

Urban Tree Commission

Meeting Minutes

January 15, 2016, City Hall Room 205

Present: Jess Barton, Barbara Darnell, Julia Malakie, Francesca Piper Koss,
Barbara Smiley, Marc Welch, Beth Wilkinson
Absent: Lauren DiGeronimo, Amy Sangiolo
Guest: Chris Steele

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

Forestry

Marc provided a staffing update. A fourth employee will be starting January 25 and a potential fifth could start at the end of March. Once these two positions are filled, Forestry will be able to staff two crews instead of just one. At that point Forestry would have one vacant position. There are no candidates at this time.

Tree Manual

Chris is still receiving input material and is putting together the remaining sections, aiming for a more complete draft by the February meeting. After his first pass on the assembled draft, he recommends a new set of eyes to review for continuity, style consistency, etc. and also to suggest good uses of graphics (no graphics are included in the material submitted so far). At this point, everyone looked at Julia and she volunteered to review the draft and suggest opportunities for graphics and photos. For the other sections that remain to be updated, Barbara D. will provide links to primary sources for legislation and policies (including the Open Space Plan) and Marc will review and update the City's tree care policies and standards.

In discussion of a target date for completion of the revised Tree Manual, Chris suggested being ready to go by Spring planting, a "natural" deadline. In terms of formal review, the Manual does not have the significance of a regulation, and instead represents the Commission's advice to the City, so lengthy external approval is not needed.

2016 Initiatives Prioritization and Next Steps

The December meeting discussion continued in two general areas:

1. “Canopy coverage” as a goal and metric for Newton forest management.

Google Maps and Google Earth were discussed as tools to communicate and manage Newton’s urban forest and I-Tree as a vehicle for tree mapping. Marc will talk to Julie Coop and Mollie Freilicher at DCR to find out what the state and other communities are doing with the system.

Beth recalled a remark by David Foster, Director of Harvard Forest, that one can’t do tree conservation one tree at a time. It was noted that while the Tree Commission was formed with a focus on individual City street trees, we, like many other municipalities, are now working with a view of managing the urban forest, which also includes park trees, cemetery trees, private and public conservation land trees, and even trees on private property. The City should know where the tree cover is and where it is not, and have goals and programs (such as setback protection and care of city-owned trees that are not street trees) for managing both.

2. Education and outreach.

The key to slowing, and then reversing the steady shrinking of Newton’s urban forest is the support of Newton’s citizens. We need to prioritize efforts to educate and involve the public in a variety of ways.

Discussion on both these 2016 priorities will continue at the next meeting.

New Business

There was no new business.

The meeting adjourned.