



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
URBAN FORESTRY COMMITTEE
KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting
MARCH 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/2659465062176745740>

Meeting notes prepared by Jennifer Clifford and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in attendance: Amy Mertl, Breck Miller (Tree Warden), Chris Dwan (Co-Chair), Jennifer Clifford, Leah Grossman, Tori Antonino (Co-Chair), Vanessa Boukili (Senior Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner)

Committee Members absent: Conor Guidarelli, Murphy Langevin

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

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

1) Introductions/ Housekeeping

- a) Committee member introductions, followed by attendee introductions
- b) Dwan: are we returning to in-person meetings?
 - i) Boukili: not directed to do so right now, maybe at some point in the future, possibly hybrid.
 - c) Made all attendees panelists for more interaction.

2) Resident Concerns

- a) Antonino: addressing community gardens and how they are modeled. Conservation commission started a subcommittee to address community gardening. Excited that people can get off waitlist and have that waitlist re-organized/revamped (reduced waiting times). Developing models for community gardening/farming. Feels confident that this will be a successful way for anyone who wants to garden to be able to do so.
 - i) Dwan: is this connected with the city survey about usage of community gardens?
 - ii) Antonino: this is part of the process
 - iii) Dwan: reminds audience that the City looking for coordinator of this program, includes small honorarium

3) Arbor Day Planning

- a) Boukili: State arbor day is April 29, 2022; traditionally we do not hold celebrations on that day because tree planting is difficult.

- b) Clifford: and we coordinate another time with tree planting? And somewhat connected with Adopt A Tree program?
- c) Boukili: tree planting at arbor day is good. Nathan Tufts Park may be good site, but unsure of timing right now. If we do it there we could also showcase the Parks Health and Tree Program. Can maybe promote tree planting pilot program if timing works out. Could also have 2 events: Arbor day on 4/29 and second, smaller event with planting.
- d) Mertl: in favor of event at Nathan Tufts Park.
- e) Boukili: proposes to put planning on back burner and consider planting schedule.
- f) Dwan: bring back the poem!

4) Parks and Bioswales Maintenance: Prospect Hill Park, Somerville Avenue

- a) Antonino: Under whose purview is the bioswales management in Union Square (US)? Same for Prospect Hill Park (PHP). Lots of invasives at the latter, and the meadow need rehabilitation.
- b) Boukili: for PHP, landscaping designed by PSUF and is still under establishment contract. They are already starting to think about it and will start work on it in early spring. Reseeding in meadow. For Union Square (Somerville Ave): project is under 2-year warranty/establishment period and is run through an engineering project. Lasts through fall 2023. Still in discussion for post-2023, will likely fall to DPW.
- c) Antonino: do contractors understand the role/impact of invasives and how to manage? Shall she contact Luisa?
- d) Boukili: contractors maintain anything they install – invasives removal is not part of this.
- e) Antonino: is there opportunity for it to come under neighborhood care? In the woodlands section, for example...there is garlic mustard, bittersweet, multiflora rose and other invasives.
- f) Boukili: limited work is done in that woodland area as part of contract, so may have to coordinate with Luisa about alternate care; contractors will not pull invasives.
- g) Dwan: hypothetically, can a group approach PSUF and ask if okay to rip out invasives; is there existing procedure to go about this? Can it be similar to private 'Leave the leaves' initiatives?
- h) Boukili: general idea is to contact PSUF: describe who and what people would like to do it, have signage. Getting DPW to sign off is also important.

