



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

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting
OCTOBER 21, 2021 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/2816764490929860875>

Meeting notes prepared by Leah Grossman and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in attendance: Chris Dwan (Co-Chair; left meeting at 5:35pm), Althea Northcross (Co-Chair), Tori Antonino, Jennifer Clifford, Conor Guidarelli, Amy Mertl, Leah Grossman, Vanessa Boukili (Senior Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner), Malik Drayton (Tree Warden designee)

Committee Members absent: None

Others in Attendance: David Hart, Gary Trujillo, Leigh Muenier, Murphy Langevin

Call to Order: Northcross called meeting to order at 4:35 pm

1. Introductions / Housekeeping

- a) Introductions all around.
- b) Clifford:
 - i. Youth membership question: wondering where things stand? Knowing Murphy will join us soon, is there someone for the second spot? Boukili has not posted it yet.
 - ii. SME Status: has been some time since we're written about it or reviewed it
 - 1. Boukili: last week UFC and others committees in the city were voted to have SME status by City Council. Some technical steps before official approval.
 - 2. Dwan: SME status allows professionals in the field to be on the committee. Northcross: if someone is working directly on the project, they can recuse themselves to avoid conflicts of interest.
- c) Dwan: Northcross, Dwan, Boukili discussed how long committee chairs should serve and how to determine who should be on the next round. Dwan proposed to add it to the agenda for the next meeting. Create a process for determining duration of the chair and how to select the next chair.

- i. Antonino: Three-year appointments will come up in February or July
- ii. Dwan: With mayoral appointments, you don't get kicked off at the end of your term, you serve until the mayor reappoints you. You do have to be reconfirmed by the council, but you can serve in the capacity as long as you want to.
- iii. Antonino: would like to discuss at the next meeting, process for bringing new people on.
- iv. Guidarelli: How many people are on a committee typically, and does it expand or do you replace people as needed?
 - 1. Boukili: Committee was formed by an ordinance with 11 members: 9 + 2 youth members
 - a. We could likely have unofficial members as alternate, non-voting members
 - b. Dwan: City Council has asked us about feedback on the ordinance, if we have feedback, we could suggest changes to the ordinance.
 - v. Northcross: For chair appointments was imagining 3-year rotations
 - vi. Dwan: Seems like two conversations: one about chair position, and one about general membership makeup
 - vii. Northcross: Add both to the agenda for next meeting
- d) Antonino: Request to update the website with current members, and remove past members. Boukili will check and have it updated.

2. Resident Concerns

- a) Mertl: Symphony park where the large tree was removed, wondering if there would be a replacement
 - i. Boukili: site is challenging because it is well planted with some trees and shrubs. Working to transform the stump into a piece of art. Will not be able to plant in the same spot, or any spot too close, at least until artwork is complete. Will need to check site for alternative planting locations; open to ideas for a new spot.
- b) Dwan: Thanks to our ex-officios for removal lists. I was asked by a resident about a tree that was removed, and concern was addressed. Clifford: agrees and appreciates being able to look at the removal list to confirm that the tree was dead and removed
- c) Leigh:
 - i. On Somerville Ave. (Gracie's on your right), there is a strip that was asphalted. Leigh asked the City a while ago and was told the area will be redone. Suggesting adding green space, even if temporary. Thinking about adding planters or small trees that could be temporary.
 - 1. Boukili: There is a process going on to work on redesigning the whole area, from the plaza through Bow Street. Lots of community process, designs are in the works, there is a SomerVoice page with details. Planting trees there now is not a good idea since the area will be redeveloped and any trees would likely have to be removed.

2. Leigh: working with Green and open Somerville with enthusiasm from other residents. Potential to start some sturdy baby trees.
 3. Boukili: If in the median, things like shorter plantings would be better to keep sightlines open.
 4. Antonino: Washington street garden – Union sq. at Medford could be a precedent.
- ii. Shout out to mass pollinator network with the NOFA (northeast farmers network). Request to have Somerville come and speak yesterday evening about the Native Species Ordinance, Antonino spoke and appreciated the event. Appreciate the group and space. The coordinator of the Mass pollinator network is hoping to do something more robust in the spring (this event was more rushed). Recording will also be posted and Antonino can share recording once its released.
1. Antonino: appreciated the event and will share, there were requests for more presentations – hoping to expand our ordinance to include pesticide use. Excited about municipal momentum.
 2. Dwan: Boston proposed tree preservation ordinance is very similar to Somerville, and appreciating how we push things forward.

3. Updates from City

a) City Tree Removals

- i. Boukili: All the trees from the last lists sent in September have been taken down. DPW is working through stump removals. No other planned removal dates planned, but aware of more trees to be removed.
- ii. Some public trees at 5 Middlesex and 153 South Street will be addressed at tree hearing that is coming up.

