



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

**Urban Forestry Committee Meeting**  
**THURSDAY, JULY 16, 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/3337881315230538512>

*Meeting notes prepared by Amy Mertl and Vanessa Boukili*

**Committee Members in attendance:** Chris Dwan (co-chair), Jennifer Clifford, Vanessa Boukili, Sharon Komarow, Tori Antonino, Amy Mertl, Mark Lawhorne

**Committee Members absent:** Sarah Sweeting, Henry Ayanna, Althea Northcross (co-chair), Conor Guidarelli

**Others in Attendance:** Malik Drayton (City of Somerville), Peter Heller, Meredith Porter, Elizabeth Long (Somerville Times), Sue C.

**Call to Order:** Chris Dwan called meeting to order at 4:34 pm

**1. Introductions/ Housekeeping**

**2. Resident Concerns**

- a. Peter Heller brought up concerns about loss of large silver maple at 23 Wallace St.
  - i. Vanessa noted it was a large, 39 in diameter tree. Old silver maples tend to decay and fall apart, the arborist saw a lot of decay in roots which is especially dangerous. It was an imminent risk so it had to be removed. Many residents were concerned to lose a big, old tree but it was dangerous. Vanessa also noted they won't be able to re-plant in exact same spot but will prioritize planting one nearby in the fall. Peter noted that residents really value trees that can grow tall, not just small ornamental trees. Sometimes it seems like

there is an emphasis on smaller trees that won't get in the way. But residents want tree cover and tall trees and not planting those tall trees near power lines means very few canopy trees.

- ii. Chris agreed there are competing priorities with trees and utility lines, Vanessa noted that trees under utility lines may be misshapen but also dangerous since they are not meant to grow that way. Need electricity and for people to stay safe.
  - iii. Mark agreed that Wallace Street has a beautiful canopy, noted that everyone loved that tree but it was completely hollow. He also expressed a desire to work with Eversource to find a way to balance larger trees and power lines.
  - iv. Tori thanked Peter for his comment and noted this is a consideration for the tree species selection group, to consider lush species that can go under the wires and make spaces for larger canopy trees.
- b. Jennifer brought up a concern about Beech leaf disease: Dark green striping in leaf on beech trees, it is very detrimental to beech trees. Keep an eye out, if anyone sees it they can contact Jennifer or DCR directly. Currently it has been found in Plymouth on both American and European Beech.

### 3. Mission of the Committee

- a. Chris read the mission of the committee:  
*"The charge of the Urban Forestry Committee is to provide public guidance, foster support and outreach in order to help protect and cultivate the Urban Forest in the City of Somerville. We are your concerned neighbors, dedicated activists, environmental professionals, and community partners working together to foster an equitable urban forest for all of its inhabitants. Together we will grow a healthy and resilient forest for the future."*

### 4. UFC letterhead

- a. Althea is spearheading this, she is currently on vacation so no change since last month.

### 5. Updates from City:

- a. City Tree Removals
  - i. Vanessa updated that on Wallace and Kingston St. silver maples were removed, due to large limb failure and significant decay. Five trees are pending removal along the community path, all dead or nearly dead. Letter for abutters on Morrison will be distributed when removal date is set, aiming for an earlier notice than with Wallace St.
- b. Private Tree Removal Permit(s) and Exception(s)
  - i. Malik listed the private trees removed:
    - 1. 25 Lowell St, a conifer with crack in the base. Exception granted.
    - 2. Exception granted for a tree destroying a foundation.
    - 3. 156 Summer St. submitted a permit application but found it was a sycamore maple so exempted. Another one on that property may also be removed.

