



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

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 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/6181855003285141762>

Meeting notes prepared by Jennifer Clifford and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in attendance: Chris Dwan (co-chair), Althea Northcross (co-chair), Amy Mertl, Conor Guidarelli, Henry Ayanna (youth member, left ~6pm), Jennifer Clifford, Mark Lawhorne (ex-officio; Tree Warden), Vanessa Boukili (ex-officio; Senior Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner, left ~6:30 and designated Malik Drayton as replacement), Tori Antonino

Committee Members absent: none

Others in Attendance: Malik Drayton (City of Somerville), Timothy Dineen, Renee Scott

Call to Order: Dwan called meeting to order at 4:34 pm. Reminds those in attendance of the need for virtual meetings because of the Covid-19 pandemic and that meetings are held in accordance with open meeting law.

1. Introductions/ Housekeeping

- a. Introductions by all in attendance.
- b. Dwan: Sharon Komarow stepping down from committee. Sharon brought expertise in landscape architecture to our committee discussions and she will be missed.
- c. Boukili: two vacant positions on UFC: youth member and landscape architect
- d. Dwan: Proposed to take item 10a (GLX working group update) out of order and do the GLX working update to accommodate the resident guest interested in the GLX updates.



10a. GLX working group update

- a. Antonino: invited Terrence McCarthy (GLX Deputy Program Manager, Stakeholder Engagement) to meet with UFC. He and Viola Augustin were to give an update on the GLX Ridership Oversight Committee meeting, but the time of that meeting was changed. UFC is concerned over losing opportunities to discuss and make recommendations for the GLX corridor green space. UFC wishes to determine where we can fit into this process and work on landscaping, perhaps even spaces of which we are currently unaware.
- b. Boukili: has not received any updates, but has reached out to Viola, who will come to a UFC meeting this fall. Relays that City is trying to get as much green space as possible for all aspects: greenery, pollinators, wildlife, etc.

Dwan: proposes to get back to regular order of business

2. Resident Concerns

- a. Boukili: resident reached out with concern of a Gingkos on Winslow Ave. Some Gingkos (a dioecious species) start as males and turn to females. Fruit drop is an issue (they smell very badly). There is perhaps another case of this conversion on Somerville Ave (in front of Machu Picchu).
- b. Dwan: resident reached out about planters on Beacon St. (planted as part of Beacon St project). These planters are either taken care of, or they become overgrown. Is there a plan for DPW to take that over? Should we have a push to “adopt” these planters? There are some plants available for use in these planters (from Morse Kelly Playground garden or Tori). What is be done with weedy species? Lawhorne will check on these and get back to us.
- c. Mertl: Pollinator surveys at public green space on Quincy St were disrupted because it was mowed, destroying some fall bloomers. Is DPW in charge of the schedule here? Dwan: suggests asking city because it depends on whether grounds or road crews are responsible for park care. Important for projects like the demonstrator gardens or pollinator counts. Boukili: thinks this is mostly DPW. Lawhorne: it can be either parks or buildings and grounds. Recreation Dept. does have responsibility for some parks. He will lay out a matrix so it will be easier to tell who is responsible and we can get those supervisors into this conversation. Together, we can decide together how to move forward. Guidarelli: at arboretum they do no-mow meadows and mow after things go dormant mow over the thatch layer. Could be useful at the Quincy St. open space.
- d. Rene Scott: On Summit Ave (between Walnut and Vinal) on uphill side, toward high school, there was a tree scheduled for removal 2 weeks ago. Other trees were marked because of need for parking space, causing some concern among residents. Suggests having better signage for removal so people don’t become needlessly concerned. Lawhorne: DPW marks section as work zone and rely on arborists to mark the tree. It makes sense for DPW, but he can see how residents get concerned. Will try to work out to better way to ID the tree that will be removed, like a colored ribbon and better sign, maybe wrapping around the tree. People will learn that this is what that means.

- e. Tree wells: Will covered tree wells be replanted? Lawhorne: open wells are paved over because of trip hazard, but this does not necessarily mean they out of service. Sometimes these paved wells can be replanted, other times new tree wells can be created nearby.
- f. Antonino: raised concern over two butterfly bushes Prospect Hill Park. This is prohibited in states south of us. In light of climate change, maybe want to consider not planting species that are considered invasive in neighboring states. Asking UFC to encourage removal of these butterfly bushes to support native pollinator health. Dwan: suggests that perhaps this should be an agenda item. Lawhorne: will bring to Prospect Hill team attention, get response, and come back to us with more information.

3. Mission of the Committee

- a. Dwan reads through as standard item:
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. Updates from City (Boukili & Drayton):

- a. Prospect Hill Park Elm tree: has Dutch Elm Disease (DED). It is being treated, but it is dying and will need to be removed in near future. Replacement will be another large, native tree, possibly an oak species. Taking other suggestions for replacement species. Dwan: this is an opportunity for marking how we are starting fresh here (symbolic).
- b. Somerville Avenue silva cells: there was a geotextile fabric that is used on top and sides of silva cells to keep roots from going outside and damaging hardscape. Work is being done correctly and according to plan. (In response to resident concern from the previous UFC meeting)
- c. City Tree Removals: staff are currently working through the list presented in the August meeting, including one additional tree at 79 Dover. As marking spaces for planting, there are other dead/dying trees coming up.

Lawhorne: adding more trees to list: 4 trees (letters have been sent) and 6-7 (letters forthcoming). Removals will be slow because of personnel slow-down. There is an outside contractor doing larger trees.

Four hazardous tree removals at Blessing of the Bay Park (a DCR property): 1 Norway maple, 1 Tree of heaven, 2 Littleleaf linden. Upcoming work at the park includes plantings of native trees.

- d. Private Tree Removal Permit(s) and Exception(s)
Permits:
 - 1. 9 Lovell St
 - 2. 19 Robinson St
 - 3. 60 Murdoch St

4. 225 Willow Ave
5. 15 Bartlett St
6. 7 Lewisberg St

Exemptions:

1. 124 Perkins St (hazard)
 2. 51 Hudson St (3 trees, invasive)
 3. 7 Cedar St (invasive)
 4. 28 Cottage Ave (hazard)
 5. 23-25 Marshall St (hazard)
 6. 205 Beacon St (hazard)
 7. 42 Cedar St (hazard)
 8. 148 Lowell St (hazard)
- e. Fall Planting: 47 sites confirmed for planting started at former Powderhouse school, site prep is happening. Planting season will include 130 trees in total. Species list for fall planting will be shared.
- f. Other
- i. At West Branch Library there is a large Norway maple tree that folks wanted saved. It had some weak branching, and has been cabled to support the branches.
 - ii. During construction at former Powder House park, contractors were not careful and put heavy equipment on root zone of an existing tree. The city fined them for damages and the money was received.

5. Urban Forest Management Plan

- a. Comments on the plan have been received from UFC members.
- b. Clifford, Mertl, Antonino, and Boukili have working group for public input. 2 input sessions, divide by section into 3 breakout rooms. Requesting moderators. Clifford to share document with UFC on drive and send to UFC group.
- c. Share UFMP with Species selection working group for feedback.
- d. Antonino: suggests writing a foreword by UFC for the UFMP, to demonstrate our passion/commitment. How can we quantify the value of interacting/connecting with nature, making observations, educational value, possible leads to learning for children/career choices, ecological value of less tangible items? Mertl: there are studies on how to quantify these. Antonino/Clifford: can make qualifications or anecdotal evidence.
- e. To demonstrate tree benefits in section 1, perhaps include photos that show people learning. Focus on connecting community; supporting science, ecology, biodiversity, how data can translate to potential research projects, inform climate change policy.

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2. Publicizing Dead/Hazardous Tree Removals

- a. Northcross/Dwan: asking about an updated list that city can publish current list of trees for removal to address desire in community for transparency. Helps people from needless concern and avoids confusion.

Perhaps a system where urgent removal, tie a ribbon around the tree to identify which is getting removed. Can people tie their own ribbon to honor a tree? This could depressurize what has in the past been tense relationship with city.

Guidarelli: suggests something more immediate, and not burden city with potential request redundancy. A ribbon can be a more delicate way to mark and provide opportunity for people to recognize and “say goodbye”.

Currently: Orange dots mean that city arborists have verified tree for removal. Sometimes trees cannot be worked through that quickly. Markings are low, so DPW can find them but not obvious, so that it does not appear malicious. Is there a way to make the removal list more readily seen? Boukili: yes, if it is okay with city. But UFC gets list to help disseminate distribute info. Is that enough? Drayton: still will often get a call immediately before anyone really looks at website. But we can point to website.

- b. Maybe create document of tree removals in UFC Google drive so UFC members can help distribute info to concerned residents.

3. Conway Park

- a. Dwan: EPA provided \$3million for remediation; funds to be matched by city. Will remove 60 trees because they are in contaminated soil. Concern that suggested 18” remediation depth is not

compatible with planting trees. Cited several articles as verification, including comparing grass vs artificial turf, planting depth for trees, microparticles in water runoff from the field.

Currently, artificial turf is proposed to replace grass. Artificial turf was chosen to support the number of hours to support play. Field will be smaller so that trees can be planted along edge in current plan. Artificial turf may use ground up tires as fill beneath, or sawdust, as this can be compacted. Safe playability vs. material type.

- b. Dwan crafted a memo for UFC review (regarding Conway Park rehabilitation). Discussion followed presentation of memo.
 - i. The memo requests, among other items, to remediate to 36” for natural grass and tree planting.
 - ii. Boukili: 18” depth can work; will replant 55 trees that grow to large species; shared a species list [via chat]: sweetgum, tuliptree, red maple, American linden, black tupelo, swamp white oak, pin oak, birch are being considered. Other suggested species [via chat]: witch hazel, sweetbay magnolia, pussy willow, pin cherry, flowering dogwood, stag sumac. Some should be avoided: hickory, some oaks.
 - iii. Dwan: urgency because money may be approved to get money to start in fall. Would like memo to be out next week to make impact on funding discussion. City Councilor White chair of finance committee.
 - iv. Incorporation of plant rush would be great to incorporate into turf fields. For fields, we have lots of options.
 - v. Eversource has begun work on Conway Park
 - vi. Concern expressed over use of artificial turf, limitations of remediating 18”, and lack of public access to the field
- c. Motion to vote on memo [motion: Mertl, second: Guidarelli)

Roll call vote on Conway Park UFC memo as shown on screen as a Google document, in drive, as is.

- i. In favor: Mertl, Guidarelli, Northcross, Clifford, Antonino, Dwan
- ii. Opposed: Boukili, Lawhorne
- iii. Absent: Ayanna
- iv. Results: 6 in favor, 2 opposed

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn meeting and table the remaining agenda items (listed below) was unanimously approved at 6:33 pm [motion: Clifford, second: Guidarelli; vote: 8:0:0 (Ayanna absent)]

8. 74 Middlesex Avenue

9. Clarendon Hill Development

10. Working Group Updates

- b. Tree Species Selection and Planting Standards
- c. Funding / Fundraising discussion
- d. Public Input plan for UFMP

11. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

- a. August 20th, 2020