

Urban Tree Commission Minutes

November 18, 2022

In attendance: Marc Welch
Howard Birnbaum
Barbara Darnell
Julia Malakie
Amy Sangiolo
Beth Wilkinson
Julie Winsett

Guests: Melissa Brown
Pam Wright

Opening and Minutes

Mark started a recording of the meeting.

The minutes of the October 21 meeting were approved.

Forestry Report:

Marc reported that the fall tree planting will conclude tomorrow with the Newton Tree Conservancy planting of 30-50 trees, a smaller number than in past year because they received fewer applications. The Forestry Department planted an additional 660 trees, with the final 10-15 scheduled to go in next week. That is the greatest number of trees planted in a season since at least the 1970s. (Last year the total was 650 trees.) The fall planting went smoothly and without the weather problems that frequently occur.

An additional 100 trees will be planted in the spring, bringing the City's total for the fiscal year to 800.

For December, the tree crews will do clean-up and miscellaneous projects. One large project will be removing brush and small trees from the stonework at Heartbreak Hill Reservoir. It's the first time that work will be done in-house workers. The project will require two to three Forestry Department workers and possibly the assistance of two contract workers.

The work is mandated by the state's Office of Dam Safety and must be done every three to four years. The tree staff prefers to do the work in cold weather, when there are no stinging insects in the rocks, and the poison ivy is less problematic. Earlier in the year, a volunteer did clean-up of trash in the water of the reservoir.

By late December and early January, the crews will begin street-by-street tree pruning. The project will be smaller in scope than last year as they begin the process of rotating through all City trees for the first time.

Marc reported that there has been no progress in filling the departmental vacancy, which has been open for eleven months.

Tree Removals

There have been no new tree-removal requests. The abutter to the street tree on Mague Avenue for which the removal request was denied last month filed an appeal to the Mayor. The ADA Coordinator reviewed the site and declared that the tree made the sidewalk inaccessible in multiple ways. Therefore, the Mayor ordered that the tree be removed. A new tree will be planted in that spot this fall if the abutter doesn't object.

The pear tree on Langley Road near Union Street (with a Beacon Street address) prevented the installation of an access ramp. The project was approved by special permit, and it was decided that there was no way to alter the design. The builder will make a payment for the removal.

In response to a question, Marc explained that the petitioner for a removal pays for the work and sometimes does the actual removal. The pear tree is so compromised, he said, that the removal will be very easy and will take only 20 minutes.

Julia asked about a second tree on Mague Avenue, and Marc said that the storm drain on the corner might make that impossible. He said they will try and that an American hybrid elm is a possibility for a replacement.

Presentation on Tree Benefits of Proposed Override

Marc said that the second presentation was attended by approximately 30 people and that the recording is available on the city website:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/play/DhiiDSoc8Nygh_XluS_3GUvjson8Q4RjAQAkUusrqw_EXICycZC3A5QpHYnR4T0AGpuag-Gjmvdqzuml6.jjX_-Svhn5ak9BZI?continueMode=true&_x_zm_rtaid=KgzcmxKPQX-01DFB0J8pBw.1670940038950.1807880cb453d11de512156e102ec2ed&_x_zm_rhtaid=925

In response to a question, Marc verified that the override would increase the Forestry Department's budget by \$500,000 per year. As explained at the last Commission meeting, the plan would be to focus on street trees to make up for lackluster care in the past. Most of the money would be allocated to staff to plant and prune trees.

Melissa Brown asked whether some of the money could be used as salary for office staff to do paperwork that might be required by the revised Tree Preservation Ordinance. Marc said that the plan is to shift some of the operating budget for payments for contract work to salaries for in-house tree crew members. Adding 300 more tree plantings each year also would require extra staff hours. Those staffing additions will create more work for Marc to coordinate, and he'll need assistance with that work. He said, however, that the overall plan would be contingent on being able to find staff to hire, which would require creativity.

Programs and Services Committee Discussion of Proposed Changes to Tree Ordinance

Continued discussion of proposed changes to the Tree Preservation Ordinance will take place at the City Council Programs and Services Committee on December 7. The Committee expects to devote at least one meeting per month to their review of the two proposals.