



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JACOB D. WILSON
MAYOR

THOMAS F. GALLIGANI, JR.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting

Thursday, April 16, 2026

MINUTES

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

Meeting notes prepared by Tori Antonino and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in Attendance: David Jackson, Joelle Renstrom, Leah Grossman, Luca Choly, Marion Davis, Michael Hendrix, Suzanne Warner, Vanessa Boukili, Tori Antonino (joined at 4:40 pm)

Associate Members Present: Allison Bernard, Rob Vandenabeele

Committee Members Absent: 2 vacant positions

Others in Attendance: Jon Bronenkant, Eugenie Hainsworth, Miles Byrne, Anne Ryan, Jaclyn Pillitteri

Call to Order: Grossman called the meeting to order at 4:24 pm.

1. Introductions / Housekeeping

- a. Committee members introduced themselves

2. Resident Concerns

- a. Eugenie Hainsworth appreciates all the new tree plantings.

3. 90 Washington Street Update

- a. Miles Byrne, representing Cobble Hill Apartments, spoke about the importance of preserving the existing berm and mature trees at 90 Washington Street, describing the space as a valued community asset that provides environmental, recreational, and social benefits.

- b. Byrne noted that current zoning requires 15% open space and advocated for increasing it to 25% to preserve the berm as a public park. He requested Urban Forestry Committee support for preserving the existing green space.
- c. Committee members discussed the Urban Forestry Committee's advisory role, noting that while its authority is limited, it can provide recommendations related to tree preservation. Members expressed support for preserving the berm where feasible and discussed reviewing the redevelopment proposals once they become available.
- d. Antonino asked about the site's original development proposal, the long-term plans for Cobble Hill Apartments, and whether preserving the berm would affect the property's redevelopment potential. Byrne responded that the original proposal included inclusionary housing rather than 100% affordable housing, that Cobble Hill intends to continue its affordability commitments, and that he does not believe preserving the berm would negatively affect redevelopment.
- e. Staff noted that redevelopment proposals have been submitted and that it is not yet known whether any include preservation of the berm or existing trees.
- f. Ryan discussed opportunities for greater financial flexibility that could support preservation of the berm. Byrne noted that he is working with the MAPC to explore potential funding opportunities.
- g. The Committee established a working group (Davis, Antonino, Warner, and Bernard) to review the redevelopment proposals and prepare a recommendation memo. Staff will schedule a supplemental meeting so the Committee can review and approve the memo before the next regular meeting.

4. Kennedy School Playground Renovation and Tree Removals (5:51pm)

- a. Senior Public Space Planner Jon Bronenkant presented the proposed Kennedy School Playground Renovation project.
 - i. The project will create the City's first fully inclusive playground, designed to serve pre-K through 8th grade students, including the school's specialized programs for students with social, emotional, and physical disabilities.
 - ii. Design development included multiple community meetings, engagement with school staff, teachers, students, and City departments, and review of inclusive playgrounds throughout New England.
 - iii. The preferred design expands the playground by reducing parking, consolidating the bus drop-off area, improving ADA accessibility from Elm and Cherry Streets, and incorporating accessible play equipment, shade structures, a bosque of trees, rain gardens, and stormwater infrastructure.
 - iv. Construction is planned in two phases to minimize disruption during the school year. Phase 1 includes parking lot reconstruction, accessible routes, stormwater infrastructure, and expansion of the basketball court, which will serve as temporary play space during Phase 2.

- b. Tree Removal Discussion
 - i. Staff requested approval for the removal of up to 16 trees, noting that four trees may ultimately be retained depending on conditions encountered during construction.
 - ii. The primary reasons for tree removal include construction of ADA-compliant accessible routes, installation of underground stormwater infrastructure, expansion of the playground, grading requirements, and reconfiguration of the parking lot and bus drop-off.
 - iii. Several trees proposed for removal are Callery pears, while others are healthy younger trees that conflict with the required infrastructure. Staff acknowledged the loss of these trees but explained that alternatives were evaluated during project design.
 - iv. Committee members asked questions regarding individual trees, opportunities to preserve or relocate trees—particularly younger swamp white oaks—and whether additional trees could be planted elsewhere on the school property if they could not remain in their current locations.
 - v. Staff agreed to explore relocation opportunities where feasible and to evaluate additional planting locations elsewhere on the site.
 - vi. Committee members discussed species selection for replacement trees, emphasizing the use of native species where possible and the importance of providing long-term shade.
 - vii. Staff explained that tree placement within the playground is constrained by accessibility requirements and previous experiences with damage to young trees from climbing. The proposed bosque planting includes protective measures to improve tree establishment while maintaining accessibility.
 - viii. Staff confirmed that the project is designed to avoid conflicts with underground utility infrastructure and that replacement trees are expected to provide increasing shade as they mature.

5. Updates from City

- a. **City Tree Removals (Jackson)**
 - i. Noted that Tree Hearing has been scheduled on May 14th for a tree at 12 Hamilton Road. Remainder of removals *tabled*.
- b. **Private Tree Removal Permit(s) and Exception(s) - tabled**
- c. **Young Tree Training Program** – program is underway to prune at least 1/3 of the city’s young trees.
- d. **Parks Tree Health Program** – Work for this year has begun. Tree maintenance and removals are scheduled for several parks, included Ed Leathers Park. Work schedules will be posted online here: <https://www.somervillema.gov/treehealth>.
- e. **Spring 2026 Tree Planting** – planning is ongoing.

6. Ongoing Work Updates

- a. **UFC Recommendations for Mayor Jake Wilson** – *tabled*
- b. **Outreach**
 - i. Arbor Day 2026 – May 8th
 - 1. Committee members confirmed availability to assist with Arbor Day activities at Lincoln Park.
 - 2. Additional event details will be distributed by email.
 - c. **UFC Overview and Startup question answering** – *tabled*
 - a. **Somerville’s Most Wanted Weeds** – *tabled*
- 7. **Urban Forestry Related Job Postings and RFPs** – *tabled*
- 8. **Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings** – *tabled*
 - b. March 19th, 2026
- 9. **Adjourn:** Meeting adjourned at 6:38 p.m. (Motion – Boukili, second – Grossman)