

City of Cambridge

The Public Service Committee held a public meeting on March 24, 1998, beginning at 5:15 p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber for the purpose of discussing plans for maintenance of the City's parks, plans for City Hall landscaping work, and plans for traffic island and other landscaping.

Present at the hearing were Councillor Kathleen Leahy Born, Chair of the Committee, Councillor Henrietta Davis, Vice Mayor Anthony D. Galluccio, Councillor Kenneth E. Reeves, Councillor Sheila T. Russell, and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury. Also present were Richard Rossi, Deputy City Manager; Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager for Human Services; Ralph Dunphy, Commissioner of Public Works; Charles Sullivan, Executive Director, Historical Commission; Steve White, Deputy Director of Public Works; Paul Ryder, Director of Recreation; Human Services Department; Clarinda Spinelli, Landscape Project Administrator, Department of Public Works; Janet Burns, Committee on Public Planting; Louise Weed, Committee on Public Planting; and Rick Gosselin, Friends of Alberico Park; and several other city staff members and interested members of the public.

Councillor Born convened the hearing and explained the purpose. She requested that all those present introduce themselves and she then requested that Commissioner Dunphy make a presentation.

Mr. Dunphy described the neighborhood park initiative, in which three districts will encompass the 13 neighborhoods. As a part of this new plan, specific problems from last year have been addressed. The contractors have been assigned and they are ready to go as of April 1, 1998.

Mr. Dunphy then moved to a brief description of the planting plans. He introduced the new landscape project administrator, Clarinda Spinelli.

Councillor Born then invited questions and comments about the neighborhood park initiative. She began with a question as to how someone who sees a problem in a park can contact the right person.

Mr. Dunphy stated that last year a parks hotline was initiated. It will be effective for the parks as of April 1. The district supervisors are not yet in place. The plan is to put out information about the parks the way that snow information is distributed.

Councillor Born suggested putting the hotline number on the signs at the park. Mr. Rossi agreed and stated that the City is working on new signs for all the parks that will be uniform and more attractive and can have this number on them.

Councillor Born asked how this plan will work for contracted parks. Mr. Dunphy stated that the district supervisor will be responsible for administering these contracts as well. No one should ever get the answer from a Department of Public Works employee that a particular park is not the Department of Public Work's responsibility because it is a contracted park.

Councillor Born asked for a description of how the new system is different from the present system and why it will work better. Mr. Dunphy stated that there will be a big improvement in accountability and thus it will be easier to track and solve problems.

Councillor Born asked if there would be a evaluation of this initiative during the summer. Mr. Dunphy answered in the affirmative.

Councillor Davis stated that the list she saw at the last meeting seemed to have more parks in district one. The eastern part of the City is more dense, so that seems problematic to her.

Mr. Dunphy stated that the districts were created by looking at the acreage and utilization of the parks.

Mr. Rossi stated that work assignment decisions will be made based on the issues involved. For example, Donnelly will take much more time to maintain than Samp, because of the utilization.

Councillor Davis stated that her interest is in having equal quality of parks around the city. The endpoint should drive the deployment.

Mr. Dunphy noted that the plans have been drawn up in the off season. If during the actual season, adjustments are needed, they will be made.

Councillor Davis said that there are 29 sites in district one, six fewer in district two, and even fewer in district three. The acreage is also greater in district one. She asked why they are not evened out. She said that eight parks would have to be moved to come up with equal acreage.

Mr. Dunphy stated that to get to district sizes that are within six acres difference from each other is good. Mr. Rossi stated that the important issue is the labor deployment, not the number of acres in a district.

Councillor Davis stated that she intends to keep close watch on whether this uneven district division ends up being a factor in the quality of park maintenance in district one.

Mr. Rossi stated that a big factor in labor deployment is which parks are contracted. Councillor Davis asked for a list of contracted parks.

Vice Mayor Galluccio stated that he appreciates the concept of district supervisors. He asked whether employees will be assigned by districts. Mr. Dunphy stated that the hope is that among the different classifications, employees will be assigned to particular districts.

In response to a question from Vice Mayor Galluccio, Mr. Dunphy stated that district supervisors will go to neighborhood meetings.

