



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

THOMAS GALLIGANI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting
AUGUST 15, 2024 4:30PM
MINUTES

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

Meeting notes prepared by Adwoa Ampene and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in Attendance: Leah Grossman, Adwoa Ampene, Calla Taylor (left at 5:57pm), Chris Dwan, Doris Jenkins, Marion Davis, Michael Hendrix, Tori Antonino, Vanessa Boukili, Dorothy Suput (joined around 4:47 pm; left early)

Associate Members Present: Allison Bernard, Rob Vandenabeele

Committee Members Absent: Breck Miller

Others in Attendance: Vanessa Arslanian, Malik Drayton

Call to Order: Grossman called the meeting to order at 4:35 pm.

1. Introductions / Housekeeping

- a. UFC members and associate members introduced themselves.
- b. Attendees were provided an opportunity to introduce themselves.
- c. Housekeeping: Boukili addresses that Dwan and Ampene are stepping down from the Committee. Dwan talks about how working together with the UFC has been and will be incredibly impactful. He may drop in on meetings, but talks about how proud he is about how far the committee has come. Ampene thanks the UFC for being an amazing opportunity for her to learn and grow.

2. Resident Concerns

- a. Vanessa Arslanian asks about blue spray-painted dots on trees. Boukili responds that the blue dot are painted on ash trees to signify that the tree was treated this year from emerald ash borer. Trees are treated on a two-year cycle.

- b. Vanessa Arslanian also asks about a tree on Quincy Street that was recently removed that a neighbor told her cannot be replaced because it is near a power line. Boukili responds that being near a power line is not a reason to not plant a tree, but she will double check that specific area in case because a power pole could prevent the planting process.
- c. Dwan brings up many trees in his neighborhood that are visibly sick or dead. Dwan asks if there is anything we can do to encourage the removal of these trees or if we have to leave them alone because they are on private property.
 - i. Boukili responds by saying the city cannot send out any notices about this issue unless it's endangering public property.
 - ii. Antonino suggests that Dwan can embrace the usefulness of the dead trees, as they are important for different creatures and fungi.
 - iii. Vandenabeele recalls a park in London that also left dead trees for aesthetic and ecological service reasons.
- d. Antonino talks about two dead Norway Maples at Prospect Hill. She mentions that we can plant something else in their place that serves more to their ecosystem. It is possible that the construction from years ago from the renovation is catching up to the trees, causing the leaves to brown and fall off, and the trees to die.
 - i. Boukili considered different causes for the quick death, such as poison or methane, but neither of these seem likely after inspecting the tree. She's seen other Norways and some Crab Apple trees die quickly this year, but believes in this case it's a mixture of construction, heat, and/or damage to the root that introduced a pest. It's a bit of a mystery.
 - ii. Antonino urges for a replacement of the trees. She wants to make a grove to replace these two dying trees. Antonino believes that more trees will help the tree community thrive better than just having one.
 - iii. Boukili notes that the trees are on Breck Miller's removal list, and will consider alternate replanting options as long as it doesn't affect the current use of the space.
- e. Bernard wants to plant new trees on property. Specifically evergreens, because of their age capacity. She asks about city recommendations about where to procure such trees, and where residents could go if they wanted trees on their own.
 - i. Boukili mentions that the city cannot recommend specific vendors, but someone in Public Space and Urban Forestry is making a list of different nurseries. Antonio recommends New England Wetland Plants, and posts a link in the chat: <https://newp.com/>
 - ii. Grossman mentions that confirming which nurseries use noenicitinoids is ongoing. A subcommittee of Landscape Architects was formed at the Boston Society of Landscape Architects conference to address this issue.

- iii. Vandenabeele talks about a website called “Grow Native Mass” that has a list of native nurseries. Vandenabeele posts the link in the chat <https://grownativemass.org>
 - f. Antonino mentions a Facebook post by Joe Lynch where pictures of mangled trees are shown on 35 Richardson Street.
 - i. Boukili just heard about the stockpiling of soil and mentions they are supposed to preserve trees as part of their building permit greenscore. She will reach out to them and tell them that their actions are harming the trees. Mounding soil around the trunks of trees is a way of slowing suffocating the tree and roots, not a method of protection.
 - ii. Antonino also asks what happens if existing homeowners cement their entire property? Do you need permits to pour cement?
 - 1. Boukili doesn’t know if they would need a permit to cement the entire property, but that what they are doing reduces the permeability of the site. This question would be better answered by ISD.
 - g. Davis mentions a dying tree in Symphony park, and questions whether we irrigate these areas to help them survive droughts.
 - i. Boukili mentions that some parks have irrigation, and some don’t. If they are not irrigated, we don’t have enough staff to water these parks, so we rely on nature and rain.
 - h. Davis also asks if it’s within contractor’s maintenance requirements to weed the wells around newly planted trees.
 - i. Boukili – yes it is part of the 2-year maintenance period, but doesn’t do so unless reminded to. For trees out of warranty, can put in a 311 request, but DPW is understaffed and the request would take a while to get to.
 - ii. Bernard asks if we can have residents or members to weed wells. Boukili responds that we definitely can, but people may end up removing plants that aren’t really weeds. Boukili mentions using the “Seek” app to know if a weed is a weed.
 - iii. Antonino notes that we shouldn’t weed weeds unless we know that they aren’t being taken care of. She mentions that she cares for some tree wells on Boston Street, but someone decided to remove some of the plants she had there. She encourages people not to contact DPW to actively weed anything, and argues that tree pits provide pollinator support, even non-invasive weeds.
 - iv. Dwan mentions that Beacon Street has aesthetically contrasting gardens: some that are mud pits with tire tracks, and others that look healthy and beautiful. He agrees with Antonino that removing plants that have been cared for is devastating. The ecosystem potential of some of these spaces is useful and beautiful.

