

Cambridge Committee on Public Planting

Meeting Minutes | March 14, 2018

Attendees: CPP: Maggie Booz, Paula Cortes, Chantal Eide, Sophia Emperador, Jonathan Lewis, Nancy Phillips, Cynthia Smith, Florrie Wescoat; City of Cambridge staff: Gary Chan (CDD), David Lefcourt (City Arborist), Jen Letorneau (DPW), Kathy Watkins (DPW); Guests: Alison Crowley (MIT), Stephen Derdiarian (VHB), Shallan Fitzgerald (PMA), Mark Junghans (VHB), Kaki Martin (KMDG), Christopher Patzke (ZEN), Natalie Robichaud (PMA), Karin Weller, Marilyn Wellons, Peter White (ZEN). Minutes taken by Jonathan Lewis.

1. Review of February minutes

The meeting was called to order and the February 2018 minutes were approved.

2. Project Presentation – Talbot Street

K Watkins provided an overview of the joint City/MIT Talbot Street stormwater outfall project. Cambridgeport has separate sewer and drainage systems but they share manholes. Overflow ends up in the Charles River. A goal over the past 20 years has been to separate the systems.

M Junghans (VHB) explained that the project is designed to replace an existing stormwater pipe that no longer functions properly. Some of the new pipe would pass through City land and involve tree removal/replacement. S Derdiarian (VHB) identified 3 trees along Talbot Street and 1 in adjoining Fort Washington Park that are slated for removal (including one that is dead and one that is impeding a roadway): a 22-inch honey locust, a 7-inch ailanthus (dead), and 10- and 12-inch crabapples. The removed trees would be replaced by 5 okame cherry trees, 1 tulip tree, and 3 white oaks. The project would pay \$19,500 to the city's tree fund (13 trees at \$1500/tree). Tree pits will be 3ft x 8ft with structural soil in a box that extends underground beyond the boundaries of the pits.

C Eide and other CPP members stated a preference for something larger than the proposed cherry trees. S Derdiarian replied that the existing zelkovas' canopy is already overhanging the road. P Cortes asked if the project could plant species that would grow above the existing zelkovas. D Lefcourt said he would prefer to add zelkovas to the park side of the project (where they have sufficient space) and go with smaller street trees.

Project consultants agreed the width of the proposed tree pits could be expanded to 4ft, possibly to 5ft if sidewalk is wider than 10ft wide (needs to be measured).

The existing 22" honey locust's health is compromised by the application of herbicide to the adjacent railroad track. By placing the replacement tree on the non-RR side of fence, consultants said it would be spared from herbicide.

3. Project Presentation – EF III (North Point)

P White (ZEN) provided an overview of Education First's plans to build a student housing and wellness facility in North Point near the Gilmore Bridge (the site is currently a MA DCR facility). The EF III project involves approximately 125" of 3-inch trees. Current trees on the site are 3 river birch located in the southeast corner of the lot (approximately 30 caliper inches in total) and 4 little lindens located in tree pits on Museum Way (one pit is empty because trees planted in the pit have repeatedly died). The project would add new tree pits to Museum Way.

White said the proposed building will be oriented to increase open space in the front of building (at expense of space in rear), and to create space for a publicly-accessible artificial turf soccer field. The front (south)-facing area of the property will contain 3 islands of plantings, with red maples, crabapples, little leaf lindens; elms will be planted on the west side of building, and black tupelo on the east side. EF would take responsibility for maintaining the street trees (including the installation of an underground irrigation system).

P Cortes asked whether EF gets "credit" from the City for trees that are planted on the property as part of its landscape plan.

CPP and project consultants discussed whether it would be possible to plant more and/or larger trees in the back (northeast) portion of the property, where there is additional public open space—potentially oaks and/or sweet gums. (The current design calls for nine 3-inch red maples.) White said EF's preference is to plant one species in that space, and for the species to be columnar and tall—but EF is otherwise open to alternatives. EF will come back to Lefcourt with a proposed alternative to red maple.

4. Project Presentation – Inman Square / Mayor Alfred Vellucci Plaza

K Watkins and K Martin (KMDG) presented the current plans for redesigning Inman Square and Vellucci Plaza. The concept design would narrow Cambridge and Hampshire Streets and add bike lanes, crosswalks, and public gathering spaces.

Four honey locusts in Vellucci Plaza have expanded into the public way and are scheduled to be removed on April 10, 2018. New/replacement trees would be planted in the remodeled Vellucci Plaza (on the west side of intersection) and in the new/expanded portion of Vellucci Plaza (on the east side, across Hampshire Street). New trees would be planted in the city parking lot on Springfield Street (next to Ole Restaurant).

Overall impact on trees and canopy:

- 5 trees slated for removal
- 2 other potential tree removals (depending on details of final plan)
- 7 trees to be transplanted (7 within the Plaza, including two street trees)
- 2 trees to be maintained in the Plaza, 28 trees to be maintained on streets

- Existing canopy would be reduced to 78% of its current size at completion of the project, then grow to 100-135% of the current size after 10 years.

City would like to replicate the success of the Western Avenue project, where newly planted trees (intermixed with existing trees) are thriving, due to the layered application of structural soil, an effective watering contract, and other measures.

Three layout schemes for redevelopment of Plaza are under consideration: “Wedge” uses benches and planters to divide east portion into 3 parts, with large canopy trees creating an edge; “Puzzle” has numerous small planters and permeable paving features to break up space, with a larger number of smaller trees that offers an opportunity for species diversity; “Eddy” uses planters to define edge of the bike lane only, with large trees planted in the ground, perhaps covered by floating tree pit grates. Designs use different features to encourage cyclists to stay in bike lanes (rather than cut across the east and west plazas). All 3 designs feature a 19-bike Hubway facility in the west Plaza, but City is looking into alternative placements.

Feedback from CPP was varied. Members urged the City and project consultants to use the project as an opportunity to prevent canopy loss, with priority given to large trees. Some CPP members viewed the use of planters in the north end of east Plaza as a nice aspect of the “Puzzle” scheme and recommended that planters be incorporated into other designs, while others said that the emphasis should be on large trees (rather than on planter-size trees). Members also said that the “Puzzle” scheme nicely pulls trees back from the edge of the roadway; that planting shade trees will be important under any scheme, given the extent of the east Plaza’s southern exposure; and that, overall, the project would benefit from a strong border of shade trees.

5. Arborist update

D Lefcourt reported that city trees fared surprisingly well during the recent February and March storms (approximately 15 were lost).