



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
URBAN FORESTRY COMMITTEE
KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting
FEBRUARY 17, 2022 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/1069088562189696769>

Meeting notes prepared by Amy Mertl and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in attendance: Tori Antonino (Co-Chair), Althea Northcross, Amy Mertl, Conor Guidarelli, Jennifer Clifford, Murphy Langevin, Breck Miller (Tree Warden), Vanessa Boukili (Senior Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner)

Committee Members absent: Chris Dwan (Co-Chair), Leah Grossman

Others in Attendance: Malik Drayton (City of Somerville Urban Forestry Planner), Crystal H, Doris Jenkins, Jonathan Estwing

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

1) Introductions/ Housekeeping

- a) Committee member introductions, followed by attendee introductions
- b) Boukili: Committee members need to complete the Conflict of Interest form by next Friday
- c) Clifford: progress of ARPA funds?
 - i) Subcommittee has not yet gotten going, Antonino will contact Dwan for more updates.
- d) Made all attendees panelists for more interaction.

2) Resident Concerns

- a) Boukili shares a concern from Crystal, wondering if the Urban Forestry Committee is consulting on the 90 Washington St. project and can the public get an update
 - i) Mertl gives an update on the memo about this project that was sent by UFC.
 - ii) Antonino attended the last public meeting, felt it was confusing. Architects gave several designs, and a survey was given for people to vote on the designs. One design was a tree preservation design. The UFC has not weighed in on the various designs.
 - iii) UFC is an advisory body, we have open discussion but not decision-making. UFC is involved in terms of making recommendations only. At the public meeting, the goals did not include a preserving green space category. Tree preservation design did not meet all the other project goals. Meeting was not a snapshot of the city opinions as a whole, just the people who attended. Future public meetings are planned.

- b) Crystal also asked if the UFC has an opinion on the planting of red cardinal flowers.
 - i) Antonino noted these are *Lobelia cardinalis*, a favorite of hummingbirds. Guidarelli agreed it is a great native plant, needs moist soil for establishment and then can handle drier conditions.
- c) Jonathan Estwing, a home owner and resident is concerned about trees on a neighbor's property. 7 or 8 trees are invasive tree of heaven, one tree is an oak tree. One tree of heaven died and fell on his fence, he is concerned that there doesn't seem there is any way to compel property owner to remove trees if they are a safety concern.
 - i) Guidarelli agreed tree of heaven are fragile. Guidarelli recommended talking about concerns with the neighbor, the spotted lanternfly has also been detected here and tree of heaven is its host tree. These insects can cause a complete mess of a property. We recommend trying to preserve native species (oak) and get a tree service to prune accordingly. Agreed there is nothing to compel them to do it.
 - ii) Boukili noted that the city can't make someone remove the tree, the property owner did receive an exemption from the TPO to remove the trees of heaven. They still have to pay for the actual tree removal (but no replacement costs). If the oak tree was removed as well they would need to either replant trees or pay into tree fund, \$10-12k into the tree fund in addition to removal costs.
 - iii) Guidarelli agreed it is a good idea for Estwing to discuss his concerns so he will have done that if something happens. Neighbors have worked together to pay for removals/trimming in the past.
 - iv) Clifford concurred with pruning oak rather than removal.
 - v) Estwing noted that the permit process should include neighbors that may suffer damage from trees.
 - vi) Guidarelli asked if a company has come to do a tree assessment for the health of the Oak tree, is it stable or hazardous? Estwing noted that a certified arborist has looked at it, it is healthy.
 - vii) Antonino suggested meeting with a city councilor. Estwing did talk with J.T. Scott.
- d) Antonino asked about the significant tree survey - are health checks happening on older trees?
 - i) Northcross noted there was discussion about that last year, ROOT and UFC group was working that, but the group has taken a break. The banner is in winter storage until spring, then it will make rounds in public parks. It has a QR code for tree nomination.
 - ii) Clifford noted there are concerns on the health of older trees, due to prospect park Elm coming down. That is something that could be added onto ROOT collaboration, Mandy DeBurro could be involved with that if interested.

3) Caterpillar Count Project Presentation

Mertl presented on data compiled from past 2 years.

- a) Background and goals:
 - i) Mertl has been working with Citizen Scientists at Mt Auburn Cemetery to do caterpillar counts over past 5 years. Wanted to expand program with roll out of Somerville's Adopt-A-Tree Program starting in 2020. People who adopt a tree are already signing up for email notifications and had an option to opt in to the program. Asked to collect data when they tended to their tree.
- b) Methods:
 - i) Caterpillars Count!: National citizen science program started at UNC. Monitors caterpillar and other arthropods activity on herbivory. Asked to survey from May-September, inspect same 50 leaves, take photos and notes, uploaded into its own app. All data is open source, app provides great training resources. Limitations are that it's only in English, relies on citizen scientist's ID skills, herbivory score is subjective, only leaves at eye level can be inspected (upper canopy data is mostly absent).
 - ii) Participation: 2020- 37 people (40 Trees); 2021- 21 people (23 Trees). 8 people from 2020 agreed to continue monitoring through 2021, plus 13 new signups.
 - iii) Trees: 21 Different species; 65% non native, 26% native trees, 9% unknown. Native species- Chokecherry, American Hornbeam, Red Maple (most common), Pin oak , serviceberry, American Elm.
 - iv) Participant Activity: 127 survey Totals. 2020: ¼ of trees were never surveyed. 2021: 1/3 of trees were never surveyed.
- c) Results:

