

Urban Tree Commission

Meeting Minutes

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

City Hall Room 205

Present: Barbara Darnell, Julia Malakie, Barbara Smiley, Marc Welch
Absent: Jess Barton, Bob DeRubeis, Francesca Piper Koss, Amy Sangiolo, Beth Wilkinson

Before the meeting began, a visitor, Dan Meus of Hibbard Rd., Newton Corner, joined the group to voice his concerns about the effects of utility wires on the City's street trees and pruning practices, and his questions about the species selected for street tree planting. In the discussion that followed, Marc provided a history of Newton street tree species selection and planting practices and the long-term effects of past monocultural planting. He also explained the Commonwealth-imposed responsibilities of the utilities to provide reliable electrical service and their consequent pruning practices. He also outlined the reasons why moving cables underground was not a likely solution and described Newton's efforts to moderate aggressive utility pruning of street trees.

Approval of minutes

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

Forestry Department update

Fall planting is largely complete: 312 street trees were planted by Forestry and the Newton Tree Conservancy. Forestry is about half way toward completion of its stump grinding program (which included a significant backlog that had developed due to past lack of equipment and/or staff). This is to be followed by pruning on a street-by-street basis.

There was a brief discussion of the improvements in attention to and management of Newton's City trees over the past 10 years. Forestry funding, staffing, and goals have expanded during the period, when it became apparent that Newton's street trees were in serious decline in both number and health.

Discussion of FY 2018 can begin at January's meeting.

Responsibility for trees

This topic arose in connection with the Newton Housing Authority Jackson Road Senior Housing project. The question was a narrow one: whether the NHA would be responsible for compensation/replacement for trees removed from "25,200 square feet of undeveloped, wooded property" for construction. The answer was that the NHA operates under State rules, rather than City rules and therefore is not required to replace removed trees. We can,

however, encourage the project to preserve significant trees on the property, or replace them in their landscaping plans.

Newton TAB article

There was a brief discussion of the next UTC article submission for the Newton Tab. Ideas included pruning of city trees (e. g., Forestry program, Utility practices) and the city tree planting program (perhaps better timed for Fall).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.