



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

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting
JANUARY 16, 2025 4:30PM
MINUTES

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

Meeting notes prepared by Calla Taylor and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in Attendance: Calla Taylor, Doris Jenkins, Dorothy Suput, Leah Grossman, Marion Davis, Michael Hendrix (left at 5:56 pm), Vanessa Boukili, Tori Antonino

Associate Members Present: Rob Vandenabeele

Committee Members Absent: Breck Miller

Others in Attendance: Adele Nychis, Michael Fager, Michele Born, Tad McDonald, William Dean, Suzanne Warner, Emily Gold, Liana Kramer

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. Antonino brought up co-chair term limits. She feels ready to step back from her position. If anyone would like to consider the position, she's ready to pass on the torch. Grossman mentions that co-chairs can be either nominated or self-nominated and the committee will vote. Add this to agenda for next month.

2. Resident Concerns

- a. William Dean - committee applicant - question about a silver maple. He is part of an HOA in Somerville where a developer had done stump grinding a few years ago. He is trying to save the tree and to understand the best process.
 - i. Boukili – no specific time for an old tree to die, but recommends having an arborist look at it more frequently if it doesn't look healthy. May need regular pruning and/or some soil work (i.e., biostimulant).



- ii. Antonino – clarification on stump grinding. Was it adjacent? Is the tree still big and living?
 - i. Dean - developer hacked off 25-30% of the tree, it was done to create more parking space.
 - ii. Antonino – how does the TPO works when you half kill a tree and then it dies a few years later?
 - iii. Boukili – in TPO ordinance, removal is defined as any action that results in the death of the tree. Easier to address when more recent (as can be hard to prove 5-10 years down the line). One proposed addition to the TPO is the “Duty of Care” - when working on properties residents have to ensure tree is preserved.
 - iv. Michael Fager - is there a statute of limitations for how long a tree needs to die?
 - a. Boukili – The ordinance does not have a timeline at the moment.
 - v. Michele Born – can we can fine for damage, not just tree death?
 - a. Boukili - we have the ability to fine for damage to public shade trees, but we do not have that ability for private trees.
 - vi. Adele Nychis - introduced herself as an applicant for the committee. Was not aware of TPO and had questions about illegal removal of trees. How do we find out about these trees? Her neighbors had cut down a healthy red maple tree. Is there a way to verify if the neighbors had a permit?
 - a. Boukili - To verify you can email trees@somervillema.gov with the address where the tree was removed. Any tree over 8 inches in diameter should have a permit or exemption. Malik will follow up if there are any violations. Self-reporting is the best way we hear about violations. Permit applications are on Citizenserve, but it’s usually easiest to just email and ask. Many local tree companies and arborists are aware of the City’s ordinance, but others may be unaware. Ultimately it is the property owner’s responsibility to get the permit.
 - vii. Grossman – maybe time to do another round of outreach to tree companies so they are aware of our process and permit requirements. Consider adding to ongoing work for outreach subcommittee.
- b. Michael Fager - applicant for the committee, and current member of Somerville Conservation Commission. When someone does construction, they have a city permit that is displayed on site. Are permits displayed anywhere for tree removal?

- i. Boukili - Yes, there is a permit, except for exceptions, which should be displayed while removing the tree. Hazardous trees do not need permits, but property owners do get an exemption email (which does not need to be posted).
- c. Suzanne Warner - introduced herself as an applicant for the committee. The city cut down a large linden in front of her house, what is the timeline for expecting a new tree? Large stump still, with rat activity.
 - i. Boukili - if it's a larger tree, we may not be able to put a tree in the exact same spot, but we will do our best to plant nearby. If stump has been there a long time, it's worth putting in a stump removal request at 311, and mention the rat activity. There is also a rat observation option for 311.
- d. Antonino - someone cut back all the beautiful new meadow near the tower at Prospect Hill. She thinks it's the DPW, hopefully won't happen again with a new contractor.
 - i. Boukili - it was the DPW and very unfortunate. It was done in preparation for an event, and someone did not recognize the beauty of those plants. Our horticultural contractor would not have done that. The new DPW gardener is really great and will prioritize native plants.
 - ii. Tad McDonald - youth applicant, shared in Antonino's pain of the loss of meadow.
- e. Suput - curious about Somerville Ave, and commuter rail near the train (close to Porter Square). There is a new sidewalk there - any plans for trees there?
 - i. Boukili – have inspected the area many times, and recently planted as many trees as possible. There is a huge gas line under the sidewalk there, in some places the sidewalk is too narrow to plant trees and/or the pipe is too shallow. Have already planted all that we can for now. There was also a series of trees that died because of a gas leak, Eversource sent a check for the replanting of that area.

