



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2019, 7:00 PM
MINUTES

MEETING AT SOMERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL
81 HIGHLAND AVENUE
LIBRARY

Meeting notes prepared by Malik Drayton

Commission Members in attendance: Rachel Borgatti (Chair), Mathias Neuber, David Turin, Cristina Kennedy, Owen Wartella

Commission Members absent: Aladdine Joroff, Michael Fager

Others in Attendance: Erica Satin-Hernandez (Shape Up Somerville), Jeanine Farley (Tufts Garden), Anne Zielinski (Durell), Rachel Schwarz (Tufts Garden), Lizzie Lundgren (Morse-Kelley Garden), John McDonald (Tufts Garden), Nicole McCullough (Glen/Franklin Garden), Leanne Darrigo (Glen Garden), Bill Noll (Bikeway Garden), Tara Mitchell (Garden Coordinator), Adam Norotny (Student –Olin College), Evan Neo-Schmidt (Student –Olin College), Abby Fry (Student –Olin College), Chris Melhus (Albion Garden), Shari Huval (Walnut Garden), Catherine Despujols (Walnut Garden), Sarah Dwyer (Bikeway Garden)

Staff: Vanessa Boukili (Conservation Agent), Malik Drayton

Rachel Borgatti called the meeting to order at 7:12 pm followed by introductions.

Updates and Discussion:

- 1) Community Gardens Program Review and Discussion with Garden Coordinators.
 - Erica Satin-Hernandez provides background into partnership with Shape-up Somerville and the food system assessment.
 - Production of food, processing, distribution, where we grow food, how people buy their food, is it accessible? Is it affordable? How people transit to food resources?
 - Urban Agriculture & Community Gardens program
 - Recommendations : SomervilleMA.gov/foodsystem
 - Surveys & Interviews conducted September thru December with 10 regional community gardens from Boston to Gloucester MA.
 - Drafted ideas to help with updating procedures



- Creation of guidelines for Community Gardens program programs
- Transparency improvements
- Common Themes in Survey Responses:
 - Annual re-application (encourages continued buy-in year to year)
 - Term limits – Range 3-10 years
 - 3 years (Cambridge) - too short
 - 10 years - too long
 - 5-7 years (most interest expressed in this time range)
 - The benefit of no Term limits is that it mixes experienced gardeners with new.
- Issues
 - Theft
 - Collective gardening idea to combat theft
 - Direct picking to communal plots that everyone contributes to
 - Lack of diversity/ Local representation in certain neighborhoods
- Overall Trends – Wide range of strengths, weaknesses and needs identified.
- ConCom community garden sub-committee overview:
 - Internally audits how the conservation commission oversees the garden program and its future goals
 - How are things working on the ground level?
 - Final documents will be drafted and disseminated to the garden coordinators for them to add input
- Digitized wait-list application
 - Google form, contains all standard contact information, contact preferences, garden choice
 - Possibilities of discounts for extra work or for those with government assistance
 - Other questions such as do you have garden space at home?
 - Discussion with gardeners:
 - What questions are appropriate?
 - What communities are we serving / not serving?
 - Demographic data - Voluntary information form
 - What are the appropriate questions to ask?
 - What questions can be asked without being exclusionary or advantageous?
 - What kind of feedback do we need?
 - How can we collect information anonymously?
 - Explain how data will/will not be used
- More data helps advocate for gardeners. It answers the recurring questions from the general population, the City of Somerville, and people on the wait list:
 - Are the gardens being used?
 - Who is using them?
 - How are they being used?
 - How many people are gardening in your plot?
 - Barriers / Challenges to gardening at home:
 - Landlords prohibiting extra water use
 - Soil quality issues
 - Scope of who gardens in Somerville

