

Urban Tree Commission

Meeting Minutes

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

Present: Jess Barton, Barbara Darnell, Julia Malakie, Beth Wilkinson, Barbara Smiley

Absent: Bob DeRubeis, Francesca Piper Koss, Amy Sangiolo, Marc Welch

Visitor: Yasodhara Paruchuru

Approval of Minutes

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

Forestry Department Update

There was no Forestry Department update. (Marc was away.)

Status of Gas Leak Regulation

The UTC's comments on the DPU's Docket 16-31 on this subject were delivered before the July 5 deadline, both electronically and in person (thanks, Jess!) The Newton Tree Conservancy and the City of Newton also commented. See all the comments at <http://web1.env.state.ma.us/DPU/FileRoom/dockets/bynumber> .

Julia reported that, at the public hearing at the DPU office on July 14, other speakers also advocated faster and more complete reporting. Julia gave us a quick overview of the years-long gas leak problem and settlement and the process and status. Damage summary: 370 leaks detected; 478 trees directly damaged by gas; ±600 trees with roots in gas-affected areas that have declined since and may require removal.

New Business

City Tree Protection

This discussion began with Barbara Darnell's report of tree root damage at Zervas and continued with a number of examples of City trees being damaged by City projects.

Barbara D. observed several large trees, on Beacon St., with severed roots on the street side. The soil was very dry, suggesting they were not being watered, and there was no coverage or

mulch, leaving the severed roots exposed. These are the trees that were to be *preserved* in the Zervas parking lot construction.

It is not clear who is responsible: these are City trees, but the project is being managed by a private contractor. Barbara mentioned that Councilor Alison Leary had requested information about this. The issue of responsibility and accountability for City trees when private contractors are doing the work needs to be addressed. Preferably before Cabot construction begins. That these trees, if lost, would be replaced "by caliper inches" is not an adequate solution.

In addition, Jess, Julia and Beth reported on individual observations of damage to trees on public property, although it was not completely certain all were on City property.

One step that could start to address this problem is for the UTC Commission to be consulted about City decisions about tree removals. (The Mayor's office can override a decision not to allow street tree removal for a driveway and can also forgive the replacement requirement.)

Housing Strategy

There was a very brief discussion of the relationship/impact of the Housing Strategy on Newton's tree canopy. Some of the proposed projects will simply replace hardscape (parking lots) with a different kind of hardscape (buildings); others appear to require tree removal. We agreed that continued discussion of the effects of the Housing Strategy on our goals of protecting and increasing the City's canopy coverage is worthwhile.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.