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

- i. Drayton: Reported on various permits and exemptions issued. These are recorded and available upon request. Will include update at next meeting about number of permits and amount received.
 1. Antonino: Re: 101 South Street - thought Norway maple does not end up on exemptions? Boukili: Norway maples >24" are involved in permit application. After 24" they become a significant tree. Included in the tree preservation ordinance amendment implemented last October.

c) City Tree Planting

- i. Boukili: 270 sites have been located, there is a planting map online. Tagged trees at Tuckahoe. Contractors are working on site prep – have done at least 1/3 of sites. Trees are being dug now (waiting until weather cools off). Trees will start to be planted in the next couple weeks. Added some Redbuds, per Antonino suggestion. Very close to 50% native overall.

1. Dwan: Have we delivered flyers to residents? Boukili: letters delivered to properties directly behind the new tree. We had some cancellations based on this.
2. Clifford: what happens below ground when the planting happens? Specifically, is there space for Silva Cells, is it standard for each site? Is there a way to make the tree pit more habitable?
 - a. Boukili: for our PSUF plantings we typically plant the site as-is, no Silva cells, no amendments. Silva cells typically used for larger investment projects. Ex. Somerville Ave project included silva cells. In general the best practice is to NOT amend the soil, unless you are doing the whole area. If only soil replaced in 3x10 well, tree would not do as well, and would result in a “pot-effect”.
3. Antonino:
 - a. Will we have an updated list once complete? Boukili: yes.
 - b. Concern about Amur maple. Boukili: we are not planting Amur maple. We had requested one *Acer truncatum*, but no *Acer ginnala*.
 - c. Appreciate integration of 50% and Redbud addition. Boukili: considered other species that were suggested, but many are not good for street trees, but could be better in park spaces:
 - i. Sweetbay Magnolia has very particular soil requirements; not good for street tree
 - ii. Red Buckeye is very shrubby and better for understory
 - iii. Redbud was included
 - iv. American Smoketree is too shrubby
 - v. Straight species Chokecherry could not find in nurseries
 1. Children have died after ingesting large quantities of berries
 - vi. Sourwood is not urban tolerant
 - vii. Sassafras has taproot + suckers
 - viii. Male pawpaw is too shrubby
 - ix. American Linden: willing to try in the future if available.
 - x. Pin cherry: did not look into yet but it can be very weedy.
4. Antonino: Follow-up question about rectangular tree well; could we implement more rounded shapes to get more space for soil?
 - a. Drayton: Parallel to street line and measurements required for ADA, more easily conducive to billing (sawcut). If there is a curve in the sidewalk, it could be curved. Curved areas would be better for park areas generally.
 - b. Boukili: Because of equipment, it is hard to cut a non-straight line.
 - c. Guidarelli: What was the verdict on putting trees on the property side vs curb-side?

- i. Boukili: It is an ADA challenge since there are already parking meters, signs on the curb-side, back of sidewalk is the clear side. Would be more excited about planting in yards, rather than cutting along the back-of-curb side.
- 5. Guidarelli: recently saw Boston giving away street trees to low-canopy areas in the city. Didn't we discuss challenges with municipal funded trees going to private property?
 - a. Northcross: non-profit "speak for the trees" charity giveaway vs municipal
 - b. Boukili: Cambridge has a back of sidewalk tree program to plant trees at the back of sidewalk. The hurdle is having access to private property, so they have a document that the homeowner signs to gives permission for access. Homeowner also agrees to take care of tree for a certain number of years. After that time the tree becomes homeowner's property.
 - c. Drayton: Crossing the public/private line is challenging, people have problems with trees planted generally, and there are issues with roots + liability.
 - d. Boukili: a lot of land in the City is private, so it's something we should continue to think about.
- d) UFC volunteer day #2 at Lincoln Park
 - i. London planes were over mulched. The mulch has been remedied but excess soil on root crown is bad for the tree. We could collectively soil scrape the root flares.
 - 1. General support for the activity, depending on timing.
 - 2. Antonino - We should be prepared with pruners, root knives, etc. and be prepared for girdling roots.
 - 3. Boukili: will send possible dates focusing on evenings + weekends.

