**Urban Tree Commission Minutes**

**March 18, 2022**

In attendance: Marc Welch

Howard Birnbaum

Michele Forte Cruz

Julia Malakie

      Beth Wilkinson

Julie Winsett

Guests: Elizabeth Sockwell

Melissa Brown

**Minutes**

The minutes from the February meeting will be approved at the April meeting

**Forestry Report**

Marc reported that the Urban Forestry Department has continued with proactive pruning of mature street trees—with both regular staff members and contract workers paid for with ARPA funds. The work is being structured along the snow-plow routes, of which there are 70 in the city. The routes done so far were in West Newton and Newton Highlands.

Earlier this week, the team changed to doing a combination of miscellaneous pruning, tree removal, and stump removal. That work will continue for another 1-2 weeks. Then, they will prepare the equipment to do tree planting starting in mid- to late-April, depending on when the trees are available. They also will mulch the new trees and all other small trees planted within the past two years.

The City budget process is scheduled to begin in March with the expectation that the department budget will be substantially the same.

City Councilors Emily Norton and Julia Malakie met with Marc and Marie Lawler from the City’s Law Department to discuss possible changes to the Private Tree Ordinance. Some of the changes they proposed were judged to be in conflict with state law. For example, the Tree Warden cannot issue stop work orders, and the Urban Tree Commission cannot assume powers as strong as those of the Conservation Commission. They still are considering how they could create differing levels of protection depending on the size of the trees, having different protection for “exceptional trees” and trees over 30” in diameter.

**City Street Tree Plan**

Marc continued his presentation of the State of the Urban Forest in Newton, which will end up as part of the City Street Tree Plan.

He began by discussing tree loss and its implications. At the beginning of the 1980s, Newton had 39,000 street trees. Now, it has just under 21,000 trees. Marc illustrated the areas of greatest loss on a map divided into eight zones that approximate the ward divisions. Zones 1, 7, and 8 have had the greatest loss.

Marc then explained the environmental impact of the loss of street trees. For example, if Newton still had the number of trees that it had in 1980, it would have 40,000,000 fewer gallons of stormwater runoff each year than it has now. If the City had maintained the number of trees it had in 1980, there would be 771,000,000 more pounds of carbon sequestered.

Mature trees are much more valuable to the environment. Mature trees are 8-10” in diameter and greater. In Newton, the average mature tree is 17” in diameter. It takes 600,000 new trees to equal the environmental benefit of 20,000 mature trees. Therefore, there is great value to trying to maintain the mature trees we now have.

The City has increased planting in recent years, but those trees still are young. For the two years after a tree is planted, it requires 100 gallons of water per year, which wipes out its benefit to the environment for those years.

The percentage of loss is much higher for young trees, and they need much more care than mature trees do. (However, Newton’s rate of loss for young trees is lower than average.) Most young trees die of a general “failure to thrive.” However, there have been insect problems, too, although fewer since winter moths have been brought under control. There are disease problems such as cedar apple rust and anthracnose. Drought also brings about foliar disease.

The full draft of the City Street Tree Plan should be available to the public by the end of this year.

**New Business**

Marc explained that the Newton Cemetery submitted a plan for tree removal connected with a plan to expand their burial area. Their replacement plan does not meet the requirements of the City’s Tree Ordinance. They have filed an appeal with Mayor Fuller. The next step will be for the Mayor’s office to notify the Ward Councilors. The Mayor has 6 weeks to make a decision about the appeal.