5) Potential for greening cement strips in Union Square

- a) Antonino: community member inquiry about a tan-colored strip that separates bike lane near Stone Ave., (in front of Mineiraõ One Stop Mart). Can there be a bioswale, self-watering planters, and/or blue barrel planters there? [Boukili shares map on screen]
- b) Boukili: there is discussion about how to use that space with other US planning groups. Planters can be considered if there is community support. May be other needs for this space: tables and chairs from some nearby restaurants, for example, so may not be up for grabs.
- c) Dwan: Question for Miller: there are a few instances where we not sure about long term usage and hesitate to put granite and trees in a spot. Can we put up very sturdy concrete, painted planters, that can be trucked in for a season or more (e.g., traffic safety work – seeing physical beauty and having physical barrier slows people down).
 - i) Miller: has not encountered this so far
 - ii) Dwan: emphasizes that barriers keep people safe and extra greenery is good. What is the right path to get on this conversation?
 - iii) Miller: Highway Dept.
 - iv) Dwan: proposes to keep this on agenda to drive interest/energy, continue conversation, and create memos. This can be used as pilot in the future.
 - v) Miller: has seen heavy cement cylinders that can serve this purpose that may be easier to move rather than putting soil in cement slab. Will continue to think about this. Will bring this up with Ben (@ Grounds Dept).

- d) Crystal H.: what about public areas that are hell-strips (parklet area on streetscapes) – under shoes management is this?
 - i) Boukili: These types of projects are reviewed by PSUF. PSUF confers and encourage solutions to developers, etc. for the public areas and for private property. On private property cannot dictate exactly what is done, as long designs conform with zoning code, and other city laws and guidelines. PSUF is always keeping green space in mind.
 - ii) Crystal H.: can we go to developer with questions?
 - iii) Boukili: Yes. If questions with city decisions, reach out to PSUF. I can direct you to the right person.
 - iv) Dwan: direct conversation is best, if it can be done. If outside of zoning, this committee can comment on anything that goes before a zoning review. No formal power, but we can make recommendations, suggestions, help with discussion.
 - v) Antonino: Watertown, MA planting guide for hell strips. Link shared in chat.
 - vi) Grossman: Love Tubs - mobile tree planting product (move with forklift). Link shared in chat.

6) Updates from City

- a) **City Tree Removals** (Miller)
 - i) Ready to start a \$50K tree removal contract. ~30 trees dead/dying/hazardous. Once final, will send to committee (as an update to current list of removals)
 - (1) Dwan: are we short staffed?
 - (2) Miller: yes
 - ii) Dwan: reminder that we can rely on this list to help mitigate public consternation
- b) **Private Tree Removal Permit(s) and Exception(s)** (Drayton)
 - i) Will create new sheet for 2022 permits, and exemption list is ongoing
 - (1) 8 permits in 2022 to date: 2 are issued and 6 are pending
 - (2) When permits are issued and data is complete, they will be added to sheet
 - (3) Exemptions reported at 3 locations; updated document will reflect this
- c) **City Tree Planting** (Boukili)
 - i) Planting 175 trees this spring. Invitation for bid is released and all bids are being reviewed (all of this info is made public). There are ongoing questions for the current lowest bidder.
- d) **Young Tree Training Program & Parks Tree Health Program (PTHP)**
 - i) *Young Tree Training:*
 - (1) Dwan: Added to agenda in response to concern over a young tree that was pruned with subsequent leaking sap. Public likes to know if this is the right time of year to perform this task.
 - (2) Drayton: 700-800 trees pruned each year after establishment period (~3 years); program designed to cycle through all young trees in 3-year cycle. Pruning is important for healthy head start for proper growth. Some species respond more dramatically when pruned. Jan-Feb a good time for pruning and consistent with previous action. Warm weather gives rise to sap run.
 - (3) Boukili: right now is ideal for pruning: without leaves, arborists can see tree structure. Sap runs in spring to support bud break. Pruning wounds heal quickly and nutrients found in sap are allocated to rest of tree.
 - (4) Dwan: we are keeping up with inventory?
 - (5) Boukili: yes, some have outgrown the cycle, and others are added. 3-year cycle seems doable.



