



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

**Urban Forestry Committee Meeting**  
**THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2020 4:30PM**  
**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/3049499205235512321>

**Meeting notes prepared by Amy Mertl and Vanessa Boukili**

**Committee Members in attendance:** Chris Dwan (co-chair), Althea Northcross (co-chair), Jennifer Clifford, Conor Guidirelli, Amy Mertl, Malik Drayton (ex-officio; Tree Warden designee), Sharon Komarow, Vanessa Boukili (ex-officio; Senior Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner), Tori Antonino

**Committee Members absent:** Sarah Sweeting, Henry Ayanna

**Others in Attendance:** Renee Scott, Councilor Katjana Ballantyne (Ward 7), Andrew Louw, Leigh Munier, Baby Sophia (cameo at 5:30pm)

**Call to Order:** Chris Dwan called meeting to order at ~5:05pm

**1. Introductions/ Housekeeping**

- a) Vanessa asked about the timing of UFC monthly meetings going forward. She proposed 4:30 – 6:30pm as the standard time for now, UFC can re-visit as needed if things change.

**2. Resident Concerns**

- a) Tori was at City Hall and expressed concern that the Buildings and Grounds crew were currently volcano mulching trees. This practice is harmful for the trees, they should be using woodchips as the city website lists as a best practice. Mulching is a waste of time and money.



- i. Vanessa noted that it is difficult to reach out to the right city people, and people forget year to year that we are doing something different. Committee discussed options for getting this information out. Determined there are four ways to approach – add to the Urban Forestry Management Plan (UFMP), create a one-page info sheet, create an online training (though could not be mandatory), have a meeting. UFC can officially approve. Tori noted she was willing to go to a meeting and connect with grounds crew. Also as more people adopt trees, that might be a way to adjust this sort of care for the trees. Tori will also work on a one-pager.
- b) Vanessa updated UFC on the prospect Hill Elm Tree (resident concern from a previous meeting). It was treated for Dutch Elm disease (DED) last year, and last week it also had soil amended to add Lyme and bio-stimulant fertilizer. Jennifer noted she went up there a couple weeks ago, looks like it needs a little pruning. Vanessa noted we likely can't keep the tree long term because of DED, but the City will do the best we can to keep it as long as we can.
  - i. Renee asked if the Elm tree won't survive at what point do we call it? Vanessa noted that since the city just treated it last year we will try for another year and keep an eye on it until it becomes a hazard to the public.
- c) Renee brought up three additional citizen concerns:
  - i. There is a Beech tree in Symphony park that is not doing well, has a fungus. Is there anything that can be done preventatively?
    - a) Vanessa noted the fungus is not a beech specific fungus, it is a weak fungus that only affects poor condition trees. Beech trees don't like to be touched, so it might be more susceptible. Not much to be done other than monitor.
  - ii. Black swallow-wort coming up like crazy, can we push people to pull it?
    - a) Chris noted we could reinforce pulling it up, but UFC website is not much of a megaphone. Vanessa can ask to have it put on parks and open space Instagram account. Sharon noted there is a flyer with ID information, could flyer houses. Vanessa can ask if there are more left and divvy them up, drop on porches where you see it.
  - iii. Concerned about the potential amendment to the Tree Preservation Ordinance about allowing invasives of significant size, concerned about that as her yard is barren due to Norway Maples.
    - a) Will be discussed later in the meeting
- d) Malik brought up a concern from a citizen who has had an issue over the last 18 years due to an ongoing accessibility conflict. Has lived in the same place for 18 years with a daughter in a wheelchair. Has been asking us to remove a tree that is in their way (width of sidewalk/elevation change issues). But if we removed city street trees for ADA conflict we would not have any of them left. Sharon noted that if it's a certain location the city is legally required to accommodate her. The City is liable, there have been lawsuits in Cambridge. Chris suggested adding this as an agenda item for future meeting to try to come up with some guidance.

- e) Sharon noted she has seen a bike locked on tree for many weeks. Is there anything the City would do? Vanessa said that abandoned bikes get cut off of things all the time. DPW's approach is to tag the bike for a few days then remove it. Locking bikes to city trees is not allowed.
- f) Tori followed up that gas blowers were now being used at City Hall, UFC should comment on this. Agree to add gas blowers to a future agenda. Tori also shared a comment on behalf of another resident whose sugar maple is doing much better this year than usual, maybe due to less cars on the road.

