



City of Cambridge

Committee Report #2

IN CITY COUNCIL

November 18, 1996

VICE MAYOR BORN
COUNCILLOR DAVIS

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to initiate an inventory and desired donation list for memorial trees and plantings and to suggest a structural procedure for people to be able to donate, including a plan for publicizing the desire for donated memorial trees and the public tree planting process.

In City Council November 18, 1996
Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.
Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy; *D. Margaret Drury*

ATTEST:-
D. Margaret Drury
City Clerk

City of Cambridge

The Public Service Committee held a public meeting on October 29, 1996, beginning at 4:45 p.m. in the Ackermann Room for the purpose of discussing a city-wide landscaping and master planting plan.

Present at the hearing were Vice Mayor Kathleen L. Born, Chair of the Committee, Councillor Henrietta Davis, Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury. Also present were Richard Rossi, Deputy City Manager; Lisa Peterson, Assistant to the City Manager; Ralph Dunphy, Commissioner of Public Works; Stuart Dash, Community Development Department; Dan Wuenschel, Executive Director, Cambridge Housing Authority; Jerry Boyle, Department of Public Works; Charles Sullivan, Executive Director, Historical Commission and Paul Ryder, Director of Recreation. ¹

Vice Mayor Born convened the hearing and explained the purpose.

Vice Mayor Born introduced Deputy City Manager Richard Rossi and requested that he make a presentation.

Mr. Rossi distributed a draft proposal for city landscaping and beautification (Attachment A) and explained the origin of the plan. He stated that it came about as a result of a spirited discussion at a City Council meeting.

Mr. Rossi described the proposed planning process, which would utilize private sector and public input along with the work of city employees. A pilot plan would be implemented because to try to do it all at once is not conducive to success. An extremely important aspect would be maintenance.

Mr. Rossi continued that the City would prepare a plan, and would use the Open Space Committee, with consultation and input from the Public Planting Committee. The initial pilot projects would be City Hall and City Hall Annex, along with some selected green spaces. The planners would also discuss the notion of encouraging landscape architects to adopt a space possibility in exchange for a sign advertising their participation. The City would control the quality of these signs.

Mr. Rossi exhibited photographs of other cities that have used this type of plan. There was also some discussion of encouraging property owners to beautify their own property, perhaps by having an award ceremony.

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¹ A complete list of those who signed attendance sheets is attached as Attachment B.

Mr. Rossi said that with regard to City Hall, the proposal is to engage in a public discussion, select a landscape designer, and then have that designer involved in a process for public input. For City Hall Annex, the plan would be to use city employees to do the design in-house and then present the proposed design for public comment. Richard Rossi added that the City would talk to other cities that have had success with public planting. The process would engage the public, and be sure to include a budget for maintenance. The City had a good experience with planting boxes and barrels in Harvard Square and a very bad experience in Central Square, where they were not maintained.

Vice Mayor Born invited Dan Wuenschel, Executive Director of the Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) to talk about the CHA experiences with what has been commended as a very successful planting project.

Mr. Wuenschel said that the CHA started with a philosophy that, if where you live is green and beautiful, residents will take more care of the place. This has proved true. Graffiti has decreased. He believes that some crime decrease is related. The CHA started by having Boston Gardens come in and catalogue what the CHA has, and provide detailed instruction and plans for maintenance of what was there. When the CHA began ten years ago, maintenance personnel saw this initiative as just another task. Now it has become a source of praise and satisfaction for the employees who work on the gardening.

Mr. Wuenschel then introduced John Kane, CHA, who has direct oversight responsibility. Mr. Kane emphasized that it has been a ten year effort and has required persistence from the top down to change employees' attitudes, along with sufficient training. Mr. Kane said that the CHA has moved towards irrigation systems, as a cost saving measure. Mr. Kane said that he believes the City is right in starting with a pilot program.

Mr. Wuenschel agreed and stated that the City would be better off maintaining one or two spots very well, rather than taking on more than can be well maintained.

Stuart Dash, Community Development Department, stated that the encouragement of private landscaping in exchange for signs would require rulemaking and oversight. Mr. Dash noted the community garden at McMath Park. This is the first time the City has incorporated community gardens into a public park. It is important to have rules regarding such issues as fertilizers and integrated pest management.

Mr. Rossi noted the importance of selection of plant material. He said that the project needs input from the Public Planting Committee.

Ralph Dunphy, Commissioner of Public Works (DPW), described the interest of DPW in continuing the improvements it has been making in City beautification.

Councillor Davis stated that she gets several phone calls every week, especially about trees. She said that this is a great idea, and added that she would like to emphasize the importance of new trees. She said that she and David Szlag would like to see "150 aristocratic trees" planted in honor of the 150th anniversary of the incorporation of Cambridge as a city.

