



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
URBAN FORESTRY COMMITTEE
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2020 5:00PM

MINUTES

Due to COVID-19 virus containment efforts, this meeting was held remotely.

A recording of the meeting can be accessed here:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/8976830050360382721>

Meeting notes prepared by Conor Guidarelli and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in attendance: Chris Dwan (co-chair), Althea Northcross (co-chair), Vanessa Boukili (ex-officio; Senior Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner), Mark Lawhorne (ex-officio; Tree Warden), Jennifer Clifford, Amy Mertl, Tori Antonino, Sharon Komarow (left at 6:24 pm), Henry Ayanna, Conor Guidarelli

Committee Members absent: Sarah Sweeting

Others in Attendance: Malik Drayton (Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner), Sean Burke (PMA Consultants), Ben Carawan (Suffolk Construction), Councilor Katjana Ballantyne (Ward 7), Sophia Boukili

Call to Order: Althea Northcross called meeting to order at 5:04pm

1. Introductions / Housekeeping

- a. Verify order for taking minutes amongst members of the Urban Forestry Committee. Decided that we shall be following alphabetically from here on out.
- b. A big welcome back to Boukili from her hiatus with parental leave and a thanks to Drayton for managing the Committee in the meantime
- c. Introductions around for all Committee Members in attendance. Followed by Others in Attendance
- d. Northcross: Five opportunities for people to join working groups. Sign up will take place towards end of the meeting.



e. Boukili - Congratulatory about the progress made with the forms and files being generated by the UFC. Suggested that editing privileges of the google docs be restricted. Northcross will make adjustments accordingly since she set up the access.

2. Resident Concerns

a. Carawan, Project Manager for the Somerville High School Project, voiced his excitement and concern with joining for his first meeting, looks forward to learning more for from the UFC about urban forestry

b. Antonino-requested update with storm damage from Monday April 13. Lawhorne- 40 calls for limbs and branches, no full trees. Most cleaned up that night, some follow up maintenance was needed the next day. Expressed appreciation to citizens who helped in storm debris clean up. Will take a storm damage scouting survey with Drayton to further assess the damage.

3. Mission of the Committee

a. Adjectives shared by committee to create a mission statement. Northcross compiled and began the process to a develop a mission statement. First draft:

Our purpose is to provide public guidance, support, and outreach in order to help protect, nurture, and grow the Urban Forest in the City of Somerville. We are a local group of dedicated activists, landscape professionals, and community partners working together for the benefit of the Urban Forest and all its inhabitants.

Requests that UFC members take the time to review and make edits prior to the next meeting.

4. Updates from the City

1. City Tree Removals

a. Sean Burke and Ben Carawan to debrief on Somerville High tree removals

- i. Five trees have been requested for removal. These removals were posted and abutters were notified. A public meeting was held April 13th, and there were no comments on the removals at that meeting.
- ii. Showed C-252 Phase 2 Planting Plans. The trees that need to be removed are located behind public library. A new drive lane goes right where these trees are currently located. The retaining wall needs repair and replacement, and is currently situated too close to the existing tree roots. *Ginkgo bilobas* are listed in the planting plan as replacement trees, spec was generated back in May of 2018 during construction process.

Discussion:

Dwan-Appreciative and acknowledged that Burke & Carawan are checking the box and following procedures. Expressed dismay for how these trees were overlooked in the initial plans. Trees slated for removal are in a critical location given GLX removals and slope position. The tree removals are costing the city ecosystem benefits and perpetuating the devaluation of mature trees. Changes need to happen in the process of plan approvals to prevent future impromptu removals. How, in the future, can this process be improved so that the need to remove mature trees doesn't sneak up contractors/UFC mid-project? What caused this missed point?



Burke/Carawan- Lack of detail for the slope and gradation of the site was missed, apologetic for not having caught it sooner.

Dwan- That's a common issue with construction in Somerville, no one is planning for preservation of mature trees in the drafting.

Mertl- What trees are you putting in and were they part of the original plan? Will you add more trees given that you are removing more than was previously planned (considering loss of substantial DBH)?

Burke/Carawan- Can't answer that.

Antonino- Recently went over the the planting plans regarding the front and running path in the construction site. No information about these trees was mentioned when originally presented. Stands against the removal of the trees and also greatly concerned about the replacement tree selection. Appreciative to the presenters for coming but would like to look at the plans and generate native plant recommendations for the replacements.

Boukili- Acknowledgment of the sentiment of frustration with removals of mature trees, but wanted to bring focus back to the removals at hand. Noted that planting plan was decided prior to the UFC formation, but suggested inviting in the project's landscape architect (LA). Antonino et al approve of arranging meeting with LA.