3. Updates from City

a. City Tree Removals

- i. Boukili – We [City staff] keep UFC members and viewers updated on tree removals. No new pending tree city removals.
- ii. Nychis lives on Avon street – many new trees on street but near heat wave. Many trees did not make it. Is there a system in place to check up on sidewalk trees?
 - i. Boukili – check on trees after planted and approximately seasonally or yearly while under warranty. Resident reports (email if trees are dying) are extremely helpful. Trees have a 2-year warranty, and should be watered weekly per contract. Avon street plantings were done as part of the Spring Hill Sewer Separation project and not through Boukili's contract. Aware that some trees were not doing well and were flagged for replacement. No

replacements went in last Fall, but expect it will happen this Spring. Can report specific addresses to Boukili for follow up.

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

- i. One new permit application in 2025.
- ii. 2024 permits/exemptions: explained to guests that we review private tree removal permits and exemptions that have come up. There have been a few permits since our last meeting.
 - i. 89 Munroe - violation that was caught and worked with the property owner for mitigation.
 - ii. 16 Bonair - issued and will be replanted.
 - iii. 35 Richardson - received a permit, 3 significant trees were removed. New building construction site.
 - iv. 27 Hall, 384 Washington, and 7 Louisberg, all got permits
 - v. 9 Taylor st is replanting.
- iii. Nychis asked about a Berkeley St tree that was removed yesterday.
 - i. Boukili – there may be some info missing from the sheet. Tree removed was a Norway Maple and they had applied for a permit. Committee explained that Norway Maples under 24 inches diameter are exempt from needing a permit. Property owners have 30 days to retroactively get a permit.
- iv. Antonino - can species names be added to the sheet for exemptions?
 - i. Boukili – yes, will ask Drayton.
 - ii. Is the property on Taylor St going to be divided in 2 lots? How will they replace the 66 inches caliper?
 - a. They have 63 inches proposed. 9 Taylor is a completely empty lot. Looks like they're putting in a big building and trees around the outside. Dogwoods and white pines, still could be in progress for green score. They may have put in big caliper trees to get the total.

c. Spring Tree Planting

- i. Boukili - spring tree planting bid is going out soon, before the next meeting. We've talked loosely about different tree species. Normally Boukili has a list of species for contractors to choose from. She puts out a bid with requirements for who can apply, and the contractors apply. Lowest cost qualified bidder gets the contract. The important information is in the bid contract. Boukili is open to thoughts or suggestions on tree species.
- ii. Michael Fager – where do the trees come from?
 - i. Boukili – depends on contractor. Have gotten trees from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, and some are more local. Specifications stipulate that the trees have to be grown in an environment similar to Somerville. They must be not from spotted lantern fly quarantine zones, or else must have proper protocols for preventing spread.
- iii. Vandenabeele - what are the specifications for native trees?

- i. Boukili - city is planting native species for at least 50% of all trees. There are no special specifications for native trees in the bid. We prefer trees to come from sources that don't use neonicotinoids.
 - ii. Is there guidance/specific definitions for what we consider native? The word seems vague enough.
 - iii. Boukili - According to the Somerville Native Planting Ordinance: east of the Mississippi River of the US is the broad range for native species, based on USDA native distribution maps.
 - iv. Boukili also tries to focus species choices on most ecologically valuable species, such as recommendations in Somerville Pollinator Action Plan.
 - v. Davis appreciates this. She suspects that sometimes the most ecologically valuable trees are not necessarily what people want. For example, people have worried about rats and crabapples.
- iv. Antonino suggested some species, especially considering the need for tough native short trees (to take place of Syringa which is becoming invasive). Suggestions include: Flowering Dogwood, Redbud, Musclewood, Chokecherry (straight species preferred over the purple leaved ones that are inedible to caterpillars), Magnolia, Yellow birch, Black gum, Hickories, Hackberry, Hoptree.
 - i. Boukili - loves Black Tupelo, plants Musclewood in shady spots, loves Hackberry, has been planting Redbud. Planted some Magnolias in parks last year, and plant a fair amount of chokecherry, but can only find Canada red variety. We prioritize straight species but they are always difficult to find. Would try yellow birch if could find it. This year will be planting at least 20-30 trees as part of the Mystic River Watershed project, which are bare root trees that we can do some more experimenting of species.
 - ii. Antonino suggested looked at Archewild or Native Plant Trust, which have 1-inch diameter trees.
 - iii. Are the tree species in the RFPs? Are nurseries getting these requests? The contractors would get the bids and then go to the nurseries themselves.
 - iv. Grossman is part of a group of landscape architects who are trying to work more with nurseries and getting straight species. The more we ask for these things from different angles, we can put pressure on nurseries for more selection options.
 - v. SSAPP will meet with Boukili next week to discuss more, and the meeting is open for anyone interested.