Councillor Davis added that eventually other city buildings should be included, such as the School Department. She gave the example of the cherry trees at the King School that were so beautiful when planted but have deteriorated.

Mr. Rossi noted the work done in area of Ellery and Broadway. David Szlag said that it was working well.

Councillor Davis noted the window box competition in Cambridgeport. She then asked about tree legacies. Richard Rossi said that there is an annual budget for tree planting.

David Szlag said that the idea was that these would be trees that take a longer time to grow, that they would celebrate the 150th anniversary and would be notable at the next such celebration, 50 years from now.

Richard Rossi said it is important to identify appropriate locations.

Vice Mayor Born agreed. She said that, for example, we cannot plant copper beech trees as street trees. Mr. Rossi said the number of 150 might be difficult to achieve.

Vice Mayor Born requested that at the next committee meeting, there be further discussion of a tree program, including memorial trees and a tree piece of the landscaping plan.

Councillor Davis stated that she is not a great fan of signs. Perhaps other recognition would be just as effective as signs for the landscape architects.

Vice Mayor Born then opened the meeting to public comment.

David Szlag, 74 Ellery Street, stated that a listing of the very nicely landscaped places in the City would be useful.

Vice Mayor Born asked what documents exist.

Larry Acosta, City Arborist, said there is an inventory of street trees.

Charles Sullivan, Executive Director, Historical Commission said that the Historical Commission has an inventory of historical places. It would be useful to have a list of trees and places that have historical significant, for example, the Houghton Beech tree.

Paula Cortez, 25 Newell Street, Public Planting Committee, said there is a state funding source for the identification of significant trees. The program suggested by Councillor Davis and David Slzag is wonderful, but the City needs to consider the maintenance. It might be better to stretch the planting of the trees over a longer time to make sure there are adequate maintenance resources.

Richard Rossi said there is a real opportunity at Fresh Pond with the upcoming improvements.

Phoebe Leighton, 128 Lakeview Avenue, Public Planting Committee, said that there is a list of desired trees at the Common.

Janet Burns, 57 Frost Street, Public Planting Committee, said that there are five of these desired trees in place on the Common. The idea was that these trees would be memorial tree gifts to Cambridge. Planting memorial trees has always been a problem. There are people who want to plant them and there are not always appropriate spaces available.

Councillor Davis stated the importance of considering the entire city not just Harvard Square and West Cambridge.

Cynthia Swift, Landscape Architect, encouraged thinking about what City Hall means to all people and how they can be encouraged to come in and feel welcomed. Regarding small space planting by landscape architects, it is very important to think first about design standards. It would also be easier if the City could provide soil and infrastructure support.

Tony Platt, 113 Inman Street, Historical Commission, stated that Inman Square is a good example of a successful linkage of local business and plantings. He said that there should be an opportunity for the supporting businesses to be listed and known.

Sara Mae Berman, 23 Fayette Street, noted the problem with the hedges on the Inman Street side of City Hall. They are not clipped to be even with the wall. Ms. Berman added that two years ago Carol Johnson Associates donated some trees which were placed at CRLS. It was a dry summer. The trees looked dry. She finally watered them. Perhaps volunteers can be enlisted.

Mr. Rossi noted a problem with school grounds. The DPW cannot be responsible for all of the school grounds.

Sara Mae Berman suggested some linkage with Harvard's School of Landscape Architecture. She also suggested involving high school and elementary school students, perhaps through an occupational education project.

Mr. Rossi said that the Morse and Longfellow Schools have projects of this sort. Ms. Berman also suggested involving Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

Jennifer Jones, Carol Johnson Associates, commended the CHA for its work. She said that Cambridge is the first time ever in her experience that a housing authority has installed irrigation. She noted concerns about small planters. They are hard to maintain and must be in suitable locations. Perhaps this is a design problem. For example, at Memorial Drive and Fresh Pond Parkway, the plantings are the wrong scale for a spot that must be seen by car. She noted the importance of design issues, for example, landscape timbers may not be appropriate in some locations. She encouraged consideration of Neville Manor in a landscape plan.

Vice Mayor Born noted a citizen who wants Neville Manor to be city garden and farm if it stops being used as a nursing home.

Vice Mayor Born asked why the hedges at City Hall have not been pruned. Ralph Dunphy said they will be radically pruned this winter.

Tony Platt noted the design problem of too many signs in the City.

Richard Rossi said that the City is inundated with signs. He would encourage people not to request the City Council to put in orders for more signs. The City should be looking to take down and consolidate signs.

Rick Wheeler, East Cambridge, noted a concern about the conflict between beautification and public safety. Sometimes private hedges and trees become overgrown and obscure vision or signs.

Richard Rossi said that DPW will always deal with this.

Louise Weed, 109 Avon Hill Road, suggested making it easy for citizens to volunteer.

