



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

THOMAS GALLIGANI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting

Thursday, August 21, 2025
MINUTES

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025, this meeting was held remotely

Meeting notes prepared by Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in Attendance: Calla Taylor (acting chair), Joelle Renstrom, Leah Grossman, Luca Choly, Michael Hendrix, Tori Antonino, David Jackson, Vanessa Boukili

Associate Members Present: Rob Vandenabeele, Allison Bernard

Committee Members Absent: Marion Davis, Doris Jenkins, vacant position

Others in Attendance: Estello Raganit (City of Somerville PSUF), Anne Ryan, Alyssa Wilk, Crystal Huff, Suzanne Warner

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

1. Introductions / Housekeeping

- a. UFC members and Associate members introduced themselves.
- b. Attendees invited to introduce themselves.

2. Resident Concerns

- a. Anne Ryan – concern over the trees near Cobble Hill. One of the Cobble Hill parking lots (between 84 and 90 Washington St) is on the 90 Washington St property that the City now owns. Although Cobble Hill can use the parking lot for now, this may change in the future. Anne is concerned about what might happen to the tree if/when this changes.

- i. Boukili – City does plan to sell 90 Washington St, but details of any potential sale are still be worked out. A few folks from different city departments met to discuss what the rules would be for creating new parking spaces on Cobble Hill property. At that meeting, Boukili mentioned the strong importance of preserving trees on site, per the Urban Forestry Committee and what we’ve heard from Anne about the desires of Cobble Hill residents. Also noted that if any significant trees (8 inches DBH or more) are proposed to be removed, the property owner would have to follow the same process as all other private property owners by applying for a tree removal permit and mitigating the removal of those trees.
 - ii. Anne Ryan plans to order a caliper and complete a tree inventory on site to at least know what is there.
 - iii. Antonino suggested letting ward councilor and any councilors at large know.
- b. Antonino – Green and Open Somerville invasive species removal event on Saturday, Aug 23rd from 10am – 12pm.
- c. Boukili - 5 Gorham/ 14 Elmwood Tree Removal Waiver Request.
 - i. Boukili – 22-inch pine tree on private property, subject to tree removal permit process. Tree is at 14 Elmwood but overhangs almost entirely on abutting property at 5 Gorham. Tree is healthy, but due to the lean it cannot be simply pruned away from the property without compromising the tree. The tree is creating a huge nuisance for Gorham property owner (Bob), dropping sap all over the entirety of their backyard. Very destructive. Would like to discuss issuing a waiver for the removal of this tree. Without a waiver, the mitigation cost would be \$13,000 or replanting 22 inches of new trees.
 - ii. Bob and Ken discuss the tree in more detail. Sap is on hair, clothes, patio furniture. Stuck to bottom of shoes and tracks into house. Cannot use backyard. Bob and Ken both agree that the tree should be removed. The rest of the backyard is full of trees. 14 Elmwood property has 5 trees, including a huge silver maple right next to the pine tree. The sap issue has gotten worse over time.
 - iii. Committee members discussed potential partial waiver options, including planting a few trees to boost diversity, possibly understory trees, or planting a meadow or pollinator plantings in the front or side yard.
 - iv. Property owner is open to planting suggestions. UFC members Antonio, Vandenabeele, and Choly will arrange a site visit and will report back to Boukili/ Drayton with findings so that partial waiver can be issued.

3. Quincy Street Open Space – park update and proposed tree removals

- a. Estello Raganit, Senior Public Space Planner in Public Space and Urban Forestry Division presented project.

- b. History of Quincy Street Pocket Park. Park originally constructed in 2012 to be a “forest oasis”.
- c. Current conditions: boardwalk - safety concerns and rat nesting sites. Also, ecological pollinator value not great. Shade on north side and flower timing primarily in spring.
- d. Proposed updates to fix boardwalk and add plant diversity. Leaning into forest oasis theme:
 - i. Exposed aggregate path.
 - ii. Propose removing 3 sycamore maples (of 8 existing). Replant 3 new trees – one multi-stem hornbeam and 2 tulip trees.
 - iii. Space defining shrubs. Boundary defining shrubs. Woody across all seasons. Reduce trampling (pets and people).
 - iv. New groundcover planting plan sun to shade to work with existing environmental conditions.
 - v. Pollinator food sources as many months as possible.
 - vi. Questions/ comments from Committee:
 - 1. Dogs – trampling and pee. Consideration for gravel patch at plan bottom right (entrance to park)?
 - a. Raganit - space is very tight. That specific location has big belly bins. Can consider alternate locations, but not sure where.
 - 2. Irrigation?
 - a. Raganit - no new irrigation. There is a hose bib at plan bottom left.
 - 3. Maintenance strategy during establishment? Contractor to do?
 - a. Raganit - Usually yes for 1 year, but need to review specs.
 - 4. Educational signage? Ecological valuable, across season pollinators, detriment of dog pee.
 - 5. Well thought out and beautifully planned.
 - 6. Add some evergreen species? Also ephemerals – trout lily, blood root, virginia bluebells, Celandine poppy, echinacea, black eyed susans, later blooming aster or goldenrod, Pennsylvania sedge, etc.
 - 7. No issues with the proposed invasive tree removals. Discussed that some are not being removed to keep shade in the park.

4. Updates from City

a. City Tree Removals

- i. Jackson shared that 23 public shade trees have been identified for removal – all of them dead, dying, or hazardous. Shared pictures and rationale for most of them using TreeKeeper tree inventory software.

b. Private Tree Removal Permit(s) and Exception(s) - *tabled*

5. Ongoing Work Updates

a. Outreach

i. Somerstreets

1. Monster Mash on Sunday, Oct 19th from 2-6pm (rain date Sunday, Oct 26th). Boukili to reach out to outreach team to see if enough people are available to table.
2. Grossman mention another tabling opportunity – Gilman Square Somerstreets event:
<https://somerlevilleartscouncil.org/events/somerstreets-gilman/>

b. UFC Overview and Startup question answering - *tabled*

c. Species Selection and Planting Protocol (SSAPP) - *tabled*

d. Somerville's Most Wanted Weeds

- i. Taylor shared that it is nearly done, just needs citation for photos. She will share Canva document with Boukili to reassign for wrapping up, as this is Taylor's last meeting.

6. Urban Forestry Related Job Postings and RFPs - *tabled*

7. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

a. July 17th, 2025

Roll call vote to approve July meeting minutes (motion – Boukili, second – Hendrix)

- i. Yay: Grossman, Antonino, Hendrix, Choly, Boukili, Taylor, Jackson, Renstrom
- ii. Nay: none
- iii. Abstain: none

Motion unanimously approved at 6:32 p.m. (8:0:0).

Committee members shared many thanks to Taylor for all her work. She will be missed!

Adjourn: Meeting adjourned at 6:34 pm (Motion – Boukili, second – Antonino)