

Urban Tree Commission

Meeting Minutes

Friday, June 17, 2016, 7:45 a. m., City Hall Room 205

Present: Jess Barton, Julia Malakie, Amy Sangiolo, Barbara Smiley, Marc Welch

Absent: Barbara Darnell, Bob DeRubeis, Francesca Piper Koss, Beth Wilkinson

Approval of Minutes

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

Forestry Department Update

- Work continues on the "special appropriation" risk tree pruning and hazard tree removal work. We are now down to 10 to 15 outstanding pruning requests and, on the removal side, to a list of 50 to 60 service requests, some new in the past few weeks, but ±45 are older. The one that remain are in locations that require a police detail, which makes them more difficult to schedule, particularly during the construction season.
- To develop a new list of the trees that now require attention, Marc has started a drive-by survey, using 70-80 routes largely based on snowplow routes. He looks at each tree, records a brief evaluation of its condition and places it on a list for pruning or removal as required. Before the work starts on the new list, another member of Forestry will review the designated trees to make sure conditions have not changed. Marc estimated that 700 to 800 trees will require removal. Data from the survey might be available by September.
- Marc also noted growing evidence of a relationship between demolition / new construction and dead or dying street trees. "Dieback", where a tree dies from the top down, is usually a root problem. Street tree roots grow under unpaved areas, principally yards on private property, because that is where the water is. When that soil is disturbed or compacted, the tree's roots are damaged.
- One Forestry employee has resigned, leaving the staff level at five. It will take several months to go through the process of filling the position.
- Marc mentioned that he has been receiving excellent feedback from homeowners on the work that has been done over the past few months. Removing dead trees and branches, pruning, and cleaning up tree debris is evidently noticed and appreciated.
- Marc was also pleased to report that Forestry has tree watering "under control". It has long been a challenge, but Forestry now has the equipment and staff to prioritize it.

Tree Manual Status

The Tree Manual was not discussed.

New Business

Gas leak regulation.

Julia raised several significant concerns with the proposed regulations. The draft provides a mechanism for compensation for damage to buildings as property. She proposed that it treat trees as property as well, providing a mechanism for compensation for damage to city trees. The draft also makes minimal provisions for gas companies to report leaks to municipalities in a timely and usable manner, which, at the very least, makes it difficult for municipalities to manage gas leak damage. She proposed that the Urban Tree Commission submit its concerns to the DPU before they consider the regulation proposal. Because the deadline for comments submission is July 5, before the next UTC meeting, Julia volunteered to draft comments and circulate them.

[Julia did draft a letter, received comments and submitted the communication to the DPU on July 5.]

Tree removal regulation vs. practice.

One of three removal permit requests was for street improvement at the Lexington and Commonwealth intersection in Auburndale. It was agreed that this was a necessary removal, but the process could have benefitted from earlier consultation with Forestry. Two other requests were for driveway expansion. One received numerous objections and was denied; the other was withdrawn.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.