



DOMINICK PANGALLO
MAYOR

CITY OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS
TREE COMMISSION
57 ORNE STREET
SALEM, MA 01970
TEL. 978-745-0195 FAX 978-741-7041

DARLEEN MELIS, CHAIR
KIRT RIEDER, VICE CHAIR

CONOR MORGAN
ACTING TREE WARDEN

Touch the Future - Plant a Tree

**MINUTES OF THE SALEM TREE COMMISSION
JANAURY 8, 2024**

A meeting of the Salem Tree Commission was held on January 8, 2024, at 7:00 p.m., via ZOOM, an online video conference call system in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023.

Present on call were:

1. Chair Darleen Melis and Vice Chair Kirt Rieder; Members: Cady Goldfield, Paul L’Heureux, Rachel McCarter and Jane Rumrill; Conor Morgan, General Foreperson, Cemetery/Tree Division, DPS and Commission Clerk Joanne Roomey. Absent were Naomi Cottrell and Susan Yochelson.
2. **Report – Conor Morgan, General Foreperson Cemetery/Tree Division of Department of Public Services**

During the last period SeeClickFix accumulated a large quantity of reports of downed branches. As the current stock of permanent able-bodied tree crew operatives is comprised of one new recruit Kevin Tores, the clearing of downed branches has been his main focus. On top of that, Kevin has been doing his best to clear house/branch conflicts. He has undergone training and will undergo much more training very shortly. Kevin has also been involved in decorating the city for the holidays using the bucket truck.

A very fine *Picea abies* Christmas tree was kindly donated from our neighborhood in North Salem and was erected in Lappin Park for the holidays. Kevin decorated this and many lampposts throughout the city. SeeClickFix has also seen an uptick in the number of tree health inspection requests. As the tree canopies are now bare, it can be harder to properly assess each tree’s health. Trees with noticeable maladies have had work orders created for them. Others whose issues were less obvious had a note made to resurvey them in springtime.

A contract for stump grinding was given to Iron Tree Service to clear all such requests throughout the city. Mayer Tree and Iron Tree both completed and invoiced the large contract which they were given in September. A new contract of work has now been given to each of these companies to further clear the backlog of work relating to the street trees. I have referred to both contracts as the “December Works,” the second phase of clearing SeeClickFix. Each of the two companies have been given 30 work orders for the city’s street trees. When this work has been completed, the vast majority of the current SeeClickFix backlog will be cleared. Mayer Tree Service has also been awarded a contract to do some badly needed removals at Howard Street Cemetery. Of the 36 tree planting

requests extant on SeeClickFix all have been vetted and approximately 27 will be viable planting locations. However, during a managers' meeting on December 26, 2023 at D.P.S. it was demonstrated to me that there was only approximately \$32,000 "left on the line" for all future tree surgery and planting in the city. Tenders have been sought for the tree pit improvements at the 105 Greening the Gateway Cities Grant locations. Tenders have been sought for the tree planting in the cemetery. The same number and specs of trees originally planned for planting last Fall. Species will be subject to change. Those tenders were solicited on December 21, 2023. So far, no responses from contractors. This leads me to suspect that the future of tree planting in this city may have to be carried out in some part by city employees.

Of the three tree permit applications discussed during the tree hearing of November 20, 2023, two permits have been granted for Hancock St. and Ward St.

Discussion: A question raised about the referenced \$32,000. Is it an annual allotment or does it roll over? Mr. Morgan explained that he is not clear about the meaning of this figure; there are many sources of funding, and he will be educating himself about funding issues.

Another question was asked about maintaining our Tree City USA status, which requires spending \$2 per resident per year, which would be around \$86,000 from the city budget. Ms. Melis will explore this further. Mr. Morgan said we are not planting a lot of trees, only 49 in springtime of last year, but the contractors did not do a good job. As a result of Mr. Morgan directly supervising planting