- i) Average Herbivory Scores: Native: 13%; Non-Native: 11%. 2021 data has an irregularity, hard to say if the increase in native is significant. It shows that herbivory activity is low for the city.
- ii) 29% surveys found at least one arthropod, 71% found none. ID's Species (Most common): Carpenter ant, Jumping spider, Coppery leafhopper, Lady beetle.
- iii) Most activity spotted in June and July. Emphasizes the need to make sure tags are put out early so that counts for caterpillars can be more accurate.
- d) Next Steps/Future Directions:
 - i) Better data if participation was for all 5 months. Could be a drawing for a prize, extra reminders. Encourage for more than 1 sample a month.
 - ii) Could compare Somerville data w/ other sites, or could sample older trees and assess patterns.
 - iii) Possible other ideas to get better data and participation?
 - iv) Big thanks to UFC, Adopt-A-Tree committee, Caterpillars Count!, all participants.
- e) Questions/ Comments:
 - i) Committee thanked Mertl for all her extensive work on the project.
 - ii) Boukili: How do you know you're checking the same 50 leaves?
(1) Mertl: Sends tags to have people tie to the branch to help them remember which leaves to reevaluate.
 - iii) Clifford: Could compare data to what you saw at the Growing Center. Was excited to see caterpillars were counted, none were measured at the Growing Center.
 - iv) Antonino: Could suggest a regular day every month and a specific location/specimen to be assessed to possibly increase participation.
 - v) Clifford: This program could be a good activity to incorporate with youth programs to get them involved.
 - vi) Mertl: You could add any tree if you want to the app. An Adopt-A-Tree subcommittee meeting is scheduled for next week so if you have any further ideas for improvement please be in touch or we can discuss at that meeting.

4) Updates from City

- a) **City Tree Removals** (Boukili)
 - i) 8 dead/dying trees have been/ will be removed as part of the Spring Hill Sewer Separation Project.
 - ii) There was also a tree hearing for 10 ash trees in sewer separation project area - trying to be more proactive with death from ash borer and removing smaller ash trees in poor health. There were 2 objections at the hearing, will need to have Mayor sign off on decision to remove before we move forward.
- b) **Private Tree Removal Permit(s) and Exception(s)**
 - i) Drayton: For the TPO there have been 2 exemptions, 21 Auburn: sycamore maple, decayed, 57 Highland: dead sour cherry, being removed shortly. The list will be updated for the year shortly. Two permits were issued for the year: 51 Church st. and on Laurel.
 - ii) Antonino asked if we can ask the homeowners to leave snags. Some people are interested for wildlife habitat, but some are concerned about rat burrows etc. - mixed feelings on snags.
- c) **City Tree Planting**
 - i) Boukili is putting out an IFB tomorrow for contractors, 350 trees ½ spring, ½ fall, adding language about native plant ordinance and our preference for native trees and straight species

5) Ongoing Work Updates

- a) Adopt-a-Tree program
 - i) Will be meeting next week
 - ii) This is Northcross' last meeting as a UFC member, UFC will miss her! The committee thanked her for all her work on the Adopt a Tree program and other programs. Northcross will still work on the Ward maps for this year's program with ArcGIS
- b) ROOT collaboration

- i) On hold for now, will hang banner again in spring and work on re-invigorating it.
- c) Outreach
 - i) Mertl and Clifford initiated Arbor Day poster contest outreach, reminder email was sent out to all teachers, no submissions yet.
- d) Tree Species Selection and Planting Standards
 - i) Discussion for the trial pits in spring, looking to seek out locations, looking at plant availability and price lists for tree whips (caliper ½ inch or less) and understory plants. They shared a document estimating costs, 2'x8' tree pit (18 sq ft or bigger). Shared a list of potential species, some are experimental species, groundcover spanning flowering times and adequate to survive in a tree pit. Pits must be protected, look for larger sidewalks if possible. \$2500 base cost. Must add stakes and fencing, add signs.
 - ii) Boukili expressed concern about pedestrian pathways with the fence - need to review ADA rules, may be better for narrow tree wells. People tend to not look down, may trip over it. Discussed putting them in wider sidewalks/tree lawn areas. Need to think carefully about placement. Need to double check with ADA coordinator to ensure they will not be impeding a pathway.
 - iii) Guidarelli asked if neon tape, signage would help. Could use flag poles that are higher than the fence. Taller stakes could be used, put in corners of fences.
 - iv) Boukili suggested avoiding dogwood, low branching habits could impede traffic, scotch maple not sure, Muscledwood likes shade.
 - v) Antonino suggested planning a meeting with Boukili and Miller to make this happen, mesh around trees could be taller than 4 feet.
 - vi) Moving forward Boukili will meet with meeting with ADA coordinator and then plan a meeting with SAP committee
 - vii) Clifford asked if we could we get a line item for this kind of pilot budget. Boukili said the City can't allocate much money for the committee. Requests to spend Tree Fund money must go through City Council. If the budget is under \$1000 that is fine. Boukili can make a request for \$1000 for UFC outreach.
- e) Tree Preservation Ordinance
 - i) Dwan was spearheading that, move to next meeting

Miller needs to be added to the UFC email list.

7) Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

- b. November 18th, 2021
- c. January 20th, 2022

Motion to approve November 18th, 2021 and January 20, 2022 meeting minutes (motion- Boukili, second- Clifford).

Roll call vote to approve both meeting minutes:

- (1) Yay: Northcross, Mertl, Miller, Guidarelli, Clifford, Langevin, Antonino, Boukili
- (2) Nay: 0
- (3) Abstain:0

Motion unanimously passes at 6:27 pm.

8) Adjourn: Motion to adjourn meeting unanimously approved at 6:31 pm [motion- Clifford, second- Guidarelli]