- v. Davis agrees with Dwan that there are good uses for these tree pits, but many of them just end up looking messy and are filled with invasive plants that fill up the space.
- vi. Boukili agrees with both sides. She believes that unnecessary invasive plants should be taken out, and that we should be leaving the plants that are intentionally planted (cues to care).
- vii. Antonino mentions creating spaces for dogs to use the restroom instead of the tree pits. By placing rocks, it creates a different and more preferred option (in her experience) for dogs to use the restroom.
- viii. Bernard shares her concern for competition with the trees. Concern that we prioritize making a space for pollinators in a place specifically designed for a tree, if that impacts the lifespan of the tree. Arboriculture manuals say mulch is the best compliment for trees, not other plants, at least while tree is getting established.
- ix. Antonino disagrees, and believes that green mulch holds in more moisture and isn't competitive with the tree.
- x. Davis recalls hydrangeas that she planted, one with green mulch around it and one without. The one with green mulch died much quicker than the one without, and agrees with Bernard, but also states that bare dirt is the worst possible option.
- xi. Boukili agrees that mulch holds moisture, but short growing greenery could be okay. Although it may take some of the water, she believes that it would also hold some of it in.
- xii. Antonino talks about a writer that talks about why mulch isn't the right way to go, and talks about looking into the subject for the next meeting.
- xiii. Grossman goes back to the idea of testing tree pits. She restates the fact that the condition that the trees are growing in is very unique, and that there is more nuance in the fact that they are growing in a tight urban condition, and not a pure environment.
- xiv. Suput asks if there is an opportunity to hold a lecture or debate about such topics to help educate and engage other people in the city on this subject.
- xv. Vandenabeele likes this idea.

3. Updates from City

a. City Tree Removals

- i. Boukili says there hasn't been a new removal list. There are some dead trees behind the skate park at Lincoln Park that will be removed.

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

- i. Permits: Drayton is still updating the list, but mentions that we are up to the 38th permit of the year. Most of them have been issued. Recent permit applications include 149 Perkins, 146 Morrison, 84 Monroe, and 34 Wheeland. Drayton will continue to fill in the list.

- ii. Exemptions: Recent exemptions include 125 Jaques St. and 500 Mystic Ave, and a dead pine on Powder House Terr.
 - 1. Dwan recalls that before 2019, Many people discouraged the idea of getting permits to remove trees, and praises how much change has occurred since then.

c. Somerville Pollinator Action Plan Advisory Committee updates

- i. Boukili - all comments have been received by the consultant. Final plan will be shared sometime in August. Next we will work on getting the word out about the plan.
- ii. Grossman mentions that it would be great to get updates about this topic even after it takes a different form.

d. Tree Preservation Ordinance Updates

- i. Boukili still needs to have a meeting with other departments, and then provide the amendment requests to the Mayor and City Council.

4. Urban Forestry Related Job Postings and RFPs

- a. Grossman & Antonino – not many positions of interest to committee. Have positions been filled?
 - i. Boukili – Public Space Planner position in PSUF has been filled, and offer extended for Senior Public Space Planner role as well.
- b. Antonino – notification of cancellation for the horticultural RFP on the 8th. Will be reposted?
 - i. Boukili – yes, edits to the RFP will be made for this fall, and it will be posted again to start work in the spring.
 - ii. Boukili confirms that we still have Pemberton for the current horticultural contract.
 - 1. Antonino – can we leave leaves this fall?
 - 2. Boukili - no work will be done after September, so the leaves will be staying.
- c. Boukili - edits to the bid will include suggestions made in the Pollinator Action Plan.
 - i. Grossman – is this something UFC can review?
 - ii. Boukili – happy to share RFP when it's posted online.
- d. Dwan questions if the tree crew is at full strength?
 - i. Boukili – no; there are still two members of the crew, and one more to fill.

5. UFC structure

- a. Boukili says she has not made any notes on the document yet.
- b. Grossman praises Hendrix for reaching out to committee members to learn more about the committee, ask questions, and figure out how to get more done. Encourages other people to reach out to existing committee members as well.
- c. Suput suggests we work on answering one question at a time on the document, during the meeting.
- d. Dwan shares the short history of the committee, and will write it up later. We have worked hard to make sure not to have an adversarial relationship between

activists and city, that it has very intentionally been cultivated as a useful and respectful place.