Vicky Boulrice, Riverside Community Network, employee of Police Department, emphasized the importance that improvements of the streetscape can have on community values. She gave the example of how barrels of flowers on Western Avenue helped get rid of drug dealers. But every year it is a struggle to come up with the money for the flowers and mulch. Abutters are solicited to water and weed. It has been a very successful community project. If the plants die, the next year the barrel is moved in front of the house of another person who wants to take care of them.

Vice Mayor Born made the following motion:

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to initiate an inventory and desired donation list for memorial trees and plantings and to suggest a structural procedure for people to be able to donate.

Councillor Davis suggested an amendment to include publicity. Vice Mayor Born agreed that this was a friendly amendment. The motion was amended as follows:

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to initiate an inventory and desired donation list for memorial trees and plantings and to suggest a structural procedure for people to be able to donate, including a plan for publicizing the desire for donated memorial trees and the public tree planting process.

The motion passed without objection.

Vice Mayor Born returned the discussion to City Hall landscaping. Mr. Rossi said that there is a wide variety of opinion about what type of planting should take place at City Hall. That is why the proposal suggests engaging in a process to interview landscape architects who would then lead a public process to come to agreement or a plan.

Vice Mayor Born asked for a timetable for City Hall landscaping. Mr. Rossi said that the plan would call for selection of a landscape architect early next year, with a view to begin work in the spring.

Vice Mayor Born asked when Mr. Rossi's staff could be ready for the next meeting.

Mr. Rossi said the response to the committee's request would take six to eight weeks. Vice Mayor Born said meeting would be scheduled accordingly.

David Szlag suggested putting information in water bills about how to trim hedges.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

For the Committee,

Vice Mayor Kathleen L. Born, Chair

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
LANDSCAPING/ BEAUTIFICATION PLAN *DRAFT PROPOSAL* FOR DISCUSSION

DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM

Many of our business streetscapes, roadway traffic islands, rotaries, public buildings and parks are lacking in visual interest which appropriate landscaping can provide. While recognizing that a considerable investment has been made over the past ten years to make city open spaces green and attractive, more can and should be done to make highly visible sites more colorful and beautiful for the enjoyment of city residents, visitors and workers.

INTRODUCTION

The City is engaged in a planning process to develop and implement a five year landscape/beautification plan. This process will include selecting appropriate sites, actively seeking the participation of private groups and volunteers and establishing realistic program goals. Of particular importance is to begin small with a few highly successful efforts and to build upon these successes. The intent is to develop a workable partnership between city forces and private forces in terms of design expertise, labor, materials and ongoing maintenance. What mix of public and private participation is appropriate in different situations will need to be established. The most difficult aspect of the plan will involve maintenance of planned landscaping improvements. Other cities and towns have started successful traffic island beautification programs. We will be actively assessing these other successful models.

The elements and time schedule for implementing a city wide landscaping plan would include the following:

ELEMENTS OF THE PLAN

1. TRAFFIC ISLANDS/ ROTARIES

The City is presently responsible for maintaining numerous traffic "islands", rotaries, and other small left over green spaces adjacent to roadways. An outreach effort will be mounted to solicit participation by landscape professionals (architects, landscape architects, gardening clubs, and landscape contractors) to design, install and maintain landscape improvements in exchange for free advertising. Such projects tend to be more complex in terms of designing to fit very different sites and in terms of actual planting activity and maintenance given the proximity and hazards posed by traffic conditions. Advertising would consist of signs approved in terms of content; size and graphic style by the city.

2. FLOWER PLANTERS

The City would expand recent efforts to make available raised planters, flowers and related gardening materials to shop keepers, businesses and residents within targeted high visibility streets. Participants would be expected to make a commitment to maintain all planters distributed for a period of one year (watering, weeding, re-plantings). The intent is to provide a quick and colorful display in front of stores and buildings within busy streetscapes. The concept would be to provide a few simple planter and plant material choices and encourage involvement by a large number of residents.

3. PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

The City will focus more attention on the re-design of landscapes at important public buildings like city hall and the city hall annex. These important public spaces need to be reconsidered in terms of maximizing both the visual and practical enjoyment of these spaces by residents, workers and visitors. Given that these facilities must be carefully analyzed and re-designed the services of a professional landscape consultant will be necessary. We shall undertake to hire a consultant or use in house staff to

develop landscape plans for these and other important sites. Funding for these larger more complex landscapes will be sought through the capital investment process in the coming year. Such projects will need to be put out for bid and implemented by a private contractor(s).

4. PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

The City will build upon attempts in recent years to introduce more varied and colorful landscapes within it's extensive parks system. More can be done in high visibility parks such as the Cambridge Common, Danehy Park, Hoyt Field and others to add more color using flowering perennials and annuals. Again to be successful volunteers will be needed to provide long term maintenance throughout the year.

