

## **Urban Tree Commission**

Meeting Minutes

Friday, June 16, 2017, 7:45 a.m.

City Hall Room 205

Present: Jess Barton, Barbara Darnell, Julia Malakie, Barbara Smiley, Marc Welch.

Absent: Bob DeRubeis, Francesca Piper Koss, Amy Sangiolo, Beth Wilkinson.

Also Present: Shane Mark, Director of Operations, Department of Public Works

### Approval of minutes

The minutes of the May, 2017 meeting were approved by voice vote.

### Complete Streets/Beacon Street Tree Removal Update from Shane Mark

- There are two main issues with sidewalks in Newton: they are not always ADA compliant, and snow and ice control can be difficult because poor sidewalk conditions limit the ability to plow curb to curb, which ends up narrowing the street.
- About six months ago DPW adopted the complete streets program and got a \$400,000 grant.
- The intent is not to take down the trees, but they recommend removal if they think the tree will be an issue moving forward. Marc Welch looks at all the trees and will hold a public hearing for removal.
- On Beacon Street the trees slated for removal are causing significant issues for DPW. Aesthetics are not a concern for them; they are not simply trying to make the sidewalks look good.
  
- Guest question: The Waban Area Council objected to the removals in order to try to trigger a public hearing. The question is whether there is another solution?
  - o Answer: Norway Maples are at the end of their life and account for many of our trees. It's a case-by-case situation, so not planning to take down all of the trees. Another concern is that not removing a trees and then digging down to lay the sidewalk may kill the tree because the root structure will be cut.
  
- Guest question: How many trees will be left on Beacon Street?
  - o Answer: About eight to ten. From Chestnut Street to Center Street about 25 trees will come down. Many of those marked for removal are Norway Maples or are in decline.
  
- Guest question: Why not do sidewalk construction and tree plantings at the same time?
  - o Answer: That's sort of being done already.
  
- Guest question: Is there a plan in place for balancing sidewalk needs and the future of trees?
  - o Answer: Larger projects have tree planting plans, such as West Newton and Newtonville. We are working on better planting methods to allow for better root

development. We will make larger berms when we have the right-of-way to do so, but it's not that easy because of underground utilities and sewers.

- o Newton has had poor success in "set back planting," where residents allow for trees to be planted on their property as is done in Wellesley and to some extent in Needham. The resident then owns and takes care of the tree.
- Question: What is being done to account for utilities and gas leaks?
  - o Answer: DPW has made good progress on working with National Grid. DPW has monthly meetings with National Grid. National Grid says there are no "leak prone pipes" on Beacon Street.
  - o Leaks are classified:
    - Grade 1 leaks = immediate fix
    - Grade 2 = fix in one year
    - Grade 2A = six months
    - Grade 3 = monitor leaks
  - o DPW is requesting National Grid to fix G3 leaks in the streets DPW is working on.
- Question: How was the Complete Streets strategy adopted?
  - o Answer: It was not adopted by the City Council, but it was presented to the Public Facilities Committee. DPW undertook the Complete Streets project since seeing this issue more and more.
- Question from guest: (1) what was the public notification process for such a large project; (2) what is the plan for the trees, the notice on the trees all went up after the project started; and (3) what is being done about the impact of the construction on property, for instance some walls are being undermined.
  - o Answer: Ball was dropped on notification for tree work. Didn't have a public meeting for this because couldn't capture the large audience. Did communicate the project through ward councilors, put flyers on the houses on Beacon Street that were going to have a tree removed. DPW says the proper procedure was followed.
  - o The project was planned since November but the neighborhood was not notified until around May.
- Question: Replacement plan for the trees?
  - o Answer: Trees will be planted along Beacon Street in the fall, but not sure of the number, and then planting will continue in the spring.
- DPW will work around trees if they can work around them.

Shane Mark: number of trees to be removed was only 6 or 7 last November; it grew later.

SL: Perhaps Complete Streets philosophy should be debated again if it ever was

Adams St people came to DPW

JAM: this is DPW imposing

Shane Mark: there are areas where they can ramp over. Others where trees leaning over street.

BAD: on Lake Ave, roots were ramped over; Beacon St seems like change in philosophy.

SM: ultimately mayor's decision. Will try to work around where we can.

BAD: much debris is left in berms from sidewalk work.

JAM: now coming in for removal of remaining trees on Adams St; can residents be confident this is all for Beacon St.

SM: Will be cases where they will want to remove tree after seeing what's under sidewalk. DPW looking at long-term maintenance.

SL: is there any place where asphalt vs concrete can be debated in city? Residents and city council should debate

JAM: what is life cycle cost of concrete vs asphalt?

- SM: DPW prefers concrete. And residents don't like checkerboard of asphalt & concrete.
- MW: hears from a lot of people who don't want asphalt.

JAM: long stretches w/o shade bad for walkability. BAD: will be like West St, w/lollypop trees that will never be as big.

JAM: would like to know cost per foot of asphalt vs concrete. Feels replacement rate as measured by caliper inches is insufficient. And

Debt of inches owed to Forestry keeps growing. Backlog

Jess has to leave.

MW: Maureen Lemieux said at budget meeting that in future she'd try to put more money for planting in budget.

BAD: elected officials need to weigh in on policy. Cambridge treats tree better.

MW: tree loss from DPW projects very small compared to overall tree loss.

BAS has to leave.

JAM question on Nahanton: another case of planning well underway before Were any other solutions considered? Was it for safety or traffic flow? Why take big island and make it small island?

MW: would be good to know further in advance.

SM: tree impact doesn't shake out until late in design phase. Dedham/Carlson has high rate of crashes, people are running the light. Volume of traffic unbelievable, Brookline onto Dedham is continuous right hand turn. Problem is that Brookline & Carlson offset. Mt Ida

on board with reconfiguration because a lot of their students involved in accidents. Mt Ida approached city, giving city easement to align intersection.

JAM: more large pine trees on Mt Ida's own property will come down. MW: Mt Ida will be replacing caliper inches.

JAM: Seems like it's really a light timing issue rather than safety issue.

Guest comment: should slow down decision making process to get public input, bring in Marc Welch sooner so trees are a design criteria.

- SM: we're getting better at communication, learning from mistakes. Will bring in Marc sooner to inform UTC.

Sallee Lipschutz: bring in area councils, WAC, NHNAC.

- JAM: not all areas have area councils.  
SM: we tell city councilors from ward.
- Visitor; that's not enough.

JAM: let UTC chair Jess Barton know about projects, and assume any intersection could have tree impact.

UTC has to leave room.

JAM: question on private tree at 1307 Beacon that someone from DPW convinced owner to let them remove. Are there any more cases of that? SM will look into that.

SM leaves

Other hearings:

Harwich Road: MW has conveyed objections.

Parkview (Cabot School project): MW trees in way of repairing culvert.

Adams St: MW heard complaints about trees that weren't cut down last fall.

Cambria Rd: Nice tree. JAM urges sidewalk be moved in to accommodate tree. Sounds like CAN-DO would consider.

Dedham/Nahanton: MW says despite looking separate from Dedham/Carlson, it's all part of same traffic flow. More discussion of how crazy traffic volume is in this area.

More discussion on Adams Street. BAD notes remaining tree not impacting sidewalk at all.

Discussion of Zervas trees. MW notes will be another street tree removal request for a relocated Zervas crosswalk; he's still waiting for info.

The meeting was adjourned.