

Urban Tree Commission Minutes

December 16, 2022

In attendance: Marc Welch
Howard Birnbaum
Barbara Darnell
Julia Malakie
Liza Sockwell
Beth Wilkinson
Julie Winsett

Guests: Melissa Brown
Cheryl S.

Opening and Minutes

Mark started a recording of the meeting.

The minutes of the November 18 meeting were approved.

Forestry Report:

Marc reported that November was a quiet month for the forestry crew because there were no significant storm events.. They did pruning, tree removal, and stump removal. They completed all work at the Heartbreak Hill Reservoir.

Including the Newton Tree Conservancy trees, a total of 700 trees were planted in the fiscal year. That number includes some of the final 4C memorial trees.

In January, the forestry workers will do pruning, and Marc will work on the FY24 budget with the Executive Office. If the override passes in March, there will be revisions to the budget to account for the additional funding for street trees.

There still is a vacancy in the department. In response to a question about whether it's possible to raise the salary to attract applicants, Marc explained that the salary range is determined by the union structure.

Tree Removals

None for December.

Programs and Services Committee Discussion of Proposed Changes to Tree Ordinance

The P&S Committee has not discussed the proposals since the last meeting of the UTC.

New Business

Melissa Brown stated that there was a large area of tree removals at the Newton Cemetery. She said that the cemetery's Level 2 status as an arboretum does not have any tree conservation status.

Marc said that the winter is predicted to be cold, possibly with a fair amount of snow. He explained that the current La Nina pattern often leads to a "front-loaded" winter in which the snow tends to fall early in the season.

There was a discussion of how trees planted in the City's right-of-way at the edge of private properties are regulated. Marc said that the width of the right-of-way (measured from the street) varies from street to street and is dependent on the width of the road itself.

Marc explained that private roads and "paper streets" (which were laid out but never built) are not covered by MA law or the Tree Protection Ordinance. They are a "no man's land," and no public trees can be planted along private roads. It's not always obvious which streets are private, and the Forestry Department uses the City's GIS map as a reference. There are 30 miles of private or paper streets in Newton.

Marc said that MA law prohibits expending public funds on private property, but the Shade Tree Law has a provision that allows planting on private land along the edge of a public road.

If a fallen private tree blocks a public street, the City will clear it.