



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

THOMAS GALLIGANI  
ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Urban Forestry Committee Meeting**  
**DECEMBER 15, 2022 4:30PM**  
**MINUTES**

**Pursuant to Chapter 22 of the Acts of 2022, this meeting was held remotely**

A recording of the meeting can be accessed here:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/4780940868172555440>

***Meeting notes prepared by Leah Grossman and Vanessa Boukili***

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

**Committee Members absent:** none

**Others in Attendance:** Anne Ryan, Crystal H, Ivan Neri, Stephen Clark

**Call to Order:** Dwan called meeting to order at 4:33 pm

**1. Introductions / Housekeeping**

- a. UFC members introduce themselves, then audience members promoted to panelists and invited to introduce themselves.

**2. Resident Concerns**

- a. Stephen Clark – pruning concerns at Ivaloo St. Dwan – row of trees on private property aggressively pruned. Neighborhood was surprised by the aggressiveness of the pruning around power wires. Assuming condo association. Stephen Clark property manager for the 18-residentail unit condo. 13 trees which were touching the building and needed some pruning. 2 quotes from Bartlett and Barrett. Bartlett was recommended by the landscaper for the complex. Steve was distressed by the pruning that happened, and wants to share the scope of work from the pruning company and find out what happened and if there are some guidelines about how we can go about making good selection of contractor to do pruning work. Eager to get advice, guidelines, and get work vetted ahead of work.
  - i. Miller – typically think of Bartlett as a reputable company, and generally do pretty good work. For anyone hiring an arborist, the key is to make sure you and the arborist understand expectations and goals, also ensure you look for accreditation.

Tree Care Association Incorporated is a reputable accreditation body. Also consider using companies that exclusively use ISA certified arborists. The case could be a situation around utility pruning, often looks terrible when it's done, but you can avoid further damage in the future. Might be able to prevent moving larger branches in the future.

- ii. Steve: one goal was to provide light to the understory. Seeking ways to evaluate quotes from potential companies.
  - iii. Boukili – when working towards having a tree pruned in the city, like to walk the site with the arborist/company and talk about the specific branches or work to be done. Quotes are the first step, but walking the site is a second good step to understand the scope of work.
  - iv. Steve – an owner did the walk ahead of time. Wants to apologize and express that the condo association had good intentions.
  - v. Crystal shares a link to a master gardener class.
  - vi. Clifford asks if it would be good to get a written description of the work to be done. We've talked with others about pruning. It can be very striking and look dramatic but it sounds like if there were power lines involved, larger trees can withstand a good amount of pruning, maybe check back in the spring that the trees come back in the spring.
  - vii. Boukili shares that a written document is standard with goals and plans accompanied with the price. More details often give a better quote.
  - viii. Steve – two issues, trying to decide if the work the company did would meet standards of good pruning in order to make good choices in the future.
  - ix. Antonino – there are other good companies to work with.
  - x. Steve – detailed description of work was the reason they selected the arborist.
- b. Anne Ryan – Cobble Hill resident, expressing concern about green space at Cobble Hill and generally about green space in urban environments. Cobble Hill tenants are gradually coming together and that has changed a lot of the process. They are surmounting the extensive language barriers and understanding what people want as they now understand that the green space is owned by the city. There is interest in preserving the green space. Ryan is happy to answer any questions and confirmed that they attended prior committee meetings.
- i. Dwan mentions the memo the UFC sent about preserving the pines.
  - ii. Anne – the former shopping mall is now encircled in a fence and for the winter / summer for use by DPW and some area is publicly accessible. 90 Washington is very separate from Cobble Hill. Anne is very grateful for the memo that UFC submitted, some are confident that the trees will be preserved. The original plan separated land out would have decimated existing the park space. How the land is divided is still unclear, part of long-term city planning process. A committee is being formed, and there will be representatives from Cobble Hill and surrounding neighborhood to advise about what will happen. Dwan – is there anything we can do as a committee? Interviews for committee are tonight, Anne hopes to be on it. Antonino + Mertl express thanks for offering the service to Ryan.
- c. Clifford – doesn't have a concern but shared a link in the chat about an interview yesterday with Speak for the Trees.