- (6) Dwan: on Beacon St., branches of trees at eye level are being pruned because they were abused by passersby. Aesthetically important also.

ii) Parks Tree Health Program (PTHP)

- (1) Drayton: PTHP started in 2019. Each year cycle through certain number of parks (aim for 6-7 year cycle for all parks). This year: Cremin Playground (done), Perkins Playground (done), 5 acre Nathan Tufts Park (to be completed by mid-late April). For Nathan Tufts Park, it has been at least 7 years since this park was serviced and there are a lot of older trees.
- (2) Antonino: important recognition that Cremin park is named after a local woman who was murdered. Dwan echoes the importance of remembrances.
- (3) Dwan: should we be trying to expand the program?
- (4) Boukili: we are asking for more money. Some parks often take more work (and \$\$) than we originally thought. Ongoing discussions on expanding.
- (5) Dwan: with budget season coming up, a good place to invest to maintain the canopy we are striving for.

e) Status of Tree Crew

- i) Boukili: Currently, there isn't one. Active union negotiation that is making the process slow. Real need for contractors because of this. 3 open jobs.
- (1) Dwan: who takes care of downed, limb trees after a storm?
- (a) Miller: the Highway Dept. does clean up. If more technical skills are required (climbing, use of bucket truck, etc.), we have an emergency contract (currently this is Barrett).
- (b) Boukili: if power line problems, this is special and under the management of Eversource.

7) Ongoing Work Updates

a) Adopt-a-Tree program

- i) Clifford: provided update on working group (Mertl, Guidarelli, Grossman, and Clifford) activities. GIS maps were generated and tree locations made available. Will send an email to UFC asking for volunteers to sign up for tag distribution.
- ii) Can we make a map and mark current adopted trees?
- (1) Yes, but there are privacy concerns.
- (2) Dwan: What is useful to share? For example, people name trees, sharing this can be light-hearted.
- iii) Ideas: How is outreach going? Where are trees adopted? How many families/groups/individuals adopted the same tree?
- iv) Crystal H: Are there, and is there room for, adoption ceremonies and adoption certificates?
- v) Dwan: keeping in mind that we are a volunteer committee. Can other residents help?
- (1) Clifford: Yes, residents can join working groups (we need the help)
- vi) Antonino: When we send out info, note that the program is growing and we need creative help.
- vii) Antonino: perhaps add tree pit adoptions in the future.

b) ROOT collaboration

- i) Clifford: will hang the ROOT banner at Trum field in April. Requesting other suggestions for hanging the banner (at city-owned locations) for spring/summer/fall months. Last year, banner was displayed at Prospect Hill Park, Foss Park, and Lincoln Park.
- ii) Dwan: is there anything in future?
- iii) Clifford: project currently on hold; will reach out to ROOT collaborators to gauge interest in how to proceed.



- c) Outreach
 - i) Arbor Day poster contest (Mertl and Clifford): No posters were submitted to UFC this year; may have submitted directly to DCR.
 - ii) Outreach signs: ‘Protect the Trees’
 - (1) Clifford: What is status?
 - (2) Boukili: PSUF feedback was that this contributes to too much signage throughout City. Maybe other ways to distribute info: a flyer to mail out, create “tickets” (to put on a bike that is locked to a tree, for example). Will reconsider specific areas for lawn signs in limited spaces (Clifford to send).
- d) Tree Species Selection and Planting Standards
 - i) Grossman: put together a budget for small diameter native tree pilot program. Reaching out to nurseries to find if everything is available. Then will formally submit to City for approval, purchase, and install. From committee, will need help with installation. Work with VB to identify (4-6) tree pits that will be used, depending on availability.
 - ii) Species - Swamp white oak, American linden, American hornbeam, Muscle wood (back ups: pin oak, gray birch), ~12 species of ground cover for base, with protection (fencing) around tree pit.
 - iii) Antonino: thanks to Boukili, Grossman, and Guidarelli for helping to advance this project
 - iv) Grossman: do we need help to ID tree pits? Boukili: not yet, Drayton will help.
- e) Tree Preservation Ordinance
 - i) Dwan: City admin proposed amendment (based on recommendation from Boukili and Drayton) to give tree warden and deputy tree wardens ability to issue infractions regarding trees. Will go to city council on March 24th.
 - ii) Dwan: agrees to spearhead the working group to consider other revisions to the TPO.

7) Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

b. February 17th, 2022 – *tabled until next meeting*

8) Adjourn: Motion to adjourn meeting unanimously approved at 6:17 pm [motion- Antonino, second- Boukili]

