



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

THOMAS GALLIGANI
ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting
JULY 20, 2023 4:30PM
MINUTES

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, this meeting was held remotely

A recording of the meeting can be accessed here:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/4029931550246883413>

Meeting notes prepared by Leah Grossman & Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in attendance: Tori Antonino (Co-Chair), Leah Grossman (Co-Chair), Amy Mertl, Calla Taylor, Doris Jenkins, Dorothy Suput, Breck Miller (Tree Warden), Vanessa Boukili (Senior Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner),

Committee Members absent: Chris Dwan

Others in Attendance: Anne Ryan, Giuliana Minghelli, Rob Vandenabeele, Anna Warrock, Robert Smith

Call to Order: Antonino called meeting to order at 4:36 pm

1. Introductions / Housekeeping

- a. UFC member introductions.
- b. Audience promoted to panelists and given opportunity to speak.
 - i. Anne Ryan – Cobble Hill resident, participating in a weekly Thursday demonstration on Washington St. to save the trees at Cobble Hill.
 - ii. Giuliana Minghelli – Resident who wants to get involved with protecting and increasing green space in Somerville.
 - iii. Rob Vandenabeele – Sustainability director at Portico Brewery. Portico adopted 32 new trees in Cambridge / Somerville in Boynton yards. Working on a sustainability EPA pollution prevention grant. Also looking into environmental justice community grant, very interested in applying next year for urban tree care in Cambridge and Somerville.

- iv. Anna Warrock + Robert Smith – originally had an issue with a neighbor with a boundary tree; issue was resolved when arborist reviewed the tree and determined it has to be removed. Anna is a member of the garden path and tends the garden path pollinator garden. Looking for information and ways to resolve issues with non-cooperative neighbors.
- c. Housekeeping:
 - i. Jennifer Clifford resigned from the committee effective as of this meeting. We will have to advertise for another committee member.
 - ii. Murphy Langevin has graduated and is stepping down from the committee.
 - iii. Boukili reminded committee members to be careful when emailing whole group. Committee business can only take place during scheduled meetings. If email group to share information about events or the like, use BCC to ensure conversation will not take place outside of a meeting.
 - iv. Suput will be away for the next meeting.

2. Resident Concerns

- a. Anne Ryan – Noticed some negative publicity of recent plantings and wanted to know how we are planning to handle that. There are people that are objecting to them. Anne saw a photograph of plants that were thrown in the street (i.e., Union Square).
 - i. Antonino – discussed fleabane and the potential for creating signage to help educate.
 - ii. Boukili – As the city, we do our best to educate people on why trees are important, and also maintain them better to alleviate concerns people have. Focusing on planting the right trees in the right places so they are appropriate. They post notices when new trees will be planted to allow people to voice any concerns. Trying to make progress to make a strong urban forest.
 - iii. Mertl – provide education, and understand that some people will not agree with our initiatives and work on a case-by-case basis to know when to not plant a tree (i.e., in front of someone's home who doesn't want them).
 - iv. Antonino – We are working on the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan and brainstormed with Luisa Olivera to have plaques in front of homes with native pollinator plants to amp people up.
- b. Anna Warrock – Residents with an ash tree since 1986 and a challenging neighbor. Arborists have not seen EAB, but the tree is now in decline. They have pruned branches as requested by the neighbor, but the neighbor has continually removed tree roots to plant grass. They consulted with a lawyer who advised the cost of the work would equal what you would get back. A crane will need to be used for the removal of the tree. Robert Smith – the concern is that if you prune a tree if it does damage to it. If someone does damage to a tree without your knowledge. There was mixed information about ownership of the tree. Asking if PSUF could create information for residents about their rules and regulations

around owning and caring for trees on private property. It would have more clout if it came from the city.

- i. Antonino – expressed consoling, asked if PSUF is interested in creating educational materials around this?
- ii. Boukili – we typically point people towards a website from the state about neighbor laws: [Massachusetts law about neighbors and trees | Mass.gov](#). Boukili is not a lawyer, so this is really the best source of information. Understanding is that one has the right to prune branches on their property if they do not harm the tree. Assume same information applies for roots.
- c. Antonino – neighbor is concerned about rubber surfacing – heat and smell and how small bits are breaking off. It may be a place to discuss within Conservation Commission.
- d. Grossman – Concern about black swallow wort trash bin getting dumped at a community garden. Boukili suggested bagging things to go in the trash.
- e. Giuliana – Has been trying to grow a tree in front of her house for the past 20 years (at tree 6-7 has not yet had success). In talking with Boukili thought there might be a gas leak. There are street tagging visible and the gas company noticed a leak across the street, but is interested to hear if that is an ongoing issue and if something is done more comprehensively to address this problem.
 - i. Boukili – met someone from Eversource and shared the story. Eversource said they would send a rep to test the soil there. Eversource recently fixed a pipe on Somerville Avenue and has committed to paying for replacement trees. Also discussed the initiative with Mothers out Front who suggested getting an outside source to do soil testing.

3. Updates from City

a. City Tree Removals

- i. Miller - A few hazard trees on radar. Will start again pruning in another week or two.
- ii. Posted a tree removal hearing on August 3rd for two sites, [Public Shade Tree Hearing \(Remote\) | City of Somerville \(somervillema.gov\)](#)
 1. Sewer project associated with Alewife Parkway rotary work
 2. Two large London planetrees at 18 Loring St.

