**Urban Tree Commission Minutes**

**March 19. 2021**

 In attendance: Marc Welch

Michele Cruz

Barbara Darnell

      Julia Malakie

      Amy Sangiolo

      Beth Wilkinson

      Guest: Howard Birnbaum

Because the meeting did not begin with a quorum, we postponed approving minutes until the April meeting.

**Forestry Report**

Marc presented his Forestry Update. All six forestry positions are now filled.

Although Marc’s team is behind where they’d like to be in pruning, they are almost caught up with residents’ requests. When that work is done next week, they will move on to stump grinding. There are 800 stumps from removals, and all of them might not be done before the planting season begins.

With approximately 200 trees from the Green Newton 4C program to commemorate Newton residents lost to Covid and 115 trees from the Newton Tree Conservancy, the forestry staff will plant over 300 trees this spring, which is 150 more trees than usual for this time of year.

The 115 trees planted with the Newton Tree Conservancy will (as usual) be watered by the residents at the properties where they are planted. The 4C program will pay for Forestry Department staff to water of its trees, potentially augmented with some volunteer watering.

Most of the 4C trees will be planted at school sites or along Commonwealth Avenue. There will be some outdoor events to commemorate those plantings. There is a memorial event planned at Mason-Rice on the first Saturday in May, potentially to be followed by gatherings at Ward and Newton South schools.

Sometime in April, tree gators will be placed on all of the street trees planted last fall. All of the trees planted then and those that will continue to be watered from prior plantings will get mulch as well—for a total of 1200 trees.

The Parks, Rec, and Culture staff is just starting its internal budget process. The proposed budget will be presented to Programs and Services Committee of the City Council on May 4. (Usually that meeting takes place in mid-April, but adjustments for Covid have slowed the process.)

**New Business and Questions.**

1. There was a question about the causes of tree loss. Marc reported that gas leaks are responsible for a small number. Vehicle damage and house fires also cause some damage. However, age and the condition of trees cause most of the loss. There hasn’t been money for general pruning for many years, and that preventive maintenance helps to prolong the life of trees.

The department’s loss rate for newly planted trees is 3-5%, well below the national average of 10%.

Marc reported that at the current rate of planting and loss (800/year), the city will have no more mature trees in 20 years. We all agreed that is an issue to revisit when the City budget recovers from the effects of Covid.

1. Marc explained that the number of tree planting requests from residents has doubled in the past six to eight years. He attributes that to the more frequent presence of the tree crews throughout the city.
2. There also was a question about off-berm planting. The department’s experience has been that residents do not welcome the practice, but its benefits for the health of trees is worth re-visiting over the next few years. In other local communities, only Wellesley has had success in planting off-berm, and they have had a mandate for the doing it for over thirty years. However, they have many fewer street trees (3,000 vs. 21,000 in Newton).
3. One commission member asked about the grates over trees on Lincoln and Walnut streets in Newton Highlands. They are being monitored to make sure that they are not harming the trees. The Forestry Department staff does not use grates any longer, but some of the new trees installed by the Washington Place developers do have grates.
4. A commission member noted that Cambridge has lowered the size of private trees protected by their tree ordinance from 8” to 6” in diameter. Marc will check whether their tree removal moratorium still is in place.