

Tree Committee

February 1, 2012, Mason Library

Chairman Dennis Gibbons convened the meeting at 5:17 PM. All members were present except Steve Adams and Abby Schroeder.

Minutes of the January 4 meeting were approved without objection.

The principal item of old business was continued discussion of the trees for the Main Street project, based on the proposals for substitution that had been prepared by the *ad hoc* tree group in 2011. The discussion was led by Craig Okerstrom-Lang. In general, he and the *ad hoc* group were concerned that the large proportion of crab apples in the plan would be an undesirable monoculture. More variety would be preferable. The committee reviewed the recommended tree list in order and reached a general consensus about recommendations for improvement.

Elm: Pruning Princeton elms is difficult, according to Steve Adams. This will require a long-term town commitment to pay for maintenance. Jefferson and New Harmony elms, which have been around about 15 years, were recommended instead, based on experience with them reported by Steve Adams (and Tom Zetterstrom, to the *ad hoc* group). These are also classic elm-shaped trees. The committee agreed to recommend substituting 3 of each for the plan's 6 Princeton elms.

Hornbeam: The committee found this recommendation satisfactory.

Katsura: Dennis Gibbons noted that the katsura has problems in paved settings. The committee suggested recommending some ginkgo trees instead, in part for variety.

Columnar red maple: Craig Okerstrom-Lang observed that these were probably included for their fall color, but that they do not do well in urban settings. He proposed substituting ginkgo trees at the locations at the end of Railroad street, and the committee agreed to recommend that change.

Pin oak: Pruning presents a maintenance issue. No one on the committee has experience with the chinkapin oak on the alternative list, though. Placement of one these trees on the plan could be improved. Placing a tree right in front of St. Peters would block the view of the building. The committee agreed to propose removing that one from the plan. The committee found that the remaining two pin oaks across the street from each on the plan other would be fine, although it would be better for the tree on the east side to be set back away from the road, on the church's property.

Sycamore: The one tree on the plan is probably worth including as an experiment, despite the risk of anthracnose which is disfiguring to smaller trees. If it is retained, the committee proposed that it should be the disease-resistant bloodgood type.

Crab apples: Because of the fruit problem, these would not be appropriate outside retail stores. To reproduce some of the *allée* or *bosk effect*, of stretches of identical flowering trees, the committee proposed using accolade cherries (which have insignificant fruit) or tree lilacs in the mid-downtown stretch. The committee proposed to retain the plan for crab apples at the north end of the project. On the west side, it would be good to put them on the top of the bank rather than on the slope, although this would mean planting them on private land. The committee also supported reintroducing some bump-outs for tree planting along this stretch on the east side of the street, as well as in front of the Post Office. At the Cottage St. intersection, tulip trees could be used to create a canopy.

Hawthorn: The cockspur on the plan is not thornless and thus it would be dangerous in a pedestrian area despite its nice flowers and great fall color. The locations where these are planned, around the Elm St. intersection and in front of Carr Hardware, are opportunities for canopies instead.

Aristocrat pear: The committee found this recommendation satisfactory (although other callery pears would be good too).

Juneberry: The clump habit would be wrong; the committee recommended substituting a single stem variety.

Yellowwood: The committee found this recommendation satisfactory.

Craig Okerstrom-Lang suggested some other modifications to the plan, to leave out trees in a few spots in order to preserve the view of important buildings. In front of the Congregational church, trees close to the street have always died because of the salt on the road. Here it would be better to put trees farther back and to leave a vista to see the church building. He proposed planting no new trees there and removing the Norway maple that is now in front of the church. In front of the library, too, omitting the trees along the road would improve the view of the building. Another alternative would be to plant only shades, which will not screen as much, or plant a single shade tree for the lawn and let it get big. At town hall, the plan calls for removing one Norway maple; he suggested that another one, that blocks the view of the building, should also go.

The first item of new business was preparation and presentation of the committee's recommendations about the revised tree list. Craig Okerstrom-Lang will prepare a revised table explaining these recommendations to circulate to the members. He reported that the 25% Mass DOT hearing is now likely to be in early March, probably in the evening. The committee will discuss at its next meeting how to present them at the hearing. Jonathan Hankin noted that because the committee should not surprise the decision-makers, it would be useful to send something to the Select Board and put the subject on for citizen speak time.

The other new business was potential revision of the zoning bylaw covering street trees along the major corridors. That is now Section 6.2, which applies on Route 7 at both ends of town. The list of trees that it refers to has to be improved, perhaps by reference to the list proposed by National Grid, since power lines run along each of these roads. Other issues to consider are whether there is, or should be, a continuing maintenance requirement, so a recipient of a special permit would have to replace trees that died, and whether the requirements, which now apply to new construction; should also apply to renovations. The committee also ought to look at the general landscaping rule, in Section 6.3.

An item not on the agenda, but that had been mentioned by Joe Sokul at the January meeting, was the condition of several prominent, older trees along Gilmore St. The committee discussed how better maintenance and rerouting a sidewalk might alleviate imminent problems with these trees.

In general business, the need for another member was discussed. Abby Schroeder, who has not been able to attend any meetings, is now on the west coast. She has advised Dennis Gibbons that she will not be back until April, and that she intended to take part and regrets that she has not been able to. Dennis will let her know that the committee would prefer that the regular members be generally able to attend meetings, but would welcome her as an alternate member or as a public participant in meetings when she is in town.

At the next regular meeting, on March 7, the DCR representative will talk to the committee. In order to prepare for the Mass DOT hearing on the Main Street project, another meeting may be needed before then; the chair will let the members know if this becomes necessary.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:46.