

Trees For Watertown Minutes
Board Meeting
April 19, 2017
Sasaki Associates, 64 Pleasant St.

Board Members present: Dennis Duff, Jane Holden, Bob Lauricella, Libby Shaw, Michele Waldman. Absent: David Jay, Genie Johnston
Guest: Chris Hayward, Watertown Tree Warden

Michelle Waldman moved to accept the minutes of the March meeting; Dennis Duff seconded; all in favor.

Treasurer's Report: Libby Shaw brought a corrected balance forward. There were two new memberships and no expenses. Michele Waldman moved to accept; Bob Lauricella seconded; all in favor.

President's Report

At the TFW March meeting, in the interest of an overfull agenda, Libby did not report on the day-long Community Tree Conference at UMass Amherst that she attended March 7th. Libby recommends this annual conference to everyone. The conference topic this year was utility tree pruning strategies and utility-community relationships.

1. Good news: Eversource reported they are shortening their pruning cycle from ten years to three years. This should allow utility pruning to be more conservative. The bad news: Eversource's nationwide pruning policy still requires yards of empty space around wires. This one-size-fits-all policy ignores growth differences among tree species and ignores the considerable social and environmental cost which major canopy loss visits on urban communities.

Unlike the greener roads in towns like Amherst which the conference presentations focused on, urban streets have very few shade trees. Urban street trees are chronically stressed by difficult growing conditions. Heavy utility pruning disfigures their canopy and drives the trees into accelerated decline. In many urban sites, the probability of a replacement tree doing well long term is low. City tree wardens should work closely with utility pruning crews to carefully evaluate each tree to ensure pruning damage is minimal.

2. Utility companies increasingly use chemicals that inhibit shoot growth and root diameter, to save money on pruning. Secondary benefits are claimed for treated trees, but growth-inhibiting effects are dose- and species-dependent. More research is needed on long term effects of this chemical treatment on urban trees and their environment.

TFW 2017 Annual Meeting/Day of Engagement

Since the original chosen date of June 6th competes with Watertown Volunteer Day, dates in September were discussed. **Library availability is the first consideration - Libby will research.** The day will begin with a brief annual meeting followed by a movie screening relating to trees - perhaps "Trees in Trouble," although a more upbeat movie may be found. David Meshoulam's Google Tree Map will be introduced along with Jane Holden's "Find the Largest Tree" Contest.

June 6th will include an arts event at Mosesian Center for the Arts. This might afford an opportunity to introduce the Google Tree Map. Libby will inquire.

Jane suggested a Whitney Hill Woods Clean-up event - this was an annual TFW project many years ago. Libby recalled that TFW's annual clean-up was initiated by Adelaide Sproul and other TFW Whitney Woods neighbors, and suggested a clean-up would best be spearheaded by current neighbors of the woods. Chris Hayward said clean-up of Whitney Hill was discussed at a recent CC meeting and that DPW would provide gloves and trash bags and remove assembled trash bags.

Lowell Ave tree protections not removed after road work

A Lowell Ave resident reported to Libby that tree construction protections remain on two trees months after roadwork was finished. Chris Hayward said they should have been removed long ago. Libby offered to write Gerry Mee to encourage further action with the contractor.

David Meshoulam - new regional non-profit and Watertown summer project

Libby encouraged members to check out David Meshoulam's website "speaksforthetrees.org" - David is trying to start a Boston area organization which, like San Francisco's "Friends of Urban Forests", secures funds to hire kids from under-resourced areas to plant and care for trees in their neighborhoods. David has met with Chris Hayward about conducting a pilot program in Watertown this summer, as well as with Patrick Fairbairn of the Conservation Commission and several Watertown High School science teachers. He will be meeting with tree activists in other towns and will go to Watertown High in May to present his summer project to students. To help his non-profit initiative, David M in collaboration with Boston's Artists for Humanity has submitted a project ("Imagining Green") to a national USA Today contest with a substantial monetary award.

Chris said David would be very helpful in what Chris is trying to accomplish. He also mentioned that Patrick Fairbairn is collaborating with WHS students on a longitudinal flora and fauna inventory in small designated plots on Whitney Hill.

Libby noted that TFW voted last year to fund a scholarship for a WHS student to attend UMass Amherst's week-long summer program on urban forestry for high school students. This could perhaps run in parallel with David's summer project.