Vice Mayor Galluccio stated that is good for the City Council and the neighbors to know about the long range renovation and rehab plans for the parks. Mr. Dunphy agreed and stated that the expectation is that district supervisors will be able to impart that information. Mr. Rossi said there are three levels, major renovations, intermediate renovations and ongoing maintenance.

Councillor Reeves asked about the definition of parks. He asked whether Cooper is in need of work. Mr. Ryder stated that it is. He noted the park at Hampshire and Elm and Cronin Park as examples of unfortunate landscape designs. Councillor Reeves stated that Columbia Park was renamed Clement Morgan Park in 1990. Councillor Reeves stated that training the people who will do this work is very important.

Councillor Born then moved to the issue of City Hall. Mr. Rossi displayed a plan which features a very low hedge at the front of the building and planting beds on each side of the stairwell. The plans call for moving the tree on the front lawn to the side lawn and removing portions of the hedge from the walk to allow access to the lawn. There would be an irrigation system installed and repairs would be made to the lawn. Mr. Rossi stated that the first step would be to move the tree. All of the proposed landscape work can be done by city employees except the tree moving and *irrigation system*.

Councillor Reeves asked about the Historical Commission's view. Charles Sullivan stated that the Historical Commission looked at three versions and strongly favored this one.

Councillor Reeves stated that he would like to see all three plans. He noted that the YMCA after school programs use the lawn as play space. Mr. Rossi stated that he hopes that the irrigation will mean that the lawn can hold up to the use that the access will promote.

Councillor Reeves stated that while petunias are not his favorite flowers, he recognizes that they are plants that people will not pick. There are other beautiful flowers for example, canas. This plan looks a little more simple then he had expected, more like Hingham than he would choose. He stated that another approach could be flowering trees, which would also provide shade.

Councillor Davis stated that it is a nice simple idea. Her question is who is going to "deadhead" the petunias so they keep blooming. Mr. Rossi stated that this is City Hall, the challenge is to get it right and keep it right. That will be the showcase.

Councillor Born requested that Mr. Sullivan say a few words about the criteria used and role played by the Historical Commission. She stated that she likes to see historic buildings kept in an historical context. For example, a woodland garden night look pretty but it would be completely inappropriate for City Hall.

Mr. Sullivan stated that the Committee sees this plan as a compromise that displays the building. The other schemes had more extensive plantings, but there were practical issues. They would be trampled.

Councillor Born asked about the plan to move the tree from the front lawn. Mr. Sullivan said that the tree was arbitrarily placed in ~~that~~ ^{its present} location. It is not balanced by another tree, and it can be successfully moved.

Mr. Rossi said that the plan will go next to the Public Planting Committee for their input. Councillor Reeves stated that impatience plants, if well-fertilized, can be prettier than petunias.

Councillor Reeves asked if there was a value judgment about what is contracted and, whether it would be easier to contract the landscape maintenance for City Hall. Mr. Rossi stated that over the past ten years the City has added about 70 acres of open space. The City couldn't afford to hire enough employees to take care of the additional space, so it filled in with contracting. At City Hall the important part is to make sure there is regular, high quality care.

Mr. Dunphy stated that he wants to be able to have employees who have these skills. Councillor Reeves stated that this is a good aim. He has seen it done successfully at the Cambridge Housing Authority.

Councillor Reeves noted the importance of keeping plants well watered. Mr. Rossi agreed and stated that onsite irrigation is very important when there are planted areas the size of Tubman Square and Sullivan Square.

Councillor Born then moved to the last item on the agenda, planting and beautification projects. Mr. Dunphy introduced Clarinda Spinelli, landscape project administrator, Department of Public Works. She stated that she has been on board for three weeks. There is an enormous potential. She distributed material entitled "Planting and Beautification" projects Spring and Summer 1998. (Attached.) She stated that her first task ^{is} to prioritize ^{these projects}. There is a list of "quick and easy" sites which can be dramatically improved fairly easily. There is also a list of four adopt-a-parcel sites that are already in the works. She encouraged everyone to give them her ideas.