Clifford- How large is that space between the two solid structures? Could help us in providing a recommendation for a tree species

Burke/Carawan- The site is 15' long, sloped very steeply. Approximately 1100 sq. ft.

Komarow- Procedural questions, as this is the first time this type of situation has been presented to us, what is our role as a Committee in commenting on this process since plans were long developed before us?

Dwan: Would like to begin achieving consensus as a committee on a written proposal so we can have more impact and offer our opinion on planting plans. This is to create the impetus for having Project Managers/LA's/Developers come to UFC before this happens.

Komarow: Arriving late in the process of this, don't have enough information in light of the question, other than we want to preserve large trees.

Boukili: Context is important, which is why for capital projects we recommend discussing tree removals at community meetings where the entire project is discussed so that we can see the big picture. However, having the UFC sending out a comment isn't a bad idea. Draft comment will be written by Dwan, Northcross, Boukili and Drayton with the following concept in mind:

Removal of these trees was due to an oversight for a retaining wall. Requesting that more trees be added to the planting plan because of the additional trees being removed. UFC would like to recommend species and plans for planting to the landscape architect and changes to species selection in the overall planting list.

Landscape Architect on the project is SMMA from Cambridge, MA. The design was done in house

Northcross-Proposal to a vote on points to be submitted as voice of the UFC. All in favor, no objections.

Closed comments on Somerville High School Project

2. Private Tree Removal (Drayton presents)
 - a. 88 Bartlett St: Dead tree, precarious
 - b. 131 Walnut St: Three tree removals, ISD will send out notice. COVID-19 is slowing work but will follow up once more information is known.

5. Funding/Fundraising discussion (Clifford & Northcross present)

Suggest applying to the New England Grass Roots Environmental Fund. Catered to small community groups to apply for funding, doesn't require coordination for city agencies and no heavy lifting. Rolling application process, ask for small amount of money (\$250-\$500). Looking to utilize these funds for outreach and this would be right grant to start working on. How can UFC properly handle this money? Really important to start figuring out what kind of holdings we can have these funds in.

- a. Boukili- Talked with Drayton and City Finance officials to understand how we can set up a UFC account. Will have to talk with municipal legal services as well. Conservation Commission is a regulatory agency and collect fees in that way, very different from a committee. State grants and federal grants, best to for City to apply and UFC can provide input or pieces of application. There are also issues with a bank account outside of the cities control.
- b. Northcross and Clifford to talk with Boukili prior to going to legal.

Also looking to come up with short term goals and direction for funding over the next few years for outreach. To be competitive for the MVP Action Grant. Any information of feedback to go through Northcross.

6. Foss Park Update:

- a. Has the memo for opposition to additional mature tree removals from the project has been forwarded on? And period of time for editing and submitting? Important to have on the record that a committee of the city commented on the state removing these trees.
- b. Boukili- Worked with DCR on recommendations for treating ash trees with emamectin benzoate in 2018. This information should be used in the memo.
- c. UFC unanimous in wanting to get memo out sooner than later. Mertil will send to final draft of letter to Drayton to send to State officials.

7. Arbor Day 2020



a. Boukili- Arbor Day is a requirement for Tree City USA municipalities. Other requirements being a tree department, tree care ordinance, and more than \$2 per capita on tree related matters. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Arbor Day Foundation is providing a pass on the Arbor Day requirement. It's a great event, but cannot celebrate as usual. Somerville continues to get a growth award every year. Usual Arbor Day festivities included outreach through tree planting, information brochures, etc. but this year will require an alternative event for engagement; to be presented by Northcross.

b. Northcross- How to better support our young trees at the beginning of their life than to organize an adopt a tree program? Roll out and implement slowly. Important at a time when we can't gather but looking for community partners to help our trees survive this summer. Map of all new trees is being generated by Northcross, could maybe have something to show for next week with Arbor Day. Steering committee and volunteers to post signage will be coordinated

i. QR code to entice neighbors to help water and care for the tree. More than one person would be favorable to adopt a tree. Could put out push notifications to remind people to water the tree especially in drought.

c. Boukili- Excellent idea, could certainly move forward with city approval of language. Also, would appreciate a planting check on each tree as the signage is posted on the tree.

d. Break it out by Wards for volunteers to post signage. Longer term monitoring of health and eyes on trees health to have data to monitor health of trees following successful launch of "water a tree" program. Antonino-concerned about more than just watering, would like to provide guidance for companion planting and have supporting information and best management practices for tree care.

Komarow- left meeting at 6:24pm, mentioned would be available for tagging trees.

e. Query into the use of Arbor Day funds since festivities are not taking place. There are no specific Arbor Day funds, it just comes out of normal budget. Stresses the need for outreach funds for more permanent solution with plastic tags.