4. Ongoing Work Updates

a. Outreach

- i. The Winter Farmers Market has last minute opening. We couldn't accept it but we asked to be notified about future cancellations.
- ii. Ongoing task: design new tablecloth

- iii. Winter is a great time to revisit tasks, for example, the Somerville Most Wanted Weeds project. We will give ourselves a goal of getting it out by summer.
- iv. Antonino still has the outreach bag and Boukili can restock the bag.
- v. The committee had approved the text of the Tree of Heaven document last time, but there was some discussion about formatting tweaks. Was this done yet or is still pending?
 - i. Grossman and Davis still need to make changes.
- vi. If the farmer's market has a day in March or April they might allow us to table outside.
- vii. Suput – would like to schedule an outreach meeting – volunteered to organize it.

b. UFC overview and startup question answering

- i. Question: How do I find out about what the committee is doing or upcoming events or meetings?
 - i. Answered on UFC overview document: attending UFC meetings, joining UFC enthusiast email list.
 - ii. Fager asked if we could set up a list to inform all relevant committees in the city? Everything is posted online, but a dense list of local committees.
 - iii. William Dean suggested some sort of mailing list for monthly updates of agenda. And put link on website.
 - a. Boukili – that is what Urban Forestry Enthusiasts list is for, but good idea to put a link to join on the website.
 - iv. We could possibly connect or share information with Climate Ambassador program or other local organizations/committees
 - v. Nychis - City of Somerville Instagram?
 - a. Some posts on Somerville Parks Instagram, a more narrow audience, we need to remember to take more photos!
 - b. Boukili can also send topics to City of Somerville Instagram. Sometimes UFC related topics are posted on the weekly email newsletter that goes out.
 - vi. Fager - what about people who don't use Instagram or social media?
 - a. We often do email blasts and newsletters, and are open to more ideas for reaching out.
 - vii. Antonino reported that the Cambridge Day is doing great, we appear and were featured in print and digital publications.
 - viii. Our meetings are on the city calendar and our agenda is posted on the Monday or Tuesday before. People can review previous meeting minutes, there is a link on Somerville UFC page to see minutes and agendas and watch previous meetings.

c. Species Selection and Planting Protocol

- i. No major updates. There will be an upcoming meeting soon.
- d. Somerville's Most Wanted Weeds - *tabled***
- e. Urban Forestry Related Job Postings and RFPs**
 - i. Grossman presented the idea of attending other meetings and community events and reporting back to how UFC can connect with other groups.
 - ii. The tree surgeon position is still open. The DPW gardener just started, and we're excited about the new person.
 - iii. There is an open bid for snow plowing.
 - iv. The Urban Horticultural Management Program is a contract to take care of horticulture in 12 parks. It is a 1-year contract with option to renew for 2 years. It focuses on more care for native planting areas around the city.
 - a. Have there been any bids?
 - b. Don't know but there is definitely interest.
 - v. There is a requirement for someone on site with a state certificate in horticultural practices. Horticulture Certification is happening in February at Days Inn, it is a day-long certification and test.

Extra time: Open Discussion with audience members

- f. Fager asked if this was an open meeting.
 - i. Grossman: yes, we are compliant with open meeting law, open to the public when meeting with more than 6 people. The subcommittees need to be of less than 6 voting members, so that we are not conferring on important meetings without the public.
- g. Dean asked if the committee applies for federal or local grants? And if there are any connections with businesses?
 - i. UFC gets a small amount of funding from the Public Space & Urban Forestry Department: \$1000 a year, used for plant giveaways, supplies, and/or to send members to meetings. The department (Public Space and Urban Forestry) gets funding from the city budget for planting and work. We have occasionally tried to get funding for new projects, and have gotten funding from DCR in the past. We are currently looking into other grant opportunities for a pilot project through a federal grant. We also get some money from a federal block grant which pays for some tree planting in specific areas of the city. We also work with a couple of nonprofits with their own funding, MyRWA has gotten funding for some planting, and we are collaborating with them (currently planting 60 trees on public property and 60 trees on private property). Groundworks Somerville may have some money too.
 - ii. Fager asked about MyRWA and Groundworks: do we make sure they are in compliance with the Wetlands Protection Act?
 - i. Boukili – yes, of course. So far no planting in wetlands areas.

- h. Antonino shared information about the MyRWA grant for a free trees on private property. Mentioned trying to get people in areas with fewer trees, but anyone can apply. 60 native trees will be given out through this MyRWA grant.
- i. Nychis was curious about the list and if the individual can choose their tree or if they are selected for a tree?
 - i. Homeowners get to choose, but recommendations are provided. Boukili will make a smaller list and have some smaller trees. They will make sure tree choices make sense and can be successful.
- j. Michele Born shared that this was her first time hearing about the MyRWA grant. Can this be more promoted?
 - i. Boukili is working on getting information blasts through various email lists, etc. Now is a great time to sign up for spring planting, the opportunity is not over.
- k. Fager was curious about planting live Christmas trees instead of using the cut ones every year?
 - i. Boukili – we looked into options for this in front of City Hall, but cannot do it right now as lots of future construction work in that area. Boukili will look into getting live trees in the other square locations. Specific tree species could be red cedar, white cedar, other evergreen trees.
- l. Fager asked about committee numbers.
 - i. We have 11 official members, and our quorum is a simple majority of 6.

5. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

- a. December 19th, 2024

Roll call vote to approve meeting minutes from December 2024 (motion – Boukili, second – Taylor)

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

Motion fails (5:0:2). Will vote again next month.

Adjourn: Meeting adjourned at 6:31 pm (motion – Boukili, second – Suput)