Arsenal Yards landscaping plan

Libby reported that at the April 5 Conservation Commission meeting, Chris Jones from landscape architecture firm CRJA-IBI Group (aka Carroll Johnson) presented an updated plant list for the Arsenal Yards project which replaced several tree species for which concerns were raised at the March CC meeting, regarding species vulnerability as the climate gets hotter and dryer (balsam fir, red maple). Libby was disappointed with the selection of a northern bog native, Black Spruce. Chris Hayward responded that 9 of 89 trees will be black spruce, they will be planted in 3 clusters of 3 in the storm water swale, and that the CC registry of deed stipulates that if these fail, they will be replaced with an appropriate species. Chris thought black spruce is worth a try, that Worcester is a big understanding of why we need a broad palette of species. Libby rejoined that we should plan for long healthy tree lifetimes, that northern species are more likely to die due to climate incompatibility. Chris repeated that he appreciates that Chris Jones is trying to diversify the landscape.

Tree Warden's Report

* Chris said he heard DPW's emergency tree pruning contractor had been seen climbing trees using spikes. He will follow up to confirm and will reiterate why tree pruners must rope in with harnesses rather than use spikes to climb trees.

* Chris is waiting to see tapes from Cambridge Water Department's camera inspection of the Stoney Brook aqueduct along Linear Park. So far no evidence was reported of root infiltration by the big American elm and Norway maple.

* Following on this past year's severe and prolonged drought (50% of Massachusetts is still officially in drought), Chris plans to plant fewer trees this Spring in order to spend more on ensuring young trees are adequately watered.

* Chris is happy to report that more residents have requested trees this Spring than his budget will support - in previous years he has had to work hard to find sites for street trees. To ensure the best likelihood of tree survival he seeks homeowner or tenant approval for every tree planted in front of a residence.

* Jane mentioned how bare Arlington Street is north of Mt. Auburn Street, despite planting sites there for trees. Chris said he had applied for a TD Bank Green Streets Grant for that area but the application didn't make it, so Arlington Street will have to be planted from his budget.

* Chris is working for a larger area of protection around trees during construction - he

wants full tree well protection where possible, not just trunk protection. Sidewalk reconstruction is the hardest on trees, so much can go wrong. He needs to be on-site.

* Dennis wondered why trees in Belmont seem to have longer planting strips than in Watertown. Chris said Watertown's planting strips are limited by underground utilities. He works now with Town Engineer Matt Shuman on planning tree protection during side street road renovations, they try to improve planting strip size.

* Dennis and Chris discussed caliper versus DBH as size designation for new trees ("caliper" is measured at the base of the tree, "DBH" stands for "diameter at breast height"). Dennis thinks planting larger trees provides better immediate canopy and gives trees a better chance at surviving damage from snow plows, car doors, vandals. Chris said in many cases he would rather plant smaller trees since they establish themselves faster and better than larger trees can.

* Michele asked about trees in the planned Edenfield Road reconstruction. Chris said three storm-damaged trees have been removed and one more at 36 Edenfield is on the next tree hearing. 18-20 new trees will be planted between Main Street and Bancroft, some in rain gardens and in bigger green strips, despite parking concerns of some residents.

* Chris drove down Cypress Street today, seeing where Jane had recruited residents willing to care for public shade trees. He said "My job got a whole lot better" -- every location looked great, with no wires and nice tree strips, so he can plant bigger trees.

* Chris described his 2017 Arbor Day program, to be held on Thursday, April 27th at the Commander's Mansion.

* Chris brought plans for the new configuration of the small delta formed by the intersection of Common Street, Spring Street and Marion Road. Two Arbor Day elms planted by Watertown's first tree warden Tom Brady with TFW funding will be affected. One elm is not doing well due to 2009 construction damage and will be removed. Chris plans to transplant the other elm within the new layout.

* Bob Lauricella asked about the 7 new trees just planted along Arsenal Street. Chris used Cleveland Select pears since overhead wires are a consideration. Advised AthenaHealth plant columnar Armstrong red maples in front of the building.

* Chris brought an alternate proposed landscape plan for the Watertown Square Delta. In his opinion David Jay's proposed plan is too dense and too much a monoculture of honey locusts (9 specified, with honey locusts already lining nearby Main Street). Chris's proposed plan shows two large deciduous trees and a specimen White Fir. Libby expressed strong reservations about adding an evergreen that could grow to skew the design and dominate the space. She reiterated her hope for an "Olmstead quality" designed landscape, a careful layout of signature trees that would

provide beauty in every season and would harmonize as they grew through the century as successfully as the trio of stately Norway maples had. Chris expressed disappointment; he had come to this meeting hoping to get TFW's support for his Delta plan. Recognizing his commitment to planting a fir tree, Libby will tour the Abies concolor at Mount Auburn Cemetery to see what this evergreen looks like in different phases of life.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20.
Jane Holden, TFW Secretary