests: Owen O’Riordan, Commissioner of Public Works

1. Minutes from the December meeting were tabled until February in order to make revisions.

2. City Arborist David Lefcourt updates.

Lefcourt shared soil test results from City sites, but noted that the data had not yet been fully analyzed. Dave Webster tested five locations: Garden and Follen, Hampshire, Broadway, Lafayette, and Western Ave. 2018 will now serve as the baseline for subsequent years with respect to testing. Broadway’s data may well be affected by planned construction—a point to keep in mind in future years when studying data.

The question was raised about levels of organic matter, and whether that correlated with structural soil at the above sites. The average content of organic matter is around 10%.

Committee members asked for more detailed information or some sort of key, particularly with respect to normal or ideal levels, to help decipher the data.

The Committee discussed a way to run a better experiment by using sites and more control trees.

3. Discussion of road salt and its deleterious effects on soil, water, and trees. A recent article was cited: “The nation’s rivers and streams are getting dangerously saltier,” (*Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2018/01/08/the-nations-rivers-and-streams-are-getting-dangerously-saltier/?utm_term=.72f2917eff95).

It was noted that the salt content is high at most of the above-named sites—a result of winter street salting. The DPW plans to put down gypsum to leach some of the salt out. The idea of adding biochar was also touched upon. Plans are also being discussed to try a new de-icing product, CMA (calcium magnesium acetate), which is extremely expensive. Combining current products (such as magnesium chloride) with molasses has also proven to be efficacious. The committee discussed using beet brine solution as a de-icer (Toronto uses it in high-risk areas when temperatures have severely plunged), and the pros and cons (mainly cons having to do with pollution) of employing machinery to melt snow on site or in designated dumping areas. A University of Minnesota study was cited, which recommended avoiding de-icers altogether, or using alternatives, such as activated charcoal.

The issue is complicated by the logistics of distribution of salt. A question was asked about the benefits and drawbacks about putting down salt in anticipation of a storm. The Committee also discussed the problem of overuse, perhaps due to lack of supervision. It was asked if DPW employees could be used to sweep up salt. And it was noted that the salt, once put down, cannot be recycled, but ends up in landfill. The Committee also discussed sharing responsibilities with DCR and the MBTA, both of whom seem to count on the City to step in.

The city is exploring alternatives.

4. Other points of discussion.

A question was raised about how citizens get their information and about the City's web interface. It was noted that the Adopt a Tree site might be better foregrounded.

The Committee discussed tree well size for new trees to be paid for through the Participatory Budget, with the desire expressed for 10-foot wells (as planned for Huron Ave). It appears that on-site utilities and other obstructions, yet to be determined, will decide the issue.

The issue of tree protection and preservation during Tobin School reconstruction was raised, and it was noted that it is too far out to plan for, but heavy protection for all the oaks is called for, and perhaps transplanting crabapples.

David was awarded Tree Warden of the Year by Massachusetts Tree Wardens and Foresters Association.

5. CDD representative Gary Chan updates.

Scheduled hearings:

16 January 114 Inman: is there room for street trees?

30 January 334 Abbot: there is no setback for trees, but a green roof is proposed.

6. Discussion about recruiting new members.

The Committee noted the need for more representatives overall, and that citizens from underrepresented or non-represented neighborhoods should be recruited in particular: East Cambridge, The Port, Wellington-Harrington, and Cambridge Highlands. It was suggested that we post the names of neighborhoods on "current vacancies" page of the City site.