- e. Grossman mentions a google drive that includes past memos and resources for the committee – will share with new members of the committee.
- f. Dwan mentioned that all prior memos that UFC has approved are posted on the UFC website.
- g. With the departures of Ampene and Dwan, there will be two positions open in the UFC. Boukili believes she can get these positions posted by September.

6. Ongoing Work Updates

a. Adopt-a-Tree Program

- i. Boukili mentions the updated tree inventory will cover the health review of newly planted trees. Would be useful would be a better idea to crowdsource checking the trees that are coming out of warranty this fall.
- ii. Grossman states that interacting with the public is super important and an important reason to keep adopting a tree and tree inspection work alive.
- iii. Hendrix offers to support and adopt a tree in any capacity.
- iv. Taylor asks about the mapping system, and whether we found a solution for this. Grossman responds by saying that we will need to find the best approach for this next inventory, but that is still something we will have to figure out.
- v. Davis asks about a recommended way for people to report potential tree issues, and Hendrix also raises concerns about this matter.
 - 1. Boukili - 311 is the most efficient way to report any trees issues.
 - 2. Davis – takes picture on phone, hard to summarize all info in an email.
 - 3. Boukili - There is a 311 app you can use on your phone. You can upload pictures of requests there too.
 - 4. Davis wonders how efficient the app is at delivering messages to Boukili.
 - 5. Boukili responds that all the tree requests are processed by her or Breck.
 - 6. Grossman adds that you also see all your old requests, and you receive follow up messages on the tree.
 - 7. Dwan mentions that the type of ticket matters. If put in the wrong way, the ticket goes somewhere else. Dwan also mentions that if you were to go into the city's data portal, all the 311 requests that have been put in are visible.
 - 8. Grossman says that in conclusion, there is no big adopt-a-tree push, but in the fall there will be a revised inventory.
- vi. Hendrix requests having an updated email list to reach out to other members, Boukili agrees but shares a brief reminder about meeting open meeting law.

- vii. Dwan asks about a company on his street that uses AI for their tree inventory process.
 - 1. Boukili responds that yes, this is our tree inventory! We are one of the first cities to be doing this in the US. We are working with Davey Resource Group and doing a smart tree inventory that scans each tree so that we can see the branch structure, size of the canopy, height, and distance.

b. Outreach

- i. Grossman brings up SomerStreets and asks if we attended.
 - 1. Boukili signed the UFC up for the Halloween SomerStreets event that is happening October 20th, with the rain date being October 27th from 2-6pm.
- ii. Davis mentions a costume library in the back of a church in Back Bay where people can borrow costumes.
- iii. Antonino mentions the mayor's summer program where youth residents made seed packets for tabling activities for the city.
- iv. Grossman shares a link about the event:
<https://sommervilleartscouncil.org/somerstreets/monster>

c. Species Selection and Planting Protocol

- i. Antonino requests that someone else take the lead on this project. She describes this as us making a list of plant species to hand out during events. Our goal is to find a species that has a chance of surviving in very small spaces. Another focus is to find a mechanism we can use to get native trees into people's yards. She mentions the Green Team in Cambridge that has the canopy crew plant on private property.
- ii. Boukili talks about working with the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) to get a back of sidewalk tree planting program going, and has also been working with the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) on a grant they have to get trees on private property.
- iii. Hendrix asks what MyRWA needs Boukili to do exactly. Boukili responds that they are looking for community leaders to be involved in recruiting people for trees on their property.

d. Somerville's Most Wanted Weeds

- i. Grossman says she hasn't been out on Broadway to weed in a while (for the pilot small tree project), but many of the weeds seem successfully weeded. She shows images of weeds that she removed and plants that she planted in this area (specifically a Tilia, that seems to be doing okay).
- ii. Boukili discusses a plant that died, and after which the owners cut the head off to 'revive it,' leaving the plant damaged. This locaiton will be replanted.
- iii. The last plant, an Ostrya, seemed to be weeded already, and seemed to be okay. Grossman encourages members to visit these plants on Broadway.
- iv. Grossman and Antonino advocate for a coordinator of meetings on this topic. Boukili mentions working in early September, and Grossman adds that she will be out of town for four weeks.

- e. McGrath Hwy Greenspace – *tabled*
- f. GLX Corridor Greening- *tabled*
- g. Removal Advice - Tree of Heaven and Other Invasives – *tabled*

7. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

- a. June 20th, 2024
- b. July 18th, 2024

Roll call vote to approve June and July Meeting Minutes (motion – Boukili, second – Grossman)

- i. Yay: Boukili, Davis, Antonino, Dwan, Ampene, Jenkins
- ii. Nay: none
- iii. Abstain: Grossman

Motion passes at 6:33 p.m. (6:0:1)

Adjourn: Meeting adjourned at 6:34 pm.