

Trees for Watertown Minutes
Board Meeting November 15, 2017
Sasaki Associates, 64 Pleasant Street

Board members present: Dennis Duff, David Jay, Genie Johnson, Bob Lauricella, David Meshoulam, Libby Shaw, Michele Waldman.

Absent: Jane Holden

TFW members present: Michelle Cokonougher, Michael Moran, Elodia Thomas

October meeting minutes were accepted unanimously as corrected (Dennis moved, David Jay seconded)
November financial statement was accepted unanimously as corrected (Bob moved, Genie seconded)

October 30 - Watertown Square Community Meeting

The Council Chamber was packed for this presentation of a major redesign of traffic flow through Watertown Square. There was lots of concern expressed by residents whose neighborhoods would be impacted by traffic changes resulting from the proposed closure of the end of Charles River Road.

Closing the end of Charles River Road would create new parkland area in Watertown Square. Genie Johnston spoke up to underscore the importance of restoring the soil at depth to allow new shade trees planted there to reach their full potential. Along sidewalks she advised fewer trees, but larger ones, in generous tree pits with the soil well prepared underneath.

Councilor Aaron Dushku strongly advocated for major changes to the Delta to make it a more comfortable way station for commuters: a plaza with seating, plus extra berthing for Pleasant St shuttle busses.

Dan Driscoll of DCR was enthusiastic about the creation of new parkland and of "doing something near the bus area, because that's really the main entrance to the Riverwalk along the Charles."

Libby proposed tonight that David Jay, she, and anyone else interested in making sure there is a beautiful, signature arboricultural landscape in this area arrange a meeting with Aaron to exchange ideas.

Tree Warden position

Tree Warden Chris Hayward is leaving Watertown to become Director of Conservation in Needham. His last day is Nov. 22, and he's starting in Needham Nov. 27. Libby will talk with Chris and ask him to send the town tree planting records for the past few years.

The advertised Tree Warden position still includes Historic Preservation responsibilities. We would like to see Watertown's Tree Warden position optimized so that the TW can more easily carry out the responsibilities that are legally assigned to this State-mandated position of stewardship.

Libby asked for board comments on a draft message to the town, addressing the need for a revised Tree Warden job description. The general consensus was that the language was too strong.

This is an important opportunity to reframe TFW's communication with the town. Seize the opportunity to rethink together what's important for Watertown. Things have changed since Chris was hired 12 years ago. The environmental importance and community benefits of urban shade trees are supported by a substantial and growing body of research and are increasingly recognized by municipalities and the general public. At the same time, in the modern urban environment it takes careful planning to ensure that a new tree can do well in the long term. How do we recalibrate in light of these issues? How to address our needs now and into the future? What would trees in our town look like optimally and how do we get there?

Important foundation for the conversation is to reach out to other towns to find out how their TW position works: full time TW? direct supervisor of a crew? multiple responsibilities? Maureen O'Sullivan gathered some of this info in 2010. Elodia did a similar kind of outreach when looking into firefighter contracts in other municipalities a few years ago.

Other questions:

What will be Watertown's TW appointment process? What's the union's role?

DavidM: Can TFW request a seat on the hiring committee?

Elodia: Steve Magoon and Ed Lewis will probably be involved.

Michelle: Town Council simply gets to ratify one candidate, doesn't even see other resumes.

Elodia: Citizens can still go to bat for a candidate with Steve Magoon or Mark Sideris.

Dennis: Could try to put someone on the search committee. Could just leave the job description as is, let the Town Manager appoint the Tree Warden and just work with the new person.

TFW community-building

TFW should open lines of communication with Bob Dirico, DPW Forestry foreman. Could offer to sponsor Bob to DCR's Fall 2018 Tree Stewardship workshop or to another community forestry conference.

General board comments: Always best when you can laugh with someone. This town doesn't have enough fun. No one goes out after a meeting and has a beer anymore. Half the time people don't even say hello on the street.

Elodia: Aim to attend town holiday functions to schmooze and build community: the Watertown Community Foundation party (especially since TFW is a 2017 grantee), the Arsenal Center for the Arts show, Commander's Mansion party, Watertown Square tree lighting -- (Isn't the Delta a jewel that we need to restore?), Town Council swearing in ceremony on January 2.

TFW 2017 Big Tree Contest

The contest ended October 31 with 4 winners and 3 honorable mentions (students who submitted trees not on the contest species list this year). Students found some great trees, but contestants were scant in number. Jane and Michele confirmed species and verified trunk diameters. One surprise find: a big hickory (which Genie identified). Jane will purchase and distribute Belmont Books gift certificates, to be reimbursed by TFW.

Age-old problem for TFW: publicity was sparse (notable exception: the Teen Tree Stewardship Program, congratulations again to DavidM). Elodia advised putting together a publicity blueprint for

TFW events. WatertownMaNews.com, Facebook pages, Watertown community access cable, Tab newspaper. Always take a moment to assess and think of what to do differently next time. Jane knows next year to get notices into the school system and at the Boys and Girls Club.

TFW Community Leaf Raking

Chris Hayward often talked about elderly residents who didn't want trees in front of their home because of the maintenance required. In response David Meshoulam and WHS student Jeremy are planning a community volunteer leaf raking event this weekend. Is a NHS community service project for Jeremy and an opportunity for TFW to build community and foster goodwill for trees. Home Depot has agreed to supply rakes, leaf bags, work gloves and Dunkin Donuts has agreed to donate coffee and donuts. David will supply maps. Have six yards so far, hope to have twenty. Kenny Woodland shared his list of people requesting snow shoveling help. David would like to make it an intergenerational volunteer opportunity.

2018 TTSP plans, and forming a TTSP Advisory Committee

DavidM discussed his goals for the Teen Tree Stewardship Program in 2018. He wants participants to

1. educate for tree maintenance
2. advocate for trees
3. plant trees.

DavidM wants to expand the program to a three-season activity He would like to hire two graduates from the 2017 summer program to be leaders in the 2018 program. This means a much larger budget.

DavidM proposed a TTSP advisory committee consisting of one person from the TFW board, one town administrator, and a member of the Town Council budget and fiscal oversight committee. Also a parent from last year, a student from last year, a consultant from last year: Andy Finton (Nature Conservancy executive and Watertown resident).

Michele: best to recruit advisors who can make your program so shiny that people will give money to it. And someone politically positioned.

Elodia suggested Leo Martin, Conservation Commissioner.

Do a survey monkey: what do Watertown people need or want when it comes to trees? Sewer and water rates are going up next year. How will public shade trees be watered? Could there be a discount on water and sewer bills to adopters of a street tree?

Elodia: we don't have a water truck. Chris reduced his plantings in order to hire Leo's Landscaping to do more tree watering. Chris thought DPW would not allow Cambridge-style water ambassadors.

David Jay: Figure out what tree watering would cost you. Sewer cost is higher than water cost.

Respectfully submitted,
Robert Lauricella, Secretary