### 3. Boynton Yards Development

- a. Antonino – DLJ is submitting plans for Boynton yards south. They presented their plans to the neighborhood and they then worked with the city and PSUF and need balance civic space

types with active uses. Design has changed a lot and would like to have them meet again with the union square neighborhood council and UFC to talk about changes in the plan.

- b. Boukili - provided more background and context. Submission is for master plan project which encapsulates various parcels. They provided a civic space study that gives overview of civic space types in area, as is required of all master plans. In Boynton yards there is currently nothing. There needs to be things there for future residents to do, i.e.: plazas, playgrounds, sport features, adult fitness, splash pads, etc. They also need to carve out spaces for Groundwork Somerville. Recommendations from PSUF were also to reorient open spaces to align connected open spaces. Guidance is to make the spaces feel open and welcoming to the public *and* people who live there. Original design had a labyrinth and Miyawaki forest. Labyrinths are typically not very active spaces so changing the structure of the open space network in the development area to be more active space. The Master Plan process will guide future development and sets the stage for the parcel development. Changes that were made do not preclude a Miyawaki forest but also do not take up a whole civic space area.
- c. Dwan – clarifying outline of Boynton Yards.
- d. Antonino – clarifying the extents and that it is one of the largest open spaces left in Somerville. Between south street and Columbia. This is going to be a conversation and the USQ neighborhood council to meet with planning and Antonino – offered to invite those who would like to join. Having DLJ join before or after submitting their plans.
- e. Dwan – asking who would approve a master plan.
- f. Antonino – DLJ has had a first neighborhood meeting. JT and neighborhood to have an additional neighborhood meeting. Developers submit a permit to receive approval. Go before Urban Design committee, request to attend UFC, then there is a second neighborhood meeting. After a comment period then they can get approval. In the process, they have had their first neighborhood meeting, next step is planning board. They have asked for a second pre-submittal meeting.
- g. Dwan – clarifying that the invitation is to attend additional meetings with DLJ developers. Would appreciate update on % of green space.
  - i. Boukili – in redesign they are not reducing amount of open space, just changing some of uses.
  - ii. Dwan – did we ever come to a clear definition of not all open space is green and not all green space is open? Could we help the city and zoning code make that distinction? Possible future endeavor.

#### 4. Updates from City

##### a. City Tree Removals

- i. Miller – next contract for pruning and removals went out to bid today. Starting up work in the next month or two. Nothing added at the moment.
- ii. Dwan – clarifying still using contractors.
- iii. Miller – believe we are close to having a tree crew but still contracting at the moment.

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

- i. Boukili – Malik has been updating the private tree removals spreadsheet to add all new activity, but not sure if 100% updated yet. Sheet available upon request.
- ii. Boukili – 2022 permit applications list. Two November and December permits pending. Overall there have been approximately the same number of permits applied this year vs last year, but overall, we have had many fewer trees proposed for removal. 90 trees this year, vs 141 last year. Many applications this year were from

homeowners and were thus exemptions. We have not received nearly as much money this year as last year – only ~ 17k this year.

- iii. Dwan – grateful for this spreadsheet and publicly accessible data.

**c. Fall Tree Planting**

- i. Boukili – 195 trees planted this fall b/c of somewhat smaller spring planting. Almost done with fall planting!
- ii. Crystal expressed concern about lateness of tree planting.
- iii. Boukili says a little earlier is sometimes better but as long as the ground is not frozen the trees generally do okay since they are dormant. We also have a 2-year warranty, so if anything happens they will get replaced. (Last fall we planted 270, for reference).
- iv. Clifford – we do health assessments for adopt a tree, should we be doing assessments for all trees that are still within the warranty period.
- v. Boukili will always take help, but it is within job responsibilities of city staff. Boukili, Miller, and Drayton work on reviewing those trees. Also note that the trees being planted now don't need much water at this time of year, and there has been a lot of rain this fall. Will also confirm they are getting watered by the contractor.
  - 1. Dwan – often hears that no one is watering the trees, but does see the watering truck come around and notices that the surface water dries up quickly.
  - 2. Boukili checks with contractor(s) that they are watering, especially during the summer.
  - 3. Antonino –noticed that there is a single bag on a post – the roots may favor the side that is being watered. Can we put on two bags consistently or can we switch the bags so that the tree is not growing unbalanced?
  - 4. Boukili – the water is slowly dripping and it likes to equilibrate, believes the soil wetness will even out with the slow drip. Cambridge does the double bag method and they swap which bag the contractors fill each week. Can think about incorporating this into the contract for next year.
  - 5. Dwan – notices the bags are susceptible to minor damage and they drain very quickly which would give the impression they are not being watered.
  - 6. Boukili – when receive notice of bags being ripped can tell contractor to replace them. Email [trees@somervillema.gov](mailto:trees@somervillema.gov).