8. Tree Preservation Ordinance

- a. Dwan- Legislative matters committee is waiting on us to remove the exemption for the removal of invasive tree species. Tree Preservation Ordinance currently list invasive trees as not being significant specimens to keep. Example: Norway maples are highly invasive, but provide shade and other ecological benefits. As we plant more native species, existing invasives will be less of an issue. Open to discussion.
- b. Mertl- Another issue is there are no options for neighbors to provide input on tree removal.
- c. Create a short recommendation to remove invasive exception, possible for invasive plants to be a significant tree?
 - a. Antonino descents, she wouldn't be able to make it a unanimous vote on this motion, because she is anti-Norway maples and all invasives.

- d. Boukili: Current proposal under discussion in Legislative Matters states that invasive plants over 24" DBH were significant which complicates matters for constituents and staff. Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus*) not of value, especially as spotted lantern fly makes its way towards New England.
- e. Guidarelli- Raised concern for devaluing trees of substantial size. Urban environment isn't hospitable to most trees, should preserve what is thriving for its environmental benefit, invasive or not. Also, Tree of Heaven can be utilized as a trap tree for the coming spotted lantern fly infestation.
- f. The issue for this ordinance is for regulating development with cutting down these trees and building or creating parking lots. Large capital projects are where we could receive the greatest gain in new plantings on private lands.
- g. Clifford- Understands both issues, we are currently dealing with issues of historical management and decision making, can we take each issue as it comes and the context of each tree removal? Sliding scale of value based on tree species, locations, services? Perhaps value vs negative environmental impacts of invasive species?
- h. Need resolution to be simple to follow and it is an additional responsibility for the the planning staff, so need to allow fastest work to either deny or approve permitting. Case by case would increase the already demanding workload.
- i. Can't take out all of the invasive species at once, would have a devastating impact, looking at that group rather than the whole. There's a great hidden value to the trees and can't devalue them.
- j. Helpful to have working definitions for UFC for terms of invasive, native, indigenous, and local ecotype regional, etc. Create terms for that for moving forward prior to an agreement. Should follow the USDA guidelines for definitions.
- k. Mertl and Dwan will reignite working group for Tree Preservation Group.

9. Tree Species Selection and Planting Standards- Dwan brought up that it's in our charter to advise tree selection for the city. Urban Forestry website has tree selection sheet available. Can use as reference in providing recommendations. Also, UFMP will include tree selection recommendations. UFMP needs to be complete by June for reimbursement.

Subcommittees to be generated: Arbor Day Committee (Adopt-A-Tree), Tree Preservation Ordinance, Tree Species Selection and Planting Standards.

10. GLX Corridor

- a. Antonino- Raised concern for ground clearing with no trees being planted nor slope stabilization. Requesting intervention by the city to push GLX to start planting trees like the community discussions have been saying. Is replanting in the plan?

- b. Boukili- Trees were cleared to expand the tracks and create retaining walls. Not the same amount of area as it used to be because of construction of more rails. City has been pushing to create more greenery in the scope of the project (meadows and the like) but its a State project and property.
- c. Dwan- It is still useful to make public statements as a committee to voice our concerns as a city committee. Wig Zamore mentioned that pollution can be used as ammunition for statement.

Boukili leaves at 7:02pm, and designated Drayton as ex-officio replacement.

11. Urban Forestry Management Plan

- a. Not enough people have gotten back with their responses to the Urban Forestry Management Plan (UFMP). Drayton suggest setting a deadline. First 2 weeks draft, 3rd is comment and edit, 4th is approval and final draft
- b. Dwan- Inquired whether there was a timeline for the next version of the UFMP and will there be a time frame for a turnaround time? Noted that our comments as a review committee get rushed and not implemented due to time constraints. Would prefer receiving more raw material or drafts to be able to voice suggestions earlier than later in the process.
- c. Currently need to just respond to the goals set for the UFMP, need correspondence from members. City has had form for a while and we need to provide clarity on goals. Will need more information from Boukili with regards to status of UFMP to continue conversation. Looking to answer “Are these goals clearly and ideally what we want to see reflected in the master plan?”

12. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

Feb. 20, 2020: Not available to approve. *Tabled until next meeting.*

April 02, 2020: minutes unanimously approved (motion - Northcross, second – Mertl, vote: 9:0:0).

Subcommittee volunteer appointments:

- Adopt-a-Tree Program: Northcross, Mertl, Guidarelli, Antonino, (adjunct members Clifford and Dwan)
- Tree Preservation Group: Mertl, Dwan, Antonino, Clifford, two public members (from Dec. 2019)
- Tree Species Selection and Planting Standards: Guidarelli, Antonino (maybe Northcross in a month)
- GLX: Ayanna, Antonino

Adjourn: Motion to adjourn meeting unanimously approved at 7:17pm [motion-Clifford, second-Guidarelli vote: 9:0:0]