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

- i. Boukili provided an update on the latest tree removals. Can inquire to see the live spreadsheet with updates.
 1. Antonino – curious how this is enforced and how are we informing residents.
 - a. Boukili – when TPO was started there was a press release. The city also informed tree removal companies so they should would be aware of the TPO. We receive some communication from residents when trees are removed to check if property has a permit (often trees were permitted

or exempt). Also, in general when a tree is being removed the applicant needs a street and sidewalk occupancy permit from the City and the engineering department knows a tree removal permit is needed. The city is keeping track of enforcement and follows up to make sure individuals replant trees.

c. Spring Tree Planting

- i. Boukili – Spring planting is complete – 185 trees in the ground. There were a lot of warranty replacements as well (75-80 warranty replacements), replacing trees that have died within the past two years. A few species were hit hard, so it could just be bad batches – *Nyssa sylvatica* (Spring 2023) and Willow oak and shingle oak (Fall 2022).

d. Somerville Pollinator Action Plan Advisory Committee updates

- i. Mertl – Working on the RFP for a consultant to create the plan. Trying to get enough info in the RFP to ensure consultant will make a thorough plan. Committee reviewed RFP scope of work and gave some more suggestions. Will view final RFP at the next meeting and then next step will be to review RFP responses.
- ii. Boukili - there is one more meeting and then a pause while the scope + RFP goes out to bid. Advisory committee will likely be involved with interviews from consultant groups. The consultant team will then write the plan.
- iii. Antonino confirmed that if the city only gets one bid that is higher than expected, usually go back out to bid. Antonino confirmed that community meetings and community involvement is part of the process.

4. Urban Forestry related job postings and RFPs

- a. Perused <https://cityofsomerville.applytojob.com/> for relevant jobs.

5. Quincy Street Open Space Draft Planting Plan

- a. Boukili reviewed the draft planting plan for Quincy Street Open Space. Boukili gave background on the site – it was an old house site that was turned into a park. It was intended to be a naturalistic environment for folks to enjoy. It hasn't been maintained as expected, many plants were removed some weeds and species that were intentionally removed. It's in a state where it needs some help. PSUF is working on a planting plan to reinvigorate the space and fill it back in. Draft design now and planting likely next spring. Boukili confirmed that things that are doing well will not be removed. Want to make sure the direction of the plan is aligned with the committee vision.
- b. Mertl would advocate for not having a lawn space.
- c. Boukili provided a July 31st deadline for comments.
- d. Antonino would hope one of the main takeaways is that we hit all the bloom times April – October so there would need to be more bloom across the season

everywhere. More Willow, would love to see some spring ephemerals (Bluebell, Dutchman's Breeches, Bleeding heart (will bloom all summer if in a shady spot), Blue flag iris). Would love to see some Buttonbush if there's space to fill in. Swamp azalea for a late blooming azalea. Many of these need grasses as support throughout. Antonino advises against cultivars as it confuses the insects. Would like to see Wild lupine, Echinacea.

- e. Grossman confirmed that it's just herbaceous planting and not shrubs.
- f. Giuliana asked about the challenges of the site.
 - i. Boukili confirmed that shade, invasive plants, dog use and safety concerns. Shrub use would have to be thoughtful to keep views open.
- g. Suput - curious how the park is used.
 - i. Boukili - it's a park for relaxing, a lot of dogs use the park to walk.
- h. Antonino asked if we can remove the decking. It feels disconnected and is the space where the rats may congregate.
- i. Antonino is cross-checking list with at-risk bees. Designing for at-risk species will support a more diverse species. [Planting Guides \(tufts.edu\)](https://plantingguides.tufts.edu/) <https://gegearlab.weebly.com/plant-list.html> and Doug Tallamy list.

6. **Species in City-owned Bump-outs - Tabled**

7. **UFC structure: Co-chair and Bylaws- Tabled**

8. **Ongoing Work Updates**

- a. **Adopt-a-Tree Program**
 - i. Last checked ~70 adopted trees.
 - ii. Taylor + Clifford went out to tag some more trees.
 - iii. Discussion of Adopt-A-Tree Email Updates + tasks.
- b. **Outreach**
 - i. Upcoming Summer Streets in September + October.
 - ii. Jenkins is interested in joining outreach + available for September.
 - iii. Taylor is also interested in outreach.
- c. **Species Selection and Planting Protocol**
 - i. Boukili confirmed that all the trees have survived and things have been doing well.
 - ii. Grossman discussed the pilot tree pit.
 - iii. Grossman + Antonino discussed doing a tree pit visit.
- d. **Use of Pesticides at Maxwell's Green**
 - i. Antonino – no update. Remove this from future agendas.
- e. **Tree Preservation Ordinance - tabled**
- f. **Somerville's Most Wanted Weeds**
 - i. Mertl – did a mockup of the draft flyer. There are creative commons photos we can use, but Mertl included a call to get more local photos.
 - ii. Boukili will send the logo.

- iii. Jenkins notes the double Asterix on the bottom vs single at the plants.

g. **GLX Corridor Greening**

- i. Antonino - hydroseeding; including on slope at Ball Square. New resident-led group to determine how to infuse the green line with arts and greening. Antonino will share the meetings event.
- ii. Giuliana - green line brought up a destruction of greening. Hot environment, and could benefit from shade.
- iii. Antonino has access to some bear oaks - would be great for this environment.

9. **Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings**

- a. June 15th, 2023

Roll call vote to approve minutes from June meeting (motion – Boukili, second – Taylor):

- i. Yay: Mertl, Miller, Taylor, Suput, Jenkins, Grossman, Boukili
- ii. Nay:
- iii. Abstain: Antonino

Motion passes at 6:33 pm (7:0:1).

10. **Adjourn:** Meeting adjourned at 6:36 pm [motion- Grossman, second-Suput]