

Urban Tree Commission Minutes 9.15.2023

Attendance:

Members: Howard Birnbaum, Barbara Darnell, Ruth Goldman, Julia Malakie, Amy Sangiolo, Elizabeth Sockwell, Marc Welch, Beth Wilkinson.

Update:

MW: Continued on the risk tree removal work and requested pruning. They will be moving over to grinding stumps which will take up most of October. Then tree planting in November and back to stump grinding in December. Standing by for Hurricane Lee. Removals have been 75% internal and 25% contractor. Had to use contractors more than expected because they had a vacancy in the department. Not the smoothest summer but got the work done.

JM: How many removals?

MW: This year there are fewer removals than the last few years. 399 (40 are trees planted last year) this year to date, but the bulk is now. Damaged or dying trees.

Discussion of microbursts and storms. Remembering Waban macroburst.

ES: Marc, are some trees more resilient in storms? Are the tree roots deeper etc.

MW: Not really. Better determinant is overall health of the tree and its surroundings.

BW: In a really wet year, like this one, does it make it more likely that a new tree will fall over?

MW: Yes, if soil is saturated and planted in a big open area, but this is not a big problem in Newton, not how we plant.

Street Tree Removal Requests:

197 Hartman Road (1 or 2 trees?) Developer/builder wants to put a driveway in - Norway Maple is not in great shape.

1149-1151 Walnut St. (right in the Highlands). Trees are two Honey Locusts. Marc has tried to work with them but they keep wanting to apply for a request. Highland Area Council has worked with them for a long time and this is the 3rd developer on the project.

Updated Tree Ordinance:

HB: Did anything result from the Public Comments at Public Hearing in August?

MW: They have not met yet to discuss the Public Hearing.

JM: They have not voted on protecting trees below 40" diameter on all lots. Only protected on 3 family plus lots or 2 family lots for developers. Can cut down 39" tree without having to replace as long as there is no construction. Some members wanted to revisit straw votes, but Josh wants to wait until law dept. is available in October. Tree supporters include NSHS junior: Made a website ProtectNewtonsTrees.org.

New Business:

From LP: Hopeful there will still be opportunities to protect trees beyond the proposed ordinance including cemeteries and 2-family development. Could Marc and team track whether development happens within the next two years. Just like now, Marc cannot do anything about people who cut trees without a permit. After the ordinance, people will have to get tree permits

for trees over 6". If they get a tree permit to cut a tree just to do a clean up, but then do construction before 24 months, they won't get building permit because they cut a tree down within 24 months. All in the permitting system now. Currently, Marc is not issuing tree permits through this system. When the ordinance is updated, I will start using the new system.

Marc is intending to switch to new.gov. Takes time to set up. Either way, Marc can see everything else in the system. Marc can see everything that every other dept. is doing.

BW: How does Marc's team do all this work?

MW: there is no extra staff provided.

JM: The plan is for all departments to be on the new.gov system.

MW: In the new system, I will get all messages and sign-offs through the system and for everyone to see everything. Tree permits used to have to be handed in person to get building permits and MW would not see the engineering and building permits.

ES: What are the benefits of NewGov? Does it increase accountability?

MW: For inspectional services it makes it easier. Before NewGov, someone who applied for a building permit, needed to process a tree permit. So it streamlines that piece. We've been using it for about a year. Before signing off on a project, I need to sign off. "Yes this is complete. They have complied," email needs to come from me otherwise inspectional services will prevent the project from going forward. A lot of projects take two years. Now I can just send messages quicker within the system. Consolidates information on permitting, planning. But if people cut trees that they aren't supposed to, we won't see it until the end when they get an occupancy certificate. Seattle has an ordinance that tree companies have to get a license to remove trees in that city. But you can't capture people who just cut down a 6" tree because anyone can do it.

JM: What if companies don't know about the new ordinance?

BW: How do tree companies know if the property owner got a tree permit? Is it then the company's responsibility to ensure there is a permit?

MW: Some will verify that there is a permit and others not.

MW: Any tree that is imminently dangerous, can be cut without replacement. There will be a form for this. Trees that are dangerous are in a separate category.

BW: What if someone didn't want to pay to have a tree removed, just had it pruned to death?

MW: Significant or severe damage, also can count as cutting a tree down. If a developer does that, I will tell them they need to replace it. But if it's over many years, it's harder to say.

RG: I have to run. Thanks everybody. Who can continue taking notes?

ES: I can continue taking notes.

BW: Any other new business?

BD: At my Unitarian church, this would be the "sharing concerns time."

JW: Didn't know that was a thing! *laughter*

JM: It's a thing! *laughter*

BD: Marc, I'm concerned about trees at Levingston Cove. There seems to be mulch over the root system. Can you please reassure me?

MW: Haven't been over there recently. I will take a peak and let you know.

BD: People moved out of 10 Hyde St and damaged a Linden tree. Too much to chop up for yard waste collection.

BW: There is a dead tree at the library as you're on the side of the swale toward the parking lot.

MW: When did you last notice that? I'm wondering if I might have grabbed it. I can take a look.
ES: What do you think Marc about the extreme flooding at the library? Can we prevent flooding there by planting more trees?

MW: Tree planting there won't stop the flooding at the library since it's a low point with a stream. When we get a storm event, the parking lot floods. It has always flooded since as long as I can remember. Two things: when you have a large rain event, there's more water than the ground can handle. Some things can't be prevented no matter what you do. Also: trees help regionally, so the more you have in people's yards and in the area, it helps prevent stormwater runoff.

ES: Concerning that the City of Newton has key resources, City Hall and the Library, built in a low, flood zone...What could be done?

MW: Need to dig out the pond at City Hall. Did that about 10 years ago.

JM: Interesting thing to watch. They drain the pond, bring in heavy equipment to dredge it. Then they take the silt and that increases the capacity.

AS: Did we rebuild Countryside again in a flood zone?

JM: There's a link to the conservation commission meeting that Emily Norton has. It was discussed at the conversation commission meeting. The plans were shown. Countryside is going to be on the east west portion of Dedham st parking lot to the west on the highest part of the lot. School would be above ground. Parking lot would be underwater. Are the teachers going to run out and go to their cars? Or just stay in school? Storm in August when Newton got 6.7 inches. A hundred year storm year. It looks like plans would stay away from the champion River Birch. Good thing we have a great tree warden.

MW: I shared with everyone that the River Birch is a pretty cool tree. Haven't heard anything.

BW: True and we need to think about "What do we have to advocate for so that Marc Welch is capable of doing what he does?"

JM: Any update on a new crew member?

MW: No not yet. As a profession, tree work, arbor culture is a skilled trade. It's a skilled trade like plumbing so it's suffering.

JM: Is it because it's a dangerous and unpredictable job?

MW: Well storm response, city emergencies happen, but it's not all like that. There are jobs in the private sector with regular hours and 6 figures. The public sector is different.

BW: Marc wrote a great article on the arbor career field. ["The Importance of Being an Arborist"](#) we put in the Newton Conservators' newsletter. We covered a lot. I will send out Marc's article. Thanks everyone.