### 3. Mission of the Committee

Althea has been compiling comments on the mission statement. She recently got edits from Conor to add, plans to add these and bring for a vote next month.

### 4. Updates from City:

#### a. City Tree Removals

Malik noted that 3 trees were recently removed. 57 Bartlett St., 19 Craigie St., 19 Cambria St. due to storm damage. 88 North St. had storm damage too. These were all 3 street trees, dangerous so no hearing.

#### b. Private Tree Removal Permit(s) and Exception(s)

Malik noted there have not been any permit applications completed since the last meeting. Everything pending as people are slow to get materials and contractors have to prove they are working safely (COVID).

Chris asked about 21 Harrison. Malik noted he received the report on May 5<sup>th</sup>, they have 30 days to complete the application. It was ID'd as a tree of heaven. Amy asked how do you know if a tree was invasive if you don't get there early enough? Malik noted either they took pictures or if it can't be determined then hold to the same standards as if it was not an invasive.

Tori noted that two trees came down in a storm near the growing center. She also sent pictures of recently felled trees on Walnut. Malik sent the photos to ISD, they received notice.

#### c. Urban Forestry Committee Website

Vanessa noted that we have a website! <https://www.somervillema.gov/ufc>. Jennifer suggested we brainstorm what to put on the website at some point. Conor asked how does DPW deal with stumps? Vanessa noted they stump grind big ones, pull out small ones.

### 5. Arbor Day 2020/ Adopt-a-Tree Program



Althea is putting together an email to send to steering committee. Will sound out 1<sup>st</sup> email in the next week or two. Big thank you, tremendous work. Chris has gotten good feedback. Beacon street trees have also been added to the program after feedback from citizens. We also logged observations for 200 of 300 young trees.

Jennifer described a bad interaction in Ward 2 with an individual. When she hung the signs they were very indifferent. When she went to check on them later, the trees at 24 and 26 Bolton St. were vandalized, had been rocked back and forth and the root ball torn out. The person came out and was very aggressive, didn't want to trees there because of dog activity, stormed back into the house. He was not wearing a mask. People's dogs were eliminating around the trees – a little fence might stop that. Vanessa will talk to Mark about the vandalization. Hard to follow though without proof. Will continue to replace tree – it is city property and other people in the area want a tree there (someone specifically requested a tree in this location). Will keep it in the same place, perhaps work with Councilor Scott. Althea noted that a buddy system might make sense next time we tag trees. Tori will reach out to Artist's Asylum on the idea of making tree guards.

Jennifer also reminded us of the idea of doing fact sheets, could be sent to people who adopt. Conor is also interested in that.

## **6. Urban Forestry Management Plan**

Vanessa noted that Althea collected great info on the visions/goals, she is still putting it into a draft for review. There will be a draft for DCR by June but not a finalized one. There will be more time to comment on the next version. Will review goals from Althea many addressed already. Vanessa will have something by the next meeting but likely not in time to review before next meeting.

## **7. Tree Preservation Ordinance**

Amy presented the general structure the working group has put together - potential positive and negative outcomes of the proposed amendment on invasive species. Asked for feedback on the structure. Conor asked where did 24 inches come from? Chris noted it was from seeing what other cities had done. Althea noted the structure is good, a good precedent for when the committee does not unanimously agree. Chris asked Councilor Ballentyne if this sort of structure would be useful for the committee but technical difficulties prevented her from responding.

## **8. GLX Corridor**

*a. Tabled*

## **9. Tree Species Selection and Planting Standards**

*a. Tabled*

## **10. Funding / Fundraising discussion**

*a. Tabled*

## **11. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings**

- a. February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020 minutes unanimously approved at 6:35pm (motion - Northcross, second – Clifford, vote: 9:0:0).

- b. April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020 minutes unanimously approved at 6:36pm (motion - Komorrow, second – Clifford, vote: 9:0:0).

**Adjourn:** Motion to adjourn meeting unanimously approved at 6:37 pm [motion-Antonino, second-Guidarelli vote: 9:0:0]