4. 30 Oak removed a tree permitted last year. They are libel to plant 4-5 more trees on property, case stays open until new trees planted. Going to be owner occupied. Partial forgiveness was given for replanting as he will be an owner-occupant. A developer would be more pressed to fully re-plant or pay into tree fund.
  - ii. Tori asked for an update on a tree that came down on Walnut street in February, Malik still needs to follow up with ISD on that.
- c. Spring Planting
- i. Vanessa updated that planting is almost complete, 20+ trees still going in, tree wells are all prepped. Most of replacement trees from the last few seasons have also been replanted. Let Vanessa know if anyone spots more small trees in bad condition, they are under warranty for two years (construction projects are sometimes a 1-year warranty). A total of 62 or 63 trees were planted, the goal was 50 trees.
  - ii. Chris brought up a question he heard on ADA accessibility vs trees. Vanessa said trees are grandfathered in to the sidewalk being ADA accessible or not. But once a sidewalk is re-done, ADA issues need to be addressed. At least one side must be ADA accessible. New trees need 36 in of sidewalk, wider if possible, and must be 20 feet from crosswalks.
  - iii. Tori asked about how tree wells are prepped with soil, they have been having discussions in species selection committee on soils. Vanessa noted they do not change the soil, just what is there when sidewalk is removed.
  - iv. Chris asked when people put in 311 requests on dead trees, what is response time? Malik said they are usually inspected by himself, the timeframe varies. Usually inspected within 30 days, though they are taken care of in terms of hazard priority. Large dead trees are taken care of sooner.
  - v. Mark noted 311 does a very good job trying to send notices to the right areas, but can sometimes get sent to the wrong place and re-routed. If it doesn't say emergency or hazard it may take longer. Weekend calls are more like to get inappropriately routed.
- d. 74 Middlesex Avenue
- i. Vanessa updated that this was a project that Tori brought up at least meeting, with a building and streetscape and a new civic space. The question was on the community process for space. Still in the early stages, layouts but not decided on species. If there is a civic space there will be a public process. No idea on timeline, we don't know if they will come here or if we go to their meetings, Vanessa will let the UFC know. Will keep it on the agenda, though UFC has limited influence if it is a private property.

## 6. Clarendon Hill Development

- a. UFC had planned to send a memo to the ZBA, this is a substantial re-building for affordable housing project. It was presented to UFC back in November, they described a plan for all native plantings, UFC was pleased. ZBA approved their plans last night – LEED for all units and all native plantings. Memo from us now is not terribly useful. PSUF division wrote a memo. ZBA is expecting suggested conditions from departments, Vanessa could put conditions on their permit. Continuance with expectations to have it passed in the next meeting. The memo should be on the planning and zoning website. Tori noted if there is not the opportunity for food crops they could grow a food forest with berry trees etc. If done intentionally it could be good for people living there to enjoy especially if no community garden. Jennifer suggested getting input from the resident community on this and other plantings, Councilor Ballentyne can put UFC in touch with residents. Tori, Chris and Jennifer volunteered to write up a proposal (though it can't be a condition of the permit).

## 7. Working Group Updates

- a. Arbor Day 2020/ Adopt-a-Tree Program
  - i. Watering program continues, Vanessa noted that the emails are intensive to translate, and language liaisons don't have time for that right now with more pressing communication needs. We could offer phone conversations in Spanish/Portuguese if needed.
- b. Tree Preservation Ordinance
  - i. Amy reviewed that the TPO working group had put together a 6-page letter for the City Council with alternative ideas regarding adding protections for large invasive tree species in the TPO. UFC discussed whether everyone feels like the various perspectives were represented accurately. Vanessa had some additional comments, minor changes mostly. Tori sees a lot of invasive plants popping up everywhere, and feels frustrated that the UFC did not come out strongly against any protections for invasive species. Overall the committee agreed it was representative of the opposing arguments and laid out our different opinions on the issue. UFC voted to approve pending Vanessa's edits. Will send the final version to the Legislative Matters Committee.
- c. GLX Corridor
  - i. Jennifer and Amy attended the last public meetings. Not very informative. They did acknowledge that planting would not be what public would be expecting. They noted that City had plans to reforest part of it, though this may just refer to community path. Has the UFD been in touch with GLX? Viola Agustin is the GLX liaison, has been putting in support for green space but push back from GLX wanting an easy to maintain space.
  - ii. UFC discussed inviting Viola or another GLX representative to a future meeting.
- d. Tree Species Selection and Planting Standards

i. Tori Antonino, Connor Guidarelli, Renee Scott and Gina Foglia met and discussed concerns, vision for a planting standard and what kind of document will it be, street trees or more broad, including trees that don't work on streets but need to be part of canopy. They discussed the herbaceous layer, how we plant tree pits, hell strips, green mulch, understory. They discussed thinking outside the box – like the trellised steel structure with a trumpet vine in Union Square – a tree that is not a tree. Getting people to plant in their yards as well as streets David Falk also join for next meeting. They will carry on with the work over the summer and work on a document.

e. Funding / Fundraising discussion.

i. No updates, will discuss next time. UFC is still unsure if a committee can have its own fundraising/bank account. Chris mentioned the idea of a “Friends of the Urban Forest” booster group – not the City directly. Chris will reach out to bike committee to see how they do it (ex. get money to hand out headlights).

8. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

a. June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020 - *tabled*

**Adjourn:** Motion to adjourn meeting unanimously approved at 6:26 pm [motion-Lawhorne, second-Mertl vote: 7:0:0]