**d. UFC Vacancy update**

- i. No progress since last week. We have applicants and we need to set up interviews. Open positions include one Urban Forestry expertise, one youth member, one general member.

**5. Quincy Street Open Space**

- a. Antonino – drafted questions for the horticulturalist. Reviewed questions as a group. Want to understand how the vegetation was removed? Why was so much removed? What are the instructions for maintenance of these parks? When is the horticulturalist contract up? How do we verify the qualifications of the horticulturalist? How do we allow the evolution of the landscape area? How do we maintain our parks in a thoughtful way?
- b. Dwan – doesn't recall getting clarification that the removal was done by the horticulturalist.
- c. Boukili – some insight from PSUF. There has been a lot of challenging situations at this park. The horticulturalist does not pull up native seedlings. They primarily pull Norway maple seedlings. The Norway maples themselves create shade making it hard for things to grow under them. There are a lot of dogs in that area that are digging and stomping. They do

not use herbicide. They had installed some plants but there was some vandalism and individuals took them (not done by the city). Wants to make it clear that has the best intentions in mind and wants to change the tone of the questions with that in mind.

- d. Dwan – question to add is what is different about Quincy Street. This is an unusual situation and is curious about the specific challenges (vandalism, dogs, shade, rats). People are desperate to ameliorate the rat problem (people have received guidance about removing plants around building foundation to help with rats). Boukili has not given advice about removing plants for this issue. How does this document move forward?
- e. Antonino – has observed the park for a long time and there has never been good extents of vegetation. Envisions that the landscape can evolve while keeping invasive plants in mind. If we have a horticulturalist, can the directives of PSUF to the horticulturalist encourage evolution of the design? Has observed that specific plants have been kept, while others have been wiped out. Wants to understand how we resolve it and have a conversation with those guiding the horticulturalist.
- f. Boukili – can assure the park design is not trying to maintain a static park, trying to remove invasives and maintain an active landscape. Somehow the park got changed, and we may never know the full answer. Next steps either a meeting or bringing the questions to PSUF.
- g. Mertl – based on the changes that have happened to the park, can attest that a lot of work was put into removing the plants. Previously in this park, plants were mowed during the growing season, rather than in fall. What is the plan for when it will be mowed?
- h. Dwan – we frequently have questions like this, how do we find out what the plan was? Or did the maintenance person not know the plan? We have a clear request for knowing what the plan was. If we have a clear sense of what the intent was, we can move forward from there. What is the intent for this space and how can we implement.
- i. Clifford – Quincy St open space was the origination of the Leave the Leaves signs. Were the plants gone? Had they died? Looking at the trees and they are all invasive maples. Norway maples have some allelopathy from the roots. Is it possible that something like this is happening in this space? Would it be worth looking into what compatible plants could be in this area?
- j. Mertl – the trees are on one side of the park and that area historically hasn't had a lot of vegetation, but other areas of the park have. Other areas had milkweed and asters that disappeared very quickly.
- k. Clifford – if there are a lot of seedlings that could be a factor.
- l. Mertl – plants disappeared quickly.
- m. Antonino – would like to submit these questions to PSUF, but feels there is a divide between PSUF, DPW and UFC and community and wants to fight the silos and be able to have more direct communication and have more face-to-face with city staff to help figuring out these questions and aligning goals. Submit questions and potentially have a meeting in the future and want to feel that we are working collaboratively.
- n. Grossman - agree about working collaboratively and figuring out how to work across departments.
- o. Clifford – agrees in how we can go further together. If there were to be something at Quincy, potentially working with neighbors to see what other concerns are. It may be worth discussing concerns with residents and it might be contributing to issues. How to bring more voices into the conversation.
- p. Dwan – agrees people are smart and usually go about things intentionally.
- q. Boukili – final steps to share the questions PSUF and set up a follow up meeting.
- r. Antonino – can we wait to do cutbacks in late May?

