Urban Tree Commission
Meeting Minutes
February 19, 2016, City Hall Room 205

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

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

Forestry Update

By February 29, Forestry should be up to full staff – six people. The current priority is "cleaning up things that have fallen" during recent wet snowstorms (i. e., tree branches). In March, the priority will shift to removals and pruning, as weather permits. One three-person crew will focus on removal and the other crew largely on pruning, with some removal work. It is anticipated that Forestry will be able to augment its workforce with park maintenance staff helping out on stump grinding. At some point in late March, the priority will shift to planting.

When Committee members expressed pleasure with the new staffing level of six, Marc reminded us that when Forestry was at its peak in the 1970s, there were 40 tree workers and that when Forestry was disbanded in the 1990s, there were 17. He noted that a large number of trees were planted in the '70s (no doubt some of those that are being removed now).

The tree planting goal for FY2016 is still 240, which will have to occur mostly this Spring because of the lower staff level last Fall. (The Newton Tree Conservancy street planting target is 200 trees.)

Marc has ordered the city trees for FY2017. Bare root red oaks were in short supply, in part because of the increased demand for the species (maples and ash have become less popular because of recent insect problems) and because nursery planting was reduced during the economic slowdown of eight to ten years ago. If the shortage continues, Forestry may need to explore contract growing with a nursery to meet future needs. However, current funding of expenditures in future years is problematic. Another limiting factor is the current availability of bare root stock. The possibility of reviving the "Forestry Division Nursery", where in past years some trees were grown by the City, is remote, given the increasingly limited availability of land for the project.

Tree Manual

In Chris' absence, discussion focused on one of the sections that has not yet been revised. Marc indicated that the section "Tree Care and Maintenance Practices", which currently includes detailed tree care and maintenance practices for City trees, will be substantially

shrunk. Instead of including specific "best practice" standards, there will be links to nursery stock growing standards and practices that are available without charge. Unfortunately, payment is required for access to ANSI standards. In addition, the section will include links to websites of governmental and non-profit tree organizations and associations. Mark will get his piece to Julia, for editing, within a couple of weeks.

2016 Projects

There was discussion of focusing on two complementary and interdependent elements: projects and outreach. Projects may include conducting a street tree census (collecting data), implementing systems for canopy management (using data to evaluate and communicate the state of the urban forest), and perhaps revisiting setback planting (implementing practice changes consistent with goals). Outreach will include involving the people of Newton in these projects and communicating at multiple levels and via multiple channels to ensure ownership.

1. Tree Census

Marc spoke about Open Tree Map, a potential tree census tool, which he has had in-house for evaluation for a long period, during which time the elements and capabilities that had been missing were incorporated. It may now be possible to do a soft launch in the Spring and involve the community with tree inventory work. The compatibility of Open Tree Map's cloud-based services with Newton's technology infrastructure may limit its usefulness as a vehicle for the public's access to the data.

We need to collect data before we can use tools such as i-Tree to manage the Newton forest. i-Tree, as an example, can mediate data from different sources and time periods, apply metrics for measures such as forest health, runoff and hardscape percentage to allow the City to manage its forest against goals over time. Newton has at least 15 years of aerial photographs and MassGIS also has substantial aerial photography to support its statewide analytical services. A next step is to determine what we want to measure and what data we will need to do that in order to successfully use systems such as i-Tree.

At the next meeting Marc will demo the Open Tree Map system that Forestry has now.

2. Outreach

Jess proposed an elementary school outreach project, such as a tree survey brochure or interactive online resource for elementary school-aged children that could engage an early interest in trees. Jess and Francesca will assess interest from schools, the library, Boys & Girls Club, YWCA and other possible outlets. If interest and support can be engaged early, with tools and technologies that are more accessible and attractive, perhaps future generations will be more likely to value their community's trees.

Visitor

Duane Hillis, Friend of Nahanton Park and tree enthusiast, visited and shared his ideas about engaging community involvement. He has long been a planter of trees (that he often just gives away when they are a few years old) and suggested the UTC involve the Newton community by encouraging citizens to plant and grow trees that could then be moved to public spaces. He described his experience with tree growing and sharing. Marc spoke about the importance of getting neighborhood involvement for follow-up care, that volunteers would be needed on both the plant and grow sides.

New Business

There was no new business.

The meeting adjourned.