



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

THOMAS GALLIGANI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting
MARCH 20, 2025 4:30PM
MINUTES

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

Meeting notes prepared by Doris Jenkins and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in Attendance: Tori Antonino, Calla Taylor (left at 6:30 pm), Doris Jenkins, Dorothy Suput, Marion Davis, Vanessa Boukili, Michael Hendrix (left at 6:30 pm), Malik Drayton (arrived at 4:45pm)

Associate Members Present: Rob Vandenabeele, Allison Bernard

Committee Members Absent: Leah Grossman

Others in Attendance: Michele Born, Patricia Murphy-Sheehy, Ruchika Madan, Suzanne Warner, James Sheehy, Ann Ryan

Call to Order: Antonino called the meeting to order at 4:39 pm.

1. Introductions / Housekeeping

- a. Co-Chair nominations

2. Tree Permit Waiver Request – 24 Ware Street

- a. Patricia Murphy Sheehy and James Sheehy present, residents of 24 Ware Street
- b. Drayton: At 24/26 Ware Street, there is a black walnut and a catalpa tree, roughly 42 inches, being requested for removal. Patricia and James have lived at 24-26 Ware Street for ~30 years, recently they split it into two lots. They currently live at 24 Ware Street, 26 Ware Street is an empty lot with a few trees that they are hoping to remove.
 - i. The fee for removal is \$600/caliper inch, or replacing in kind

- ii. The property owners have a landscaping plan to partially replant (17")
- iii. Committee has been asked to share their opinions, ultimately Malik will make the decision.
- iv. Tree committee shares concerns on using native species instead of non-native, because losing these large trees is a big loss to the neighborhood. Also selecting trees that may grow into a larger canopy tree as opposed to smaller ornamental trees.
 - 1. On the list presently there are a few pseudo invasives, committee would like to see these replaced with native species and a strong diverse palate
- v. Property owners do not intend to cut down trees in the future, the only other tree they have removed was dying
- vi. Boukili also shared that planting trees on adjacent properties counts towards the caliper inches
- vii. Committee shared SPAP, and list of native species
- viii. The committee shares the consensus that the fee can be waived, and the property owners can receive a partial exemption (meaning they do not have to pay, only plant in kind), under the exemption that all trees are native and strive to achieve ~90% native plants an plant on adjacent lot.
 - 1. Drayton will need an updated planting plan in order to issue the permit (and they will need to resubmit for the Greenscore process).
 - 2. Antonino would like to provide comments on the planting plan. She will do that and share the comments with Drayton.
- ix. Taylor abstained from the conversation as the property owners are involved at Somerville High School

3. Resident Concerns

- a. Anne Ryan: Cobble Hill is having an arbor day celebration and residents have made signs sharing what they love about trees, they will be placing them on the “endangered” area
 - i. Friday the 25th
 - ii. UFC will spread the word if Anne shares the information

4. Somerville MVP grant project – Letter of Support

- a. Boukili presents project “Green and Cool Somerville”. Certain sidewalks are so narrow that trees cannot be planted, Somerville is proposing to do a big planning study to look at how to plant trees in difficult places. Then, using that planning document, align with street redesign projects to employ some pilot projects.
 - i. The grant will include informational interviews with committees and the consultant team
 - ii. MyRWA, CRWA, and Groundwork Somerville will likely be community partners.
 - iii. Letter of support from UFC presented and discussed.

Roll call vote to approve MVP letter of Commitment (motion – Jenkins, second – Taylor)

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

Motion unanimously approved at 5:52 p.m. (8:0:0).

5. Updates from City

a. City Tree Removals

- i. Ash tree removed on Greenville Street, EAB presence likely
 - 1. Antonino ran into the tree crew and asked if we could have a piece of the bark showing EAB impacts (holes) – crew said they had to ask Boukili
- ii. Large Zelkova removed on North Street, had a wound that was reopening and dangerous
- iii. Large tree on Willow is leaning on a power line, contributed to a recent power outage – may be tagged for removal soon
- iv. Norway Maple in front of West Branch Library – no longer stable, to be removed on 3/21
- v. On 3/25 tree work happening in Lou Ann David park – boxelder near electrical box to be removed

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

- i. Future Ailanthus removals: Malik will share the guidance that Bernard prepared
- ii. A few pending applications
- iii. Kent Court issued (Ailanthus)
- iv. White St Place – 2 sycamore maples and one American elm
 - 1. Most likely going to have to pay for the larger elm

c. Spring Tree Planting

- i. Boukili: Wagon Wheel is the contractor for citywide project. Also working with MyRWA to plant park trees (53 trees across 5 parks) – volunteer planting days to come. Bare root trees, so it will be a fast turnaround.

d. Private Development Tree Damage

- i. Antonino: A developer damaged a tree that was supposed to be protected. What are the repercussions for a negligent developer?
 - 1. Antonino shared video of excavator being used within a few feet of the large silver maple.
 - 2. Boukili: They did not follow the conditions of their permit. Technically the tree is on one property but overhangs the adjacent property. The adjacent property owner owns their air/soil space, so pruning and clipping roots on their own property is technically not within the purview of the city.

3. The city likely cannot be involved in the dispute – its hard to tell if the City’s conditions around the permit were “enforceable” or penalizable.
4. The developer is North America Development, the neighbors have talked them.
5. Committee would like to discuss further at the next meeting, the enforceability of content etc.
- ii. Could the committee write a letter and submit it to the better business bureau or something like that?
 1. Boukili: likely yes that would be fine.

e. Tree Preservation Ordinance Amendments

- i. Boukili is submitting the proposed amendments to City Council tomorrow
 1. Protection of private trees during construction
 2. Duty of care clause for significant trees
 3. Youth members terms to be adjusted to account for the academic year
 4. A few small changes elsewhere

f. Sourcing Plants without Neonicotinoids – *tabled*

6. Ongoing Work Updates

a. Outreach

- i. Somerville Arbor Day – do on national arbor day, Friday April 25?
 1. Will be doing bare root tree planting that day, could be Somerville Arbor Day too.
- ii. Earth Day Activities
- iii. Tablecloth – mid-size to put over many table sizes. Propose to order 2.



1. Antonino: can we add in some birds / animals?
2. Suput: Keep it simple given the smaller footprint of the tablecloth

Roll call vote to approve Tablecloth Design (motion – Boukili, second – Hendrix)

- i. Yay: Boukili, Jenkins, Taylor, Antonino, Davis, Suput, Drayton, Hendrix
- ii. Nay: none

iii. Abstain: none

Motion unanimously approved at 6:14 p.m. (8:0:0).

- b. UFC Overview and Startup question answering - *tabled*
- c. Species Selection and Planting Protocol - *tabled*
- d. Somerville's Most Wanted Weeds - *tabled*

7. Urban Forestry Related Job Postings and RFPs

- a. Ash tree treatment RFP
- b. Citywide plants and flowers RFP
- c. Tree Warden position should be posted soon

8. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

- a. February 20th, 2025 - *tabled*

Adjourn: Meeting adjourned at 6:35 pm (Motion – Suput, second – Boukili)