- Procedure Manual
 - Application / Draft manual
 - Having a renewal system can weed out people no longer interested in garden plot.
 - Are people good at regulating themselves when it comes to this?
 - How is data handled?
 - Is this information helpful?
 - Data dictates that proximity is one of the key indicators of what will make people successful.
 - Centralized consistent application process
 - Digital forms filled online, paper forms or both.
 - Digital Forms for initial application process
 - Paper form for Renewal
 - Accountability as to who is gardening
 - Paper Forms will be given to people for renewal
 - Also provided to those without internet access
 - Fees
 - Fees collected on the clean-up day by Coordinators
 - Garden contract rules given out via email yearly
 - Information such as examples of infractions
 - Helping to track how funds are being used
 - Consistent checklist
 - Package that gardens can receive at the beginning of their term
 - Should the City manage the funds?
 - Not a feasible option at this time
 - There would not be an easy way to distribute the funds back to the gardens
 - Transition to a single centralized list
 - Top three garden choices
- Items open for discussion:
 - Forms handed out pertaining to data collection
 - The collection methods/ how data is handled
 - Is this helpful on an individual/ personal basis?
 - Is this helpful to the City?
- Erica to add Survey monkey to add demographic information and cut it out of the application process?
- Benefits of the City-wide Garden list
- Gardens are diverse age-wise
- Google form link available on the SCG website
- How is personal information handled?
- Consistency of information disseminated to/from all garden coordinators
- Formalize fee collection with forms, rules, procedures
- Short wait list vs. Long wait list / Amount of turnover
- Selection of no preference in order to get into a garden plot quicker
- How Transparent should the Garden Plot list be?
 - Not for the public in order to protect personal information
 - Do you let someone know how many people are ahead of you on the list?
 - Would that be discouraging to applicants?

- List management struggle
 - How do we merge/ centralize the list fairly?
 - List will be organized by the by the timestamp of the receipt of the applications
- What are the challenges of a weighted list?
 - Will there be inconsistencies if people are on multiple lists?
- ADA Accessibility
 - Who on the list is eligible for the ADA plot? No indication of this on the wait list
 - Lack of ADA information, issue to be solved with the new applications – enhanced information
- Infractions
 - Must start gardening by the agreed upon date – June 1st
 - 1 time infraction that will result in removal from the garden plot
 - 3 infraction limit before one is removed from the garden plot
 - Who enforces infractions? Garden Coordinators
 - Procedure manual provides consistency in enforcement
 - Formalized process
 - Letters placed on the garden plot – informing of infraction committed
 - Support/Flexibility
 - People on vacation
 - People with health issues
 - Leniency for extenuating circumstances
 - Do infractions expire? No
 - Should they expire?
 - Who tracks infractions?
 - How are they tracked?
 - If you are asked to leave a garden, you shouldn't be able to get a garden anywhere else
- What are the chances of their being new plots?
- How is the information about the creation of new garden plots being disseminated?
 - Somervision 2030 → Somervision2040.org
 - Plans of increased open space
 - Open space Taskforce
 - Lincoln Park - new Garden Plots
 - Cobble Hill – Eminent domain
 - Art farm – New raised beds
- Thought about more spaces that could be used as garden space
 - Gardening in an official capacity vs. unofficial capacity
 - Poor maintained areas/ unsightly bare soil areas
- When will water be turned on in the gardens
 - Reach out to DPW
 - When do they usually turn it on?
 - When do we expect it on? April 15th
 - This was a problem last year
 - They did not have the combination for the locks for the Garden Plots

- Gardener ask for support in regards to advocacy and Outreach for the expansion of community gardens
 - Grassroots movement
 - More demand for urban agriculture
 - Proposal for expansion gardens Bikeway Path
 - Denied- concern about contaminated soil
 - Get money for a study to ascertain which areas in the City have minimal contamination?
 - Creation of 20 Garden plots
 - Acquisition of a big plots vs. cheaper awkward shaped plots
 - Somervision2040 Open Space metrics
 - Bike Path Community Garden Extension
 - Water infrastructure challenges
 - MBTA Property
- Community Gardens are not open space they are locked
 - Need to be cognizant of this and perhaps create public/communal community gardens
 - Malden example – Communal growing space

- 2) Ongoing Projects – *tabled*
- 3) Letters/ Notifications – *tabled*
- 4) Associate Commissioners – *tabled*
- 5) Action Item Review – *tabled*

Other Business (8:55 pm):

