



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

THOMAS GALLIGANI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting

Thursday, December 18, 2025
MINUTES

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

Meeting notes prepared by David Jackson and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in Attendance: Doris Jenkins (left at 5:18), David Jackson, Joelle Renstrom, Leah Grossman, Luca Choly, Marion Davis (left at 5:57), Michael Hendrix, Suzanne Warner, Tori Antonino, Vanessa Boukili

Associate Members Present: Rob Vandenabeele, Allison Bernard

Committee Members Absent: none

Others in Attendance: Kathe Gregory, Ruchika Madan, Malik Drayton (City of Somerville PSUF)

Call to Order: Hendrix called the meeting to order at 4:31 pm.

1. Introductions / Housekeeping

- a. Boukili: Youth applicant update - one vacancy, deadline extended to Jan 5th. Call for anyone to share with people they know.
- b. UFC Members introduce themselves.
- c. Attendees invited to introduce themselves.

2. Resident Concerns

- a. Ruchika Madan: questions about private ways and tree planting since Somerville cannot currently plant City trees on private ways. Help or guidance in this regard? Also, how does the city care for mature trees on private property that may not clearly be a homeowner's responsibility?

- i. Boukili: expands on planting opportunities, front or side yard vs parking areas. Mystic River Watershed opportunities.
 - ii. Vandenabeele: de-paving opportunities, Mystic River Watershed?
 - iii. Antonino, Bernard: discuss Green and Open Somerville de-paving.
 - iv. Grossman: offers guidance and support. Will connect outside of the meeting to discuss further. Warner and others offer help and guidance outside of the meeting as well.
 - v. Boukili: responds to question regarding caring for mature trees on private ways. The City views mature trees in private ways as private property. Homeowner responsibility.
- b. Kathe Gregory: Will young trees that have not survived be replaced? Oak tree on the corner of Berkley and Central requesting to be replaced.
 - i. Boukili confirms trees will be replanted if they die. Either under warranty or through planting projects. This one is part of Spring Hill Sewer Separation Project. Fall dig hazard, probably on Spring replanting list but will check.
- c. Anne Ryan: Cobble Hill update
 - i. 45 Parking spaces on the table to be installed: Zoning available to protect the trees at Cobble Hill? Concerned that the residents at Cobble Hill do not have a voice. Is there a way for zoning to offer protection? Suggested by City Counselors.
 - ii. Boukili lists some reasons why zoning may be a difficult path (with caveat that she is not a zoning expert).
 - iii. Antonino offers help and a desire to connect outside of UFC.
 - iv. Potential to redraft memo of UFC support for Cobble Hill and the efforts to preserve trees.

3. Updates from City

a. City Tree Removals

- i. Jackson: No new Public Shade Tree removals approved in the last month. Excitement ensues.

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

- i. Drayton: Permits/ Exemptions/ Violations:
 - Some exemptions submitted as permits but categorized as undersized by DBH requirements, so are not listed.
 - 70 Line St., two dead mulberries - Exempt
 - 15 Curtis Ave. One hazardous tree - Exempt
 - 6 Mt. Vernon St. – Exempt

- 82 Beacon St. – Violation: Friday 12/12, 82 Beacon discovered to be performing illegal removals, project stopped. One Ailanthus, one Norway maple removed (both hazardous). The rest were preserved. Permits to be submitted for any other removals.
- 59 Union Sq – Violation: letter sent

c. Fall Tree Planting

- Boukili: Planting finished early December. 158 trees planted (Wagon Wheel) + 25 with volunteers. List of trees on the City website. Around 66.5% native trees - slight change from last projection due to necessary substitutions at nursery.
- Bernard: question about support posts on new trees: Newton, Chicago, don't use posts. Potential to save wood, labor, and avoid dog urine on trees if we place the bag on the tree trunk.
 - Boukili: posts offer protection, identification, and needed support. Also, bags directly on the tree trunk are harmful to the tree.
 - Jackson confirms negative impacts of bags directly on trees.
 - Discussion about composting and how to deal with old posts. When to cut arbor tie off trees. Better systems? Rock or tree guard to protect trees from dog urine?

4. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

- November 20th, 2025

Roll call to approve November meeting minutes (motion – Boukili, second, Grossman)

- Yay: Jackson, Renstrom, Davis, Grossman, Choly, Boukili, Antonino, Hendrix
- Nay: none
- Abstain: none

Motion unanimously approved at 5:57 p.m. (8:0:0).

5. Ongoing Work Updates

- Outreach – Grossman reached out to winter farmers market but no response yet.
- UFC Overview and Startup question answering – *tabled until next month*
- Species Selection and Planting Protocol (SSAPP) – *no update*
- Somerville's Most Wanted Weeds
 - Grossman to set up meeting about the poster

6. Urban Forestry Related Job Postings and RFPs

- a. Jobs – planning department and tree surgeon

7. UFC Recommendations for Mayor-elect Jake Wilson (6:00pm)

- a. Requested to switch this item to end of meeting at 5:53pm.
- b. Antonino shares document and takes notes pertaining to UFC recommendations to Mayor Jake Wilson.
- c. People invited to email Tori with thoughts outside of UFC (must remain under quorum) and will discuss in the January meeting.
- d. Mayoral questions to answer:
 - What are the most important challenges or needs?
 - Private property development tree removals, excess pavement/development breeds more pavement, pavement flooding issues, no green space left after new construction, ADA limits tree planting ability in sidewalk, can UFC get a better seat at the table, tree watering options to increase new tree watering, less hanging annuals that require water / replace with artwork.
 - Are there existing programs or initiatives that are working and should be expanded?
 - Are there gaps in programs/initiatives where the City is falling short?
 - Recommend a few actions the City should take to improve this issue.
- e. Working group created to continue working on this: Antonio, Davis, Choly, Warner, Vandenabeele. Will discuss more next meeting.

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