

## **Urban Tree Commission**

### Meeting Minutes

Friday, September 16, 2016, 7:45 a. m.,

City Hall Room 205

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

Absent: Bob DeRubeis, Francesca Piper Koss, Amy Sangiolo, Beth Wilkinson

### Approval of Minutes

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

### Forestry Department Update

The Risk Tree Removal process, underway since last April, should be complete in the next few weeks. There are about 50 trees remaining to be removed, based on the Spring assessment. Forestry will conduct another survey next Spring. Between now and then, Forestry will resume normal operations, responding to citizen requests for removal. They will do some pruning and will plant 200 trees in November. After the end of the month they will be shift operations to stump grinding. Forestry needs to acquire two or three new stump grinders. Because the 15 year old grinder that they currently use spends a fair amount of time being repaired and the limiting factor for stump grinding is equipment. Years of not doing it has left a backlog, in addition to the new stumps created by recent tree removals.

There will be 2,500 - 2,700 stumps to be addressed. The equipment is about 30 years old and breaks down frequently, so new stump grinders will be acquired. This activity will be Forestry's focus until the end of April, with some pruning and removal work as needed. They will also use some contractors and staff from other divisions and departments to complete the work, especially for cleanup. The estimate is six stumps per day per crew. They will purchase new grinders and hire contractors for some of the work, which should cost \$300-350,000, for which Marc will request a new appropriation. In response to a question about how deeply the stumps were to be ground, he said that depth of removal will be 6-8", based on visual impact rather than on preparation for planting.

The general seasonal work program is: Summer, removals; Fall, planting; Winter, stump grinding; Spring, planting. Specific requests, emergencies and new projects are handled as needed.

Two postings for removals have been submitted: 126 Stanley Rd. (European weeping birch for driveway expansion) and 32 Wertherell St. (Norway maple for new driveway).

After the public hearing on Adams St., and assuming that the project will go forward, the DPW Commissioner will request Mayor's Office approval for removal of the existing street trees, which should occur this Fall. Planting will probably wait until Spring. The possibility of a gas leak on Adams St., which could affect location of replacement trees, has been raised

with National Grid. The current plan is to replace approximately 35 trees with 66 trees (based on caliper inch replacement). Tree species selection and location will be handled by Forestry. The contractor will handle planting.

### Possible Tree Ordinance Modifications

Recent meetings have raised some concerns about the existing tree ordinances:

**Public Trees.** One suggestion was changing the replacement requirement for city trees from number of trees to caliper inches. Marc noted that the City generally does this now (cf. Adams St.).

**Private Trees.** Barbara Darnell raised a concern about damage to tree roots from the effects of construction that is very close to the setback line. The possibility of increasing the setback requirement was discussed. While there was agreement that this construction practice can have long-term damage to otherwise healthy trees, it seemed any remedy would involve zoning regulations.

Marc mentioned that the number of Tree Removal Permit requests that he receives has declined over the past few years, now averaging 150 permits per year. An emerging concern is possible damage to City Trees from construction practices on private property.

### Housing Strategy

Lily Canan Reynolds of the Planning and Development Department joined us to discuss the relationship between plans for increased housing density and concerns for the effect on the urban forest and the loss of open space. She pointed out that *Newton Leads 2040* is a long range planning document focused on identifying a comprehensive list of potential housing sites and that the subset of properties that will be addressed first will be evaluated on a case by case basis. This would be the same process as is used now. Julia suggested that, despite the City's Open Space Goals, many open spaces are still ending up with developers. Lily pointed out that the Complete Streets and Storm Water Management initiatives both support the preservation of trees and green space. It was suggested that tree loss is associated with the loss of smaller homes to larger development. Lily thought that was a zoning issue and emphasized that the Housing Strategy would work *with* the Open Space and coming Transportation Strategies. She left us more to think about.

### New Business

There was no new business

### Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.