5. SIGNAGE

The City will undertake to hire a professional signage consultant to design a uniform, graphically appealing and informative system of signs covering a broad range of information, rules, and regulations related to open space. Signage which is attractive, minimal and clear goes hand in glove with landscaping improvements and so must be included in this beautification plan.

6. CITY PARKING LOTS

Although not often thought of as an open space resource parking lots can be attractively landscaped. An example would be the recently completed parking lots in Central Square along Bishop Allen Drive. More can and should be done in this area to enhance these spaces through appropriate landscaping.

7. TREES

The Cambridge tree planting program continues to be a strong element of any beautification effort. Every year the City plants hundreds of trees throughout Cambridge within parks, playgrounds and along roadways. Trees are an important part of every planned open space improvement and roadway reconstruction project.

OVERSIGHT

Administration of this new program will be conducted through the Cambridge Open Space Committee in cooperation with other civic organizations. A separate sub-committee will be set up to identify important sites and funding to implement the plan. Community review of larger proposals will be handled through the normal Open Space Committee process. Responsibility for hiring design consultants, developing public outreach materials and follow up on completed projects will reside within this committee.

TIME SCHEDULE

1. TRAFFIC ISLANDS/ ROTARIES

An outreach effort should be mounted over the winter with the intent to secure agreement with one or two landscape contractors and or architects to develop sites in the spring of 1997. The focus should be on doing a few sites at a high level of quality. A brochure explaining this aspect of the plan needs to be developed and distributed.

2. FLOWER PLANTERS

Again participation by area businesses and individuals should be sought with an outreach effort. Agreement should be secured from prospective participants to maintain planters while city officials can provide technical support. Funding should be identified within the Public Works Department budget to provide planters and plant materials with a start up date of spring 1997.

3. PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

Landscape improvements to the city hall and city hall annex shall be undertaken as soon as possible. The City Hall re-design will require the services of an outside consultant whereas the re-design of the Annex could be handled using in-house staff within the Community Development Department. Funding for these larger more complex landscape improvements will be recommended through the Capital Investment Program process for the next fiscal year.

4. PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

Landscape improvements within rehabilitated and additional parks shall do more to introduce perennial and annual planting beds as well as community gardening where appropriate. The landscape/beautification sub-committee shall develop design guidelines over the coming year for inclusion in the Cambridge Park Design Guidelines. The purpose of these guidelines shall be to promote a more active strategy with regard to providing flower planting beds for the enjoyment of park users. Again the inclusion of such high maintenance landscape materials will require citizen involvement in maintaining these planting areas.

See attached lists of traffic islands supplied from DPW and the Traffic Department.

Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department

Metered Parking Lots

The Department has several small metered parking lots where simple landscaping treatments are possible and two where they have been installed. In FY97 funding for a landscaping maintenance contract will be sought.

Lot 2 - Harvard Square.

No planting area.

Lot 4 - Central Square, corner of Bishop Allen Drive and Essex Street.

Landscape improvements have been designed but are not funded.

Lots 5 & 6 - Central Square, off Bishop Allen Drive.

Landscaping with an irrigation system has been installed as part of the Central Square renovations.

Lot 8 & 9 - Central Square, corners of Pleasant and Green Streets.

Future potential landscape strip.

Lot 11 - Macarelli's, off Cambridge Street running between Warren and Marion Streets.

Future potential landscape strip.

Lot 12 - Corner of Winsor and Cambridge Streets.

Future potential landscape strip.

ATTACHMENT B

Attendance

Name	Address
Dan Wuenschel	CHA
John Keene	CHA
David Szlag	74 Ellery St.
Tony Platt	113 Inman St.
Vicky Boulrice	CPD-5 Western Ave.
Paul Ryder	DHSP - Recreation
Louise Weed	109 Avon Hill St.
Taolig Sweeney	56 Fayerweather St.
Paula Cortes	25 Newell St.
Ralph Dunphy	DPW
Janet Burns	57 Frost St.
Phebe C. Leighton	128 Lakeview Ave.
Richard Wheeler	49 Seventh St.
Larry Acosta	118 Elm
Gerald R. Boyle	Camb DPW
Jennifer Jones	Carol R. Johnson Associates 1100 Mass Ave.
Cynthia W. Smith	37 Crescent St.
Joanne Turnbury	167 Brattle St.
Mary Kennedy	57 Brewster St.
Charles Sullivan	CHC
Sara MacBerman	23 Fayette St.

A communication was received from D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk, transmitting a report from Vice Mayor Born, Chair of the Public Service Committee, for a meeting held on October 29, 1996 for the purpose of discussing a city-wide landscaping and master planting plan.

In City Council November 18, 1996

Report Accepted.
Placed on file.
Order Adopted.