**Urban Tree Commission Minutes**

**May 21. 2021**

 In attendance: Marc Welch

Michele Cruz

      Beth Wilkinson

Julie Winsett

      Guest: Howard Birnbaum

**Forestry Report**

**Tree Removal Requests**

Marc reported that all three residential sites that had tree removal notices posted last month received objections and, therefore, were denied. According to Mass. State law, if anybody (including the City) wants to remove a street tree that is not dead, dying or a hazard, a notice must be posted on the tree, in a newspaper, and in one other public space. After the posting, an informal hearing is held. However, if anyone objects in writing before that date, the tree cannot be removed.

It is possible for the person who requested approval for a removal to appeal to the Mayor to overturn a denial. That appeal must be made within five days of the denial. If the denial is overturned, the City Clerk to communicate that information to the Ward Councilors, and the person who made the appeal must pay to replace the tree at $180 per inch and for the cost of removing the tree.

In answer to a question, Marc explained that the removal of trees on private land is covered in the Private Tree Ordinace, Section 20 of the city ordinances.

**Departmental Work**

The Forestry Department will have planted more than 900 trees in FY 20-21. Unlike last year, there will be no net gain on the total number of street trees this year—as there was last year for the first time since the 1980s.

In the next couple weeks, the forestry crew will begin to remove hazard trees. The “risk survey” that guides that work has started, and the removals will continue well into September. The crew has started weekly watering of trees.

**Budget**

After a decrease because of Covid last year, the Forestry Department received a budget increase for the coming year, FY 21-22. The overtime budget will return to the pre-Covid level. The budget for contractual work will be slightly above the pre-Covid level.

There will be an additional increase of $250,000 - $270,000 to restore the planting program to the pre-Covid level. In addition, work will begin on an Urban Forestry Plan for Newton. The Department will seek input for the plan from members of the Urban Tree Commission, other stakeholders, and the public. The team will consider issues with street trees and park trees and how to correct them. Their goal will be to get the urban street tree population back to its high point in the late 1970s. All work to develop the plan will be done by members of the Forestry Department.

**New Business and Questions**

In response to a question, Marc explained that Senator Cindy Creem has joined with other senators to propose legislation to require all municipalities to have a planting plan. They also are considering changes to the law that governs liability of private trees falling on other properties.

In response to another question, Marc said that Eversource has been requested to remove a wire from a dead tree at Fire Station 4. The tree most likely will be replaced by a utility pole, which will require the agreement of the City Council.