

Urban Tree Commission

Meeting Minutes

Friday, August 19, 2016, 7:45 a. m., City Hall Room 205

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

Absent: Bob DeRubeis, Francesca Piper Koss, Beth Wilkinson

Visitor: Yasodhara Paruchuru

Approval of Minutes

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

Forestry Department Update

Recent focus of the Forestry Department has been is removal of dangerous street trees. Since late May, Forestry has been performing an annual survey to identify dangerous trees. The street tree survey, started in May, has been finished with identification of 950 trees requiring removal (most of which have already been removed). Forestry is currently conducting a second round of inspections on school properties, to be followed by inspections of parks and open spaces. This fiscal year's budget contained an increase of \$200,000 for risk tree removal, allowing for additional use of contracting crews. Forestry will be requesting additional funds this fiscal year to complete the work.

Starting in late Fall, through next April, the focus will be on stump grinding. Because of the current emphasis on hazardous tree removal (and an existing backlog), there are currently approximately 2,700 stumps. Forestry may use contracted services and/or other department staff and plans to acquire two or three new stump grinders to supplement existing equipment. (Some of which is 25 years old.) Once this round of stump removals has been completed, stump grinding will be on a request basis until June.

With recent resource increases (including contract work) and backlog reductions, Forestry is able to move toward a regular annual schedule of maintenance work performed during the Summer, between Spring (April) and Fall (November) planting seasons. This will also allow the continuation of Marc's annual survey (late May – early June) of a portion of the street tree population, followed up in the Fall by his staff assessing and tagging trees that need to be removed. Newton now has about 20,000 street trees. (The count is updated every three years.)

Marc noted that this was the worst year for Gypsy moth since the 1980's. His survey work, followed up later in the season by his inspectors assessing and tagging trees, provides a time lag between observations that helps detect insect damage.

Care of City Trees

This agenda item arose from concerns that have arisen recently about trees on City property affected by several City projects.

Adams St.

The Public Works roadway and sidewalk reconstruction project that will bring Adams St. into compliance with ADA standards will require removal of more than 30 street trees. The trees that will be removed are all healthy, but preserving them would make sidewalk reconstruction impossible without damage to the roots that have caused the sidewalk problems. City Councilor Alison Leary has asked for Urban Tree Commission input before a public hearing to be held in early September. We discussed the issues, using a preliminary plan for the construction and agreed to send a statement of concerns and recommendations before the meeting. A copy of the UTC Comments sent to Councilor Leary is attached to these minutes.

Zervas

Barbara Darnell updated the Commission on the status of the trees whose roots had been damaged by the construction to lower the level of the Zervas parking lot. Roots of several mature trees that had been selected for preservation in the construction plan were damaged. Extra watering and selective pruning were recommended to improve the chances of the trees' survival. This is being handled by the on-site manager. Marc said that it seems the recommendations are being followed and that a risk assessment will be conducted by the landscape contractor, using ANSI standards, before the school opening.

Newton South Modular Classrooms

Several trees were removed for the location of modular classrooms at the South campus with no public notice. Marc noted that the Tree Preservation Ordinance requires posting of notice of removal only for street trees. Otherwise, Forestry is informed and the City funds an inch-for-inch replacement. Amending the ordinance to provide advance notice of City tree removal to the UTC before the fact was suggested. Marc pointed out that no permit is required for removal of trees less than eight caliper inches on City property.

New Business

City Tree Census

Currently planned work is counting, not a detailed inventory. The last detailed census was performed about 25 years ago. After five years, the data becomes inaccurate. Marc plans to document a portion of the street tree population every five or six years, with random sampling for species distribution, using snow routes.

Housing Strategy

It was suggested that we invite a representative of the Planning Department to meet with us to discuss the tree implications of the new Housing Strategy.

Drought Effects

Julia raised this issue. Marc noted that the worst impact would be on recently-planted street trees, but Forestry has assumed responsibility for regular watering for the first year, reducing the drought effect (vs. contractor planting without a watering program). The effect on larger trees will not be apparent for a few years.

Emerald Ash Borer

The Emerald Ash Borer has been observed in Newton. Marc reported an isolated case of an Ash tree killed by the insect. Ash trees make up a small percentage of Newton's street tree population, and are mostly small trees. He does not believe that treatment would be cost-effective.

The meeting was adjourned.