- i. Mertil – there’s always something growing, tricky to find the right time.
- ii. Antonino – asking to keep vegetation on site.
- s. Dwan – clarifying two goals here. 1. Questions for Quincy Street. 2. General maintenance guidelines for understory and park maintenance. Can there be a statement coming from UFC about maintenance generally?
  - i. Antonino – keep things that are questions and neutral. Instructions move to a memo.
  - ii. Boukili – once we have answers, we can think about maintenance next.
  - iii. Dwan – add question about any outreach we are doing and any some gaps the PSUF team has identified that UFC help with.
  - iv. Dwan – summarizing our maintenance guidelines as a separate memo. Potential SSAPP topic.

## 6. Use of Pesticides at Maxwell’s Green

- a. Antonino – is it possible to communicate with the maintenance staff at Maxwell’s green that this is a POPS – anyone in the city can use the space and our practice is there is no pesticides. Boukili confirmed it is a POPS, but unsure if the city can mandate if they can use herbicides. Would have to review the maintenance agreement/ covenant. Encourage UFC to send a memo.
- b. Dwan – this should be a request we make of any such space. We should reach out to Maxwell’s green, but would be comfortable with this memo go to city council, the mayor to not use pesticides in public spaces. We could send that memo to the contact at Maxwell’s green.
- c. Clifford – once approved we could put it on the website.
- d. Antonino – who wants to join the memo? Clifford – offers to help review a draft. Antonino – will draft and share a document to review at a future meeting.

## 7. Ongoing Work Updates

- a. **Adopt-a-Tree Program** – *tabled*
- b. **Outreach** – *tabled*
- c. **Species Selection and Planting Protocol** – *tabled*
- d. **Tree Preservation Ordinance**
  - i. Dwan – identifying potential updates to TPO and priorities.
    - 1. Heritage tree – designation would prevent removal.
      - a. Clifford – agrees. DCR has a heritage tree program we could use for language. Can it be expanded to rare + healthy species?
      - b. Mertil – is there a way to incentivize maintaining and keeping those trees. Issues usually happen with landlords. How do we help people keep and maintain their trees? How do we get them to care about that?
      - c. Dwan – you can’t have the appearance of handouts to certain individuals. The city may be able to support maintenance of a large individual tree.
      - d. Antonino – emphasizing we cannot protect large invasive species.
      - e. Clifford – clarifies that a heritage tree would not include any invasive species.
    - 2. Owner/ occupant exemption. It is the big loophole that was included for expediency. What considerations do we have in removing the exemption, maybe the new council would be supportive?
      - a. Boukili - Malik would have good insight and would like him to be present. We’ve had folks who own a home but cannot afford to keep a challenging tree, often older folks without a hazard exemption. If there was a program to help people maintain trees and we could give money for that for incentive, then it would be possible.

- b. Clifford – what would that program look like? Applications and need-based program to help maintaining these trees. Possibly city work on private property, likely lots of challenges.
  - 3. Youth membership. Clifford – working group has drafted elements of this and will form working group to develop this. Priority for outreach group.
  - 4. Additional city staff positions - would it make sense to have more departments represented in our meetings?
  - 5. Adding language to our mission – Consider adding a mandate to convene meetings within the community. Clifford – more formalized events about community meetings. Boukili – the ordinance does specify outreach within the mission.
  - 6. Would like to continue debating these items within our committee.
  - e. **Somerville’s Most Wanted Weeds** – *tabled*
  - f. **GLX Corridor Greening** – *tabled*
- 8. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings**
- a. November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Roll call vote to approve meeting minutes from November 17<sup>th</sup> 2022 and December 8<sup>th</sup> 2022:**

Yay: Miller, Dwan, Clifford, Grossman, Langevin, Antonino, Boukili

Nay: none

Abstain: none

Motion unanimously passes at 6:33 pm.

- 9. Adjourn:** Motion to adjourn meeting unanimously approved at 6:34 pm [motion- Clifford, second-Boukili]