



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
URBAN FORESTRY COMMITTEE
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting
NOVEMBER 18, 2021 4:30PM
MINUTES

Due to COVID-19 virus containment efforts, this meeting was held remotely.

A recording of the meeting can be accessed here:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/6280041401091017478>

Meeting notes prepared by Tori Antonino and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in attendance: Chris Dwan (Chair), Althea Northcross, Amy Mertl, Conor Guidarelli, Jennifer Clifford, Leah Grossman, Murphy Langevin, Tori Antonino, Vanessa Boukili (Senior Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner)

Committee Members absent: Malik Drayton (Tree Warden designee)

Others in Attendance: Alicia Byrd, Austin Miles, Crystal Burney, Leigh Meunier, Marc Bourgoïn, Marjorie Bourgoïn, Mary Kiesling, Owen Bean, Leslie MacMillian

Call to Order: Dwan called meeting to order at 4:35 pm

1. Introductions / Housekeeping

- a) Introductions all around.

2. Resident Concerns

- a. Large Elm on Mondanim court – private tree that will be removed.
 - i Property owners presented information about tree removal, and questions and suggestions were made by UFC members.
 - ii Marc Bourgoïn: we have a permit and tree service coming in on December 2. Concerned citizens have voiced concerns about whether this is a permitted situation, so we wanted to clarify that at this meeting.
 - iii Antonino: Report that there is a nest of red tail hawks in the tree. Leslie MacMillian is concerned about the tree and potential hawks. How do we determine if there is a nest?

- iv Mark B: Hobby ornithologist, no nest observed. We have had this tree in our lives for a long time. It has been a significant part of the community. Two weeks ago, a large limb came down and took out a window of our neighbor's house. We have had Barrett tree and other arborists come in and look at the tree. We've looked at options to prune it instead of bringing it down. The age and size of limb that had fallen makes it unlikely that the tree could recover. Marjorie and I would welcome suggestions. If there is a nest, we would want to start a process of relocation.
- v Dwan: as a neighbor, have watched the deterioration of the tree. Red Tailed hawks in the neighborhood like at the arts and sciences park across the street. We are a committee to share transparently and have discussion. You have the permit. The committee has no judgment power beyond being a place of discussion. Grateful for all of the years you gave it.
- vi Boukili: do not know of any professional ornithologist that work for the city.
- vii Guidarelli: Thank you for bringing this to our attention. Searching now, see that the State ornithologist is Andrew Vitz. Reaching out to find the best time to remove a nest. Red tail hawks always build a new nest in the spring. Raptors also use old red tail hawks nest too.
- viii CD: Appreciate you going the extra mile and coming to the committee.



- b. Crystal B: have noticed the change in the canopy in Somerville. We have lost so many old growth trees. People will say ‘we got an arborist to come take a look at it’. If someone is in the business of taking down trees, they might be recommending to take a tree down. I want to be more informed.
 - i Boukili: A lot of different types of tree companies and arborists. Some assess, some remove. Most do maintenance as well as removal. Trees do need maintenance. Best bang for their buck is to maintain the tree.
 - ii Guidarelli: I was just going to echo what Boukili said. Keeping the tree alive is best for the arborist. Barrett tree company is reputable.
 - iii Dwan: Would Malik have gone to look at a tree to check to see if it qualifies as an exemption.
 - iv Boukili: The city accepts pictures or an arborist report.
- c. Guidarelli – received response from ornithologist. It’s best to take the tree down now because any existing nests would not be in use. Illegal to take down tree if red tail hawks are using it.

