

Urban Tree Commission

Meeting Minutes

Friday, April 15, 2016, 7:45 a. m., City Hall Room 205

Present: Jess Barton, Barbara Darnell, Julia Malakie, Barbara Smiley, Marc Welch, Beth Wilkinson
Absent: Bob DeRubeis, Francesca Piper Koss, Amy Sangiolo
Guest: City Councilor Alison M. Leary

Membership

The Urban Tree Commission has an authorized voting membership of 12. Two members are *ex officio* (the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation and the Superintendent of Urban Forestry). Ten members are Newton Citizens appointed by the Mayor. There are currently three citizen vacancies. In order to fill these, Barbara Smiley suggested that members approach potential candidates among their acquaintances and others suggested outreach via *The Newton Tab* and ListServe. It was agreed that people interested in the work of the Commission be invited to attend a few meetings to become familiar with UTC functions and projects.

Forestry Department Update

Winter clean-up work continues (largely picking up parts of trees that had fallen to the ground). However, planting season starts April 19, when the bare root trees are delivered. There will be 160 to 200 street trees to plant, for different purposes:

- 40 to 50 will be citizen service requests for a street tree planting at their address
- 50 to 60 will be part of the tree replacement requirement for trees removed for construction at the Angier School site. Approximately 800 total caliper inches will be replaced over the next two to three years, in various locations. They will not be planted at the Angier site.
- 40 to 50 will be planted in the Ward School area as part of the "Complete Streets" program and in Chestnut Hill (Florence and nearby streets) as "tree ordinance" replacements.

The tree planting season should end by mid-May. Trees are planted bare root, and need to be placed in the ground very soon after delivery. The ideal time is when there are no leaves on the trees.

There was a brief discussion of the effect of paving material (asphalt vs. cement) on street tree health. Marc said the key is not the material. "Any tree stuck in a two-foot wide space will eventually have root problems with the paving, because the roots need to access water somehow." He noted that sidewalks built in the 1950s were seven to eight inches thick with a

good underlayment of gravel that allowed water availability for tree roots. Current practice is four inches.

After planting is finished, Forestry will focus on removal of dangerous trees, some pruning, and continued addressing of storm damage. The Mayor's Office has allocated \$300,000 for contract workers to help eliminate the backlog of tree removal and pruning service requests. There are ±300 removal locations, with 340- 350 trees and ±400 locations for pruning service requests. The highest volume of this work occurs in May and June.

Eighteen months ago, Marc completed a "windshield survey" to identify problem trees. A follow-up survey is planned for this summer.

In response to a question, Marc estimated the current street tree population at 22,000.

Solar Panels [not on agenda]

Alison Leary encouraged the Commission to become more involved in developing a consensus on solar panel locations and offered to provide a list of the top six or seven upcoming sites so we might visit in advance of final selection. Barbara Darnell will coordinate with her.

Alison also expressed concern about "clear-cutting" tree removal for development on private property and suggested that the Tree Preservation Ordinance might need to be strengthened. Marc noted that Newton builders and homeowners are still transitioning to full understanding of and compliance with the Tree Preservation Ordinance. Most of the removal permit requests he receives are for small numbers of trees. He also noted the value of vigilant neighbors in bringing unpermitted removals to his attention.

Tree Manual Status

Progress continues, albeit very slowly, on the current revision.

2016 Projects: Tree Observation Booklet

Jess contacted the School Committee about the possibility of using the booklet in the school system. They already have materials for use this year, so deferral until Fall is preferable. Meanwhile, the Newton Tree Conservancy will put the booklet on its website, so we may be able to get some feedback via that route.

2016 Projects: Tree Census (Open Tree Map)

Marc gave a demo of Open Tree Map, a web-based system that could be used not only to conduct a new census of city-owned trees but also to integrate tree data with the City's GIS and potentially integrate with data capture for other components of the urban forest (e. g., private trees, conservation properties). This would enable the City to make information

available to the public, promote stewardship, and increase citizen involvement with the urban forest.

The system appears to offer a great deal of flexibility and Forestry can customize it to the City's specific needs. Marc plans to determine what data elements should be used and introduce the result to both the UTC and the Newton Tree Conservancy (NTC). The goal would be an internal launch, potentially in the Fall, with participation of both groups, to explore what Newton could do with the system.

Goals include not only the ability to conduct a tree census, but also to promote citizen stewardship, with public involvement and people caring for trees and becoming aware of what they can do to help their urban forest.

New Business

There was no new business. However, a development occurred related to some old business. The National Grid gas leak settlement was reached at \$100,000. It is so far unclear what damage is covered and what trees require replacement. Ongoing damage is apparently not covered. There is possibly more to come on this subject.

The meeting was adjourned.