- 1) 2019 City Nature Challenge
 - 4/27/2019 – 10:00am
 - Draw 7 Park with partner Earthwise Aware
 - Friendly competition to document biodiversity during 3 day period using i-Naturalist app.
 - Earthwise has training on the app a few weeks before the event
- 2) Letter to City regarding homeless along Alewife Brook (9:00pm)
 - Homeless encamped on the bank of the Alewife Brook
 - Conservation Commission to write letter pertaining to the adverse impact of human encampment on the Alewife Brook River?
 - Discussion ensued about the possibility of writing a letter to the mayor and DCR
 - Consensus wasn't reached
 - Individuals could reach out to Health and Human Services (HHS) to connect to resources.

Approval of minutes:

- 1) Vote to approve February 26th, 2019 minutes with one amendment at 9:08 pm [motion – Neuber, second – Kennedy; vote: 5:0:0].

Adjourn:

- 1) Motion to adjourn meeting unanimously approved at 9:08 pm [motion – Wartella, second – Kennedy, vote: 5:0:0].



Outstanding Action Items:

- 2019**
- February:**
- **Action:** Garden subcommittee will submit a draft of all garden documents to be sent out to the ConCom and Garden Coordinators in time for the March 26th ConCom meeting.
 - **Action:** add idea of having community plot at gardens to an ongoing list of ideas for gardens/ gardeners
 - **Action:** Agent Boukili to follow up about Veteran's Rink snow storage.
 - **Action:** design and price out signs to add to Medford's outfall poles.
 - **Action:** contact Medford Conservation Commission to inform them of the joint jurisdiction of this property [Boston Ave and Mystic Valley Parkway].
 - **Action:** Commissioner Fager to review results [of Draw 7 sediment sampling results transmittal] and follow up.
 - **Action:** Agent Boukili to send assigned OOCs to Commissioners Turin and Neuber.
- 2018**
- November:**
- **Action:** Commissioner Fager to draft letter to DCR re: Draw 7 Park, Commissioner Turin and Kennedy to assist.
- October:**
- **Action:** Arn Franzen to let Tara and the garden coordinators know about the new construction timeline for Allen Street, and to make sure Erica and Lisa (Shape-Up Somerville) are involved.
 - **Action:** Agent Boukili to work with T&I staff on educational brochure formatting.
 - **Action:** After reformat this brochure to be able to easily print it, put this on website.
 - **Action:** Agent Boukili to ask Thomas Dalton about checkbox for Conservation Commission permits on DCR forms and get sample DCR form(s).
- September:**
- **Action:** Boukili to put more information on the website, such as the community gardener agreement, coordinator responsibilities, etc.
 - **Action:** Boukili to update Garden Map to include more street names (remove walkshed circles or put on interactive map so that people can zoom in and out).
- April:**
- **Action:** Send email to DPW, Planning, Engineering, Capital Projects, and any other departments who might review construction or development projects. Remind them of Conservation Commission jurisdiction and requirements that must be following when working near the river.
 - **Action:** Talk to Garden Coordinators about accounting of garden fees.
 - **Action:** Commission to start a list of suggestions for Garden Coordinators about how to be more open/ inclusive, especially to folks on the waitlist (ex. "garden-sitting" when gardeners are on vacation).
 - **Action:** Commissioner Joroff to revise ConCom Policies document, then Commissioners to read though it again to make sure everyone is willing to follow it.

List of Meeting Documents (located here K:\OHCD\Shared\Conservation Commission\Agenda + Minutes + Legal Notices 2019\2019_03_26_Meeting_Documents):

- Agenda (2019_03_26_Agenda.pdf)
- February Meeting Minutes (2019_02_26_Minutes_Draft.docx)
- Ongoing Projects spreadsheet (Ongoing Project Data.xlsx)
- Eversource Oil Spill Report (IRA Status Report #2 FINAL.pdf)
- Community Gardens documents:
 - ConCom 3-26-19 Meeting Presentation.pptx
 - Draft Application Form.pdf
 - Draft Renewal Form.pdf
 - Somerville Community Gardens_Gardener Agreement_no sign_updated.pdf