3. UFC Chair(s)

- a) Dwan: Northcross is stepping down as co-chair. For context, it is not a huge amount of work, but it is work. Framing up the agenda, some back and forth behind the scenes. Blessing and a curse to be in a conversation and steer the meeting. Having two co-chairs so one can take the wheel. (Or be on vacation.)
- b) Boukili: If it seems intimidating, we can have a one year cycle instead of two. Dwan: and/or can have tenure offset.
- c) Clifford: Maybe everyone could take a turn, and we could come up with a rotation schedule. I’m a little bit daunted by it. What does this mean regarding commitment?
- d) Dwan: The chair is what you make it. A couple hours a month of legwork ahead of time. Shaping the agenda you get to steer what the organization is.
- e) Northcross: The experience I have had is to be very supported by Malik and Vanessa. There’s back and forth of what needs to be covered in each meeting. Different experience running the meeting and participating in discussion. Different engagement with committee, community and issues.
- f) Boukili: bonus of being a chair is that you don’t need to take meeting minutes.
- g) Dwan: I would be happy to serve another year and have someone else step in as co-chair.
- h) Northcross: Very open if someone has questions or would like to have an offline conversation.
- i) Grossman: What is our timeline? Have a decision by next month? Like the idea of time overlap.
- j) CD: Sounds good. Let’s all think on it, make a decision next meeting.

4. Updates from City

- a) City Tree Removals
 - i. VB: We lost a few trees to the storm: at least one at the Central hill library and one at 111 West Adams street (13” Callery pear). There may be a few more – don’t have full list from DPW.

- ii. The tree hearing since our last meeting. Included discussion of 15 small Callery pear trees at 5 Middlesex Avenue, which need to be removed because the street is being changed. Tree hearing also discussed three trees on Windsor Street for 101 South Street development. Need to be removed for street changes, sidewalk and mobility planning. No objections were received, and trees will be removed soon.
 - iii. Dwan: For context, the Tree Hearing is required under state law. If a tree owned by the city is to be removed, the city is obligated to hold a hearing (unless the tree is a public safety hazard). If anyone objects, the mayor may overrule to allow the removal. City has done a lot of planning before the hearing happens. We are a good committee to intercede on a tree's behalf.
 - iv. Boukili: We do try to save as many trees as possible. We explore all options before a tree is removed.
- b) Private Tree Removal Permit(s) and Exception(s)
- i. Boukili: Drayton is out sick, but he has been updating the spreadsheet. Looks like over \$90k has gone into the Tree Fund from all of the permits we have completed.
 - ii. Antonino: Is that money earmarked for tree things, and can we have that money for our events? Can we use it for tree giveaways?
 - iii. Boukili: The money goes into the tree fund which is its own financial place in the city and has strict requirements for use. City Council needs to approve any use and we have to present a detailed plan. We expanded money to maintenance activities, supplemental watering, young tree training, etc. but I don't think we can buy plants for giveaways. We have used very little of tree fund money. I'll need to look into to see if we can use it for a UFC event.
 - iv. Clifford: When we tried to approach that before it wasn't something we would be able to do. Do you see that changing in the future?
 - v. Antonino: Originally funds were for one thing then it was expanded for maintenance. Can we expand the funds again to support our committee?
 - vi. Boukili: Discussion with finance director. Since UFMP showed that private property is our biggest opportunity, there could be an argument to supplying trees, but it might not be acceptable. Other complications.
 - vii. Grossman: Similar conversation back in May. Could go into green mulching? What would it look like to make that happen? Have a fund to buy perennials and groundcover. We would need to put together a proposal for city council. Could this provide a pathway for initial investment in plants in pilot and then extend to adopt a tree?
 - viii. VB: I think it is possible. More likely be able to fund that than private trees. Looking for wording for tree fund money. If you have a list of things you are thinking of send to me and I will talk to finance team.
 - ix. Dwan: Useful for us to make a proposal. We can't take public funds to give to private property. Interested in whether we could have data gathering program where we could support updating tree keeper. Should we have a working group to kick that around.
 - x. Grossman: Planting Tree pit committee.

c) City Tree Planting

- i. Boukili: Started putting trees in the ground this week. 75 of 270 trees in the ground. Should be able to finish up end of November beginning of December. Total of 350 this year.
- ii. Grossman: Is the website up to date? Boukili: Yes

2a) Residents' concerns continued:

