

Urban Tree Commission Minutes

February 17, 2023

In attendance: Marc Welch
Howard Birnbaum
Amy Sangiolo
Liza Sockwell
Beth Wilkinson
Julie Winsett

Opening and Minutes.

The minutes of the January meeting were approved by all voting members.

Forestry Report:

Marc reported that his staff spent most of the past month doing pro-active pruning. They will conclude that work next week with work in West Newton, off Derby Street near Wellington Playground. In March, they are scheduled to do approximately twenty removals.

If the weather continues to be unseasonably mild, they will begin to much the young street trees early.

Work has not yet started on the FY24 budget. If the override passes, there will be funds to plant one thousand new trees each year. There also would be funding for hiring additional staff. If it is difficult to find new staff members, the department would hire contractor workers instead. However, the cost of contract work is at least five times the cost of having in house staff do the work.

There was a question about raising the wages offered to entry-level forestry workers in order to attract them to the department. Marc said that new staff members in his department start at the highest grade for the City's union and that the rate cannot be raised with union negotiation.

The City's payment rate is \$30/hour. Private contractors pay approximately \$40-\$45/hour. The state of Massachusetts pays the "prevailing wage" of \$60/hour.

Marc said that there is a shortage of tree workers in the whole region. He said that there currently are too few students in the University of Massachusetts' two-year program—and in other programs throughout the state. He said that one proposal is to lower the qualifications for entry-level tree workers. Boston Power is beginning a mini trade school at UMass/Mount Ida for HVAC and arboriculture

Tree Removals

There were no new applications and no new developments on the prior applications.

Programs and Services Committee Discussion of Proposed Changes to Tree Ordinance

On February 2, the Programs and Services Committee devoted an entire meeting to continuing with its line-by-line review of the two proposals to update the Private Tree Ordinance. There was a request for Marc to create a smooth scale of payments as the size of trees increases, and he will do so. There will be public discussion of the goals and concepts of the ordinance after the committee members' line-by-line review is done.

Beth reported that she's aware of interest in ensuring that those who would like to remove invasive trees in order to plant more environmentally friendly species without penalty (an "environmental restoration exception). Marc said that there already is language to allow for that but that he's open to expanding that section.