

From: Piotr Mitros
Sent: Saturday, March 9, 2019 12:15 PM
To: Woodbury, Catherine <cwoodbury@cambridgema.gov>
Subject: Urban Forest Master Plan (public comment)

Dear Members of the Urban Forest Task Force,

I am excited the city is working to protect the urban canopy, forest, and green space. I am much less excited about how it's going about doing that. I like to garden, and my yard has plenty of trees. I like my trees. My neighbors have trees too. Almost next door, Alexandria has a massive industrial complex with virtually no trees.

My plan for this spring was to replace one of my mulberry trees with an apple tree. Right now, I do this sort of thing for fun. If the city decides that I need permits and permissions to garden and landscape, it will stop being fun, and I'll stop gardening. If trees become a liability or a hassle, the end result will be that I'll have fewer trees. With the law which just passed, I'm planning to start cutting down trees as soon as they are about to reach 8" diameter, and to mostly switch to plants either technically classified as shrubs or that don't grow that big. At the same time, that will do nothing about the growing commercial wasteland with no trees in the Kendall area.

If you'd like to encourage trees, the first step might be to rezone much of the industrial and commercial land in Cambridge. Alexandria is moving quickly to put up street-to-street office buildings, and that (much more so than tree permits and tree tribunals) needs to be stopped if we are to preserve our urban canopy. That's where we really need an emergency zoning measure -- not tree permits for Cambridge residents (we like our trees!).

In the longer term, we should rethink our city planning around commercial spaces. Street-to-street buildings are quite unpleasant. Commercial and industrial lands should:

1. Require percentage green space. To make up for lost density, we could allow more height. The green factor proposal seemed nice, although a bit complex for residential owner-occupied properties. It also lacked any carrot for commercial properties which might allow it to pass (e.g. allowing more height in return for green space), and by virtue of not thinking through the holistic issues around it, became politically difficult.
2. Require some amount of space for human-friendly businesses (e.g. cafes, restaurants, child cares, small shops, etc.). If the first floor is designated human-friendly, and the Facebooks, Googles, and biotechs start on the second floor, we've lost very little
3. Mirroring low-income housing, designate some portion of commercial space for small, resident-owned businesses, small nonprofits, arts, maker spaces, and/or community organizations.
4. If increasing density, submit a plan for impact on traffic, public transit, and bicycle transportation

A comprehensive, thought-out rezoning like that could address urban canopy, growth/development, and many other issues, and draw support from many more stakeholders.

If we do go the current path -- tree tribunals, permits, and similar -- there should not just be fines to the Tree Fund for cutting trees, but also payouts from the Tree Fund for growing new ones. If I cut down a tree to plant a new one in its place, that's a neutral, normal thing to do. Under the current plan, I might be looking at massive fines to do that.

Best wishes,
Piotr