Councillor Davis said that last summer the landscape work seemed tipped in favor of the western side of the City. Mr. Rossi said that he does not agree; the real money was spent by the City on Tubman and Sullivan Parks. Mr. Rossi stated that the City Manager's message is equal geographic distribution.

Councillor Reeves noted the beautiful gardens on Green Street. Mr. Rossi said that in the past there was a program for awards to people who have beautiful gardens that the public can see. Ms. Spinelli noted the value of creating incentives for private parties to beautify private spaces that can be seen by the public.

Councillor Davis stated that there are barrels on Western Avenue that should be recognized and supported.

Councillor Reeves stated that he is not overly fond of barrel planting.

Councillor Davis noted the embarrassing lack of planting in the barrel at 831 Western Avenue.

Vice Mayor Galluccio welcomed Ms. Spinelli and applauded her concern about the gateways.

Councillor Reeves stated that he too is pleased that the City has a landscape specialist. He urged that she look at some of the outstanding ~~sights~~, and wished her luck.

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Councillor Born thanked all those present for their attendance. The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

For the Committee,

Councillor Kathleen Born,
Chair

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For the Committee,


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Planting and Beautification Projects

Spring/Summer 1998

High Priority Sites

1. QUICK AND EASY

Some of these will be targeted for more extensive changes in the future. For now they will simply be planted (new or supplemental).

Elm and Hampshire
Arsenal Square
Gold Star Park
Dog Park (Hawthorne & Mt. Auburn)
Aberdeen Mall (both ends)
Sleeper Park
Mass Ave. and Broadway Underpass
Railroad Tracks, East Cambridge
Clark and Moore
Alberico Park
Franklin/Franklin Place/Belvedere
Gray gardens East
Lowell Park (work with "Friends" group)
Raymond Park (work with "Friends" group)

2. SUBSTANTIAL RENOVATION These may require partial/complete removal of existing paving materials or more significant earthworks and/or construction.

Windsor and Plymouth
Cronin Park
Cambridge and Columbia
Main and Bishop Allen
Sozio Circle (high potential for adopt-an-island)
Lincoln and Windsor
Garfield Street (with Gulf station)

3. ADOPT-A-PARCEL SITES (followed by others after development of "adopt-a-parcel" marketing package)

Hawthorne and Mt Auburn
Mt Auburn and Brattle (with Mt Auburn Cemetery)
Huron and Sparks
Huron and Vassel/Appleton

4. MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS

Police Station	Central Square
Fire Stations	Headquarters Engine # 2 Engine # 3 Engine # 4 Engine # 5 Engine # 6 Engine # 8 Engine # 9
	Broadway and Kirkland Mass. Ave, Central Square First and Cambridge Mass Ave, Porter Square Inman Square River Street Garden/Concord/Huron Lexington Ave
Main Library	Broadway
DPW	Hampshire St.
Cemetery	Coolidge

5. GATEWAYS

Massachusetts Avenue and Memorial Drive	
Western Avenue and Memorial Drive	
River Street and Memorial Drive	
B.U. Bridge/Memorial Drive	
Concord Avenue	
Alewifebrook Parkway and Massachusetts Avenue	
Alewifebrook Parkway and Route 2	
Route 2	
Cambridge Street	Museum of Science/First St Prospect Street Columbia Street Broadway/Main Street(Kendall Square)

Rough Timetable

- Immediate: Develop task list and plant plan for each site
 Clearing, grubbing, removal of existing paving materials where needed
- April: Soil preparation/ammendment
 Construction/installation of raised beds
 Resurfacing
- Late May: Planting begins

Program Development

1. ADOPT-A-PARCEL

Corporate/Business
Civic/Fraternal
Community/"Friends" groups/Neighborhood Associations
Individual

2. PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN

Public Awareness

- (1.) Of planting initiative and of specific projects as they occur
- (2.) Recruitment of donors/volunteers
- (3.) Donor/participant recognition

3. PRIVATE SITE BEAUTIFICATION

Inventory private/business spaces having significant public visual impact.
Create incentive to develop beautification plans.

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Committee Report #2

S-270

Communication was received from
D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk
transmitting a report from
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Public Service Committee, for
a meeting held on March 24, 1998
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In City Council April 13, 1998

Report Accepted.

PLACED ON FILE