**Newton Urban Tree Commission**

**Meeting August 16, 2024 7:45 am**

Minutes

**Attendance:**

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

Guest: Melissa Brown.

**VOTE:** May & June minutes approved.

Howard asked about the mandate/mission statement of the City Tree Commission.

The page on the website was circulated.

Marc will send out all the ordinances on trees and the committee agreed to discuss, per Howard’s suggestion, the mandate/mission of the Urban Tree Commission.

**Forestry Department Update**:

Completing clean up from the last two storms. Completing any tree removals and starting to plann for the fall tree planting.

Working their way through interviews for three tree maintenance positions.

Julie Babcock, the former payroll and operations clerk for Parks, will move over to the administrative position once her payroll position is filled. 8 positions are open at Parks and Rec so a lot going on. Julie has already been helping tree administration so it will be an easy transition.

Melissa: Planting - a priority to plant in heat island places but many of them don’t have berms so how is this handled?

Marc: Forestry does not create tree pits unless it’s a new redesign like Newtonville. Most of the city has berms but some are not wide/deep enough to create a good tree pit. So far, haven’t had a lot of this situation - still working on places with decent berms. For the first time, ordered extra for the fall, given worries about availability and off loading of trees with staffing shortage.

Elizabeth: are you delaying fall plantings because of heat/climate change.

Marc: Not really, start planting in late October/early November. Order extra trees in the spring and hold them over to plant in the fall. As long as the ground is not frozen, we can plant and trees are still not dormant in the fall. We can go into early December.

Elizabeth: saw tree farm in upstate NY - isn’t this where we get our trees?

Marc: We get ours from a nursery outside Buffalo. Marc has already ordered the trees for the fall.

Julia: did you order extra this fall for the spring, given the availability issue?

Marc: I did not because we always have extras from the fall to the spring. For the first time, nursery sent a fall and spring “availability” order, so maybe we should order for the spring now.

Julia: are certain species harder to get?

Marc: larger growing trees are still easy to get. Crabapples that he likes to get are not to be found but he did buy a lot two years ago.

Beth: you see the numbers so you know what you are going to get.

Marc: I try to order as soon as the availability list comes out so I can get what I want. Occasionally, I miss something.

Beth: have you seen reductions because of the new funding for trees as you predicted last year?

Marc: There has been some reduction but mostly Newton buys bareroot and this is less popular. New City of Boston Tree Warden came from Detroit is interested in planting bareroot and using the same tree nursery. Marc buys 1000 trees and we are a good and consistent tree warden. Marc worries that the nurseries will sell off for development (family business) because the land is more valuable for development.

**Tree removal requests:**

Marc: hard to avoid removing the bigger Norway because of the DPW project. The tree lilac is nearly 20 years old and is not “thriving” but there is nothing wrong with it.

Most of our trees are growing exceptionally well because we’ve had so much rain in the past several years.

Julia: why lilac is not flourishing?

Marc: probably was not watered exceptionally well which is why we like to do our own watering. Also the berm is narrow and possibly soil is not good.

Julia: Can you move the tree?

Marc: some of our more frequent builders suggest moving it trees. We’ll charge this builder for replacement and try to get two trees out of this for replacement.

Julia: are you having the problem of trees removed and then trying to replant and finding asphalt that has been left in an old driveway?

Marc: Yes, this year, when they put in sidewalks and curbs in a new way, they don’t leave any berm so there is no place to plant. Marc will reach out to DPW about the new sidewalk configuration.

Beth: It’s happened at Weeks playground and Trowbridge.

**New Business**

Melissa: At Programs and Services on Wednesday 8/14, raised the idea of keeping track of the new tree ordinance questions/problems especially with neighbors who have problem with builders next door. Like a form they could fill out.

Marc: old system had a “report a tree ordinance violation” - but this is a good suggestion, because we did not bring this over in the new system. He will change this to tree ordinance concern and people can fill out. We track all the data but typically these challenges, concerns etc. are emails and harder to track but we can turn into a form.

Melissa: categorize the type of comment - tick box.

Howard: related question. Neighbor complained about paper work involved in removing a tree plus the cost of getting an arborist - have you heard complaints about expense?

Marc: if it’s an exempt tree, there is no fee from the city.

Howard: this is about getting an arborist and costing thousands of dollars.

Marc: If someone is looking to remove a tree larger than 40”, then there is a cost.

Done 15 for 40”+ and 130? For exempt trees.

For their lot, the need to fill out the tree remover form, which has to be done by the tree removal form. Typically they are not charging for this.

If tree requires an arborist assessment (more than 40”) there will be a cost.

If it’s part of a construction project and you need an arborist assessment, then it could be 1000+ dollars. People think they need to do much more than they have to from reading the ordinance.

Marc: Encourage people to reach out, we are happy to speak to them.

Melissa: there is a group that has website “[www.newtonpropertyrights.org](http://www.newtonpropertyrights.org)” that is putting out a lot of misinformation. They don’t say who they are. But it appeared right after Lawrence Lee put up objections and a Coldwell Banker broker gave a misleading presentation.

Julia: did the Ash trees get treated for Emerald Ash bores? Are they still out there? If they have laid eggs is it still a good time to get them?

Marc: we have not carved out the staff time. We’re still ok to do it, but probably better to have done it earlier. Marc thinks they are close to done. Injected into the trunk - stays there for 2 - 3 years so it’s there when a feeding takes place for anytime in the lifespan - want to do it when liquid is moving in the tree - flow rate is important. Have to go back and look at the details.

Beth: how are the beech trees doing?

Marc: Not seen beech leaf disease but seen other ailments on our few beech trees. Feels like it’s inevitable that all beech trees end up with it. Seems like it is inevitably fatal for most trees - very new and still a lot of question marks. All native and non-native beech trees.

Melissa: any treatment for fungus attacking hemlocks.

Marc: it’s actually an insect. Natural controls were released a few years ago - appears like this insect is less impactful than it was years ago and possibly due to the natural controls. Hemlocks suffer from a number of other elements.

Beth: Kay Kahn got the $$ for Hemlock Gorge - not successful. Beth successfully treated her hemlock.

Melissa: asked if we are tree city?

Marc: tree city is not something that we should aspire to. Lot’s of paperwork and fairly meaningless.

Melissa: Champion tree for the tree at Countryside

Marc: has applied twice but the arborist who comes can’t get the height? The Trunk is definitely larger than anything listed - 2nd largest from any tree - 117 inches, River Birch. Height and spread is very significant - comparable to state champion for this kind of tree but the trunk is really big. Someone nominated a Cucumber Tree in West Newton - 44 inches, but the one on Shorncliff is 60+ diameter.