- i. Dwan: Can we talk about the elm on Mondamin again? Leslie McMillan has waited patiently. This committee doesn't get to decide which trees are removed and which aren't. We exist as a place to have conversation in public. The owner has a permit and we did just get information that this time of year is the best time to remove a tree if a hawk nest is in it.
- iii. Leslie: I wasn't sure there was a permit. Concerned that they waived the permit process. Is there any room to persuade homeowners, to prune the tree? Bartlett says the tree could live another 10 years with pruning. I hope that the committee would support that first line of defense. Troubling because the tree is so majestic. The aesthetics is that it is an absolutely gorgeous tree and it concerns me that it would come down. Especially since there are red tailed hawks.
- iv. Dwan: Hard for the committee members to make a judgement because we haven't seen pictures. Bartlett is a reputable company, but I would presume arborist would make the best recommendations to preserve the tree. We can recommend that if safety or integrity of the tree was not a risk, to keep the tree.
- v. Leslie: Understanding that the reason for permits is because there is some value to these neighborhood trees. There is a public benefit to these big trees. We should advocate for first line of defense. If no one is pressuring homeowners to have fiduciary responsibility to prune these trees, then we will be losing trees. What is the point of having permitting process, if all they have to do is apply?
- vi. Dwan: I hear you. It's a frustrating balance. I know homeowners who spend thousands of dollars a year to maintain large trees. What I heard was that these property owners have been there for decades and, on professional advice, decided that it's time to remove the tree. Through our permit process we have seen projects change course and we got a lot of trees planted that wouldn't have been planted otherwise.
- vii. Guidarelli: Even though this tree is on one person's property, it benefits the whole neighborhood. Maybe community and neighbors can raise funds to have work done? If this tree does end being removed, the neighborhood can think of replanting another tree. We're here because we want to increase the canopy and don't want them to decline. We feel for you.
- viii. Antonino: Thank you, Leslie, we need to have people to have eyes on the ground.
- ix. Guidarelli: Regarding hawks: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/masswildlife-staff-directory> Andrew Vitz, State Ornithologist 508-389-6394.

- x. Leslie: I wanted to advocate for the tree. If we want the big trees to be here, we need to preserve the middle-aged trees now. I will contact Andrew Vitz.
- xi. Leigh Meunier suggested a way to memorialize the loss. Whatever the outcome is for last ditch efforts to preserve the tree, we should honor the trees.

4. Updates from City, *continued*

d) UFC volunteer day #2 at Lincoln Park

- i. Boukili: Would like to set up a volunteer day focusing on removing excess soil on trees. Think it's too late in season now, so maybe best to wait until Spring.
- ii. Guidarelli: Does the city have air compressors for air spades? That would speed up the process. I would be happy to operate it.
 - 1. Boukili. Not sure, will ask.
- iii. Antonino: also will need root pruners, soil knives, scrapers, trowels.
- iv. Decided best timing would be later winter before leaf out. Possibly March-ish. Could do it as an arbor-day event.

5. Ongoing Work Updates

a) Adopt-a-Tree program

- i. Northcross: We had a task hand-off for program to continue in the spring. Thank you for everyone who volunteered.
- ii. Dwan: Thank you for everything, you have left a notable program behind.
- iii. Boukili: Austin Miles wants to start up a similar type of program, may have some questions.
- iv. Austin: Wondering how you got this program started and wanted to know how successful it has been.
 - 1. Northcross: Program started two years ago. New plantings had 230 adoptions. Been able to connect with neighbors. Communications with how to care for and water tree and how to stay in contact with the city. We would be happy to support other programs and share what we learned. We have done it one way for the past couple of years, but would love to see it evolve.

b) ROOT Collaboration - no update.

c) SomerStreets Tabling

- i. Clifford: Halloween event. Guidarelli, Antonino, Grossman, Mertl, Clifford. Lots of participation. Kids in costumes. Sharing information, seed bombs. Gave away plants and fairy garden kits from the growing center. A lot of people didn't realize that we had an Urban Forestry Committee. 13 new enthusiasts signed up. Look forward to doing it next year. Doing this at the winter farmer's market would be nice.
- ii. Boukili: Thank you! People re-visiting or was it new people?

1. Clifford: A lot of new people. Wanting to know what the UFC was. Didn't know we existed. What does the blue dot mean? Helps develop and ongoing conversation with community.
 2. Grossman: Met someone on the pedestrian and bike committee. Great enthusiasm. People who adopted trees. A lot of talking.
 3. Guidarelli: Everyone I spoke to first time knowing we had a UFC. One resident was distraught, had lost all hope about trees. I wrangled them back in. Anecdote: the rainstorm. People sought refuge in the trees. Even if they don't know, they love trees deep down in their hearts.
 4. Antonino: Leigh Meunier so helpful. Jennifer great at getting seed bombs to people. Seed bomb Halloween 'trick' for kids. Throw seed bombs in people's yards. Amazing rainbow!
- iii. Dwan: Amazing how much this committee has done in a relatively short time. How much we have done and how many people have not heard of us. So much progress and so much more to do.
 - iv. Clifford: Inspired to write a little blog. Ran into someone on the street and she didn't think we were doing anything during COVID. But we have done so much! Something on the website so people feel like we are doing things for them.
 1. Dwan: Could be a retrospect of what we have done. Going back to when Boukili came on 5 years ago. We didn't have a professional before then.
 2. Clifford: Will draft something. Boukili has done so much, truly.
- d) Outreach
- i. Clifford: Boukili was able to print some signs for natural habitat in progress. Quincy, Stone place park, Central Hill pollinator garden, Morse Kelley fenced in area.
 - ii. Clifford: flyer in the mail announcing arbor day poster contest: 'Be a cool community and plant trees.' Reaching out to 5th grade teachers that they understand the rules. We did a modified version last year and had some really good submissions.
- e) Tree Species Selection and Planting Standards
- i. Meeting yesterday at Prospect park: Jennifer, Tori, Leigh. Focused on the natural area (Black Locust) and plantings at base of the monument. Lots of dieback at the base, and some undesirable plants that have popped up in place (cottonwood?). How do we have someone manage the property and be more fluid rather than fixed into the original planting format? Mostly invasive plants in the natural area. Meadow is mostly grasses now, not many if any flowering plants. How can the leaves be managed better?
 - ii. Stone place park. Leaves get blown from path and into the planting beds. Not much other maintenance to do.
 - iii. Union Square: bioswales along the street filled with native plantings. Very healthy and doing well.
 - iv. Citizens bank traffic triangle. Use to have milkweed and has been planted with mums now (Oct). No mums as of late. Can we stop planting annuals that are resource and time intensive? We should be doing perennial natives for displays throughout the city.

Antonino has annexed the planting bed to manage. Needs DPW to leave it alone so that it can have a better more sustainable planting.

- v. Dwan: We should certainly create a list of management practices that can be served to the city and DPW so they understand how to take care of specific locations around Somerville.
- vi. Clifford: That's exactly what we're trying to generate and formulate so that we can move forward with aiding the city in open space care.
- vii. Breaking down park specific, right of ways. Would be helpful to know who is responsible for what property care. Or inviting Louisa/horticulturist to come speak so we can have a discussion on the matter?
- viii. Boukili: in response to the adoption of an area. Put forth a proposal for the plot and how to care for it. PSUF would review and inform DPW, there would need to be formal signage.
 - 1. Antonino will submit an application.
- ix. Grossman: This is really important especially as the city moves towards more intricate plantings with native species.

6. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

- a) October 21st, 2021

Roll Call Vote to approve meeting minutes @ 6:32 pm.

- i. Yay: Mertl, Dwan, Guidarelli, Clifford, Grossman, Boukili, Antonino
- ii. Nay:
- iii. Abstain: Murphy, Althea

- 7. **Adjourn:** Motion to adjourn meeting unanimously approved at 6:33 pm [motion Boukili, second-Clifford]