4. Ongoing Work Updates

- a) Adopt-a-Tree program
 - i. Northcross: sent email to the whole group to submit dates for wrap-up and planning session. Also want to discuss handoff as Northcross is moving out of Somerville and is hoping to pass off responsibly and to ensure program continues.
- b) ROOT collaboration
 - i. Northcross: similar handoff with the collaboration
 - ii. Clifford: last minute photo exhibit at The Center for Arts at the Armory in the cafe. Deb and Kerry initiated. Clifford drafted a statement about the photos, their group and our collaboration framed with their photos. Hopefully will drive interest to the collaboration.
- c) SomerStreets Tabling
 - i. Clifford - On September 19th we had a lot of visitors to the table. It was busy the whole time, got 19 sign-ups for the forestry enthusiast list, five raffle giveaways of pollinator

- plants and two donations of garden kits from the growing center. Some concerns, but lots of enthusiasm expressed. Northcross: had the banner hung as well, lots of enthusiasm
- ii. Clifford: next up- October 31st with costumes, lots of kids. Wondering if we could get more giveaways? Boukili will ask. On Somerville Ave. between Hawkins and Park St. Confirmed list of volunteers. Guidarelli offered to make leaf ID board. Antonino: asked about tent. Clifford: rain date following week. Antonino: Requested an expanded space to do seed bomb making.
- d) Outreach
- i. Clifford: outreach signs, pilot "leave the leaves" at Quincy St. park and Central Hills pollinator garden. Waiting to hear about protect the trees sign. Boukili: hearing that too many signs around the city causes visual clutter. Alternative ideas to contact bike committees and contact city departments (like T&P) about not putting signage on trees. Start to think about other ways to get the word out without signage. Drayton: have Dwan talk to bike organizations about how to treat trees. Clifford: Having the pamphlet be more targeted would be better. Would like to implement something sooner vs later. Boukili: will check back in. Luisa did not get a chance to verify the leaf sign – reviewing on screen. Antonino: these would be just in two locations: City hall garden and Quincy street. Another candidate is Stone Place Park. Blowing the leaves into the beds and leave them there would be better. Boukili: will look into adding Stone Place to the pilot list. Mertl: concerned that this signage is not being seen as important. Consider adding it to the adopt a tree sign. Expressed that is important to express these concepts. Clifford: planned to have these on yard signs. Think we can place them strategically to maximize impact. Selectively place these where there are fewer signs. Leave the protect the trees as yard signs. Northcross: assuming Clifford is heading up the signage effort. Others include Mertl, Antonino, Renee Scott. Antonino: potential to have some information on the annual yard waste flyer to highlight leave the leaves and protect the trees.
- e) Tree Species Selection and Planting Standards
- i. Antonino - Urgent meeting of SSAPP yesterday: Antonino, Mertl, Renee Scott, Clifford. Quincy street park: all the areas that were heavily vegetated were bare. Many areas Antonino and Mertl focused on to do invasive removal and areas where milkweed and goldenrod were preserved were removed. Plant cutback happened at the wrong time. Want to understand the rules and directives of each park to understand what happened. Now invasive species are taking over these areas that were massively cleared. If this was reactionary 311 call, we need to understand how to clean it up for public view. In Stone Place park: shrubs were installed, but no herbaceous groundcover. Mertl: Quincy Street looked like the plants had been ripped up. Concerned why was the extra effort to rip the plants up? Have to figure out what steps to take so this doesn't happen again. Clifford: helpful to us to have a better understanding of who is in charge of these areas. Helpful to understand which is under Parks, DPW, Buildings. Help understand the best way to move forward. SSAPP: creating guidelines, but also document for the city about maintenance routines. Can there be a better communication about this if this is the type of gardens we want to support in the city?
- ii. Boukili: Have discussed this before; we can submit a list of parks we are interested in and DPW will let us know who is in charge of those spaces. In general:
1. Street Trees: lights and lines and tree crew
 2. Grounds Division (newly created): City owned parks and open spaces

3. Special Cases: PSUF + DPW

- a. Horticulturalist contract that interfaces between DPW + PSUF. Focus on specific parks with complex plantings, like Quincy, Symphony, etc.
 - b. Boukili: not sure what their directive was. Boukili will ask and get an answer for next meeting.
- iii. Guidarelli: would be great to invite the horticulturalist to the next meeting to begin this conversation about what we see and what we want.
 - 1. Boukili: the horticulturalist is directed by PSUF, not UFC. We can't require them to come to our meeting, but can filter questions to the manager of the contract.
 - iv. Antonino: would like to have a chance to do a field trip. Can we intentionally leave some leaves in parks and schoolyards instead of bagging them up? Concerned about continual overcleaning and over mowing.
 - 1. Boukili: can ask Director of Grounds.

5. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

- a) September 16th, 2021

b) Call to vote to approve meeting minutes as amended:

- i. Yay: Mertl, Northcross, Clifford, Grossman, Boukili, Drayton, Antonino
- ii. Nay: none
- iii. Abstain: Guidarelli

6. Adjourn: Motion to adjourn meeting unanimously approved at 6:32 pm [motion Guidarelli, second-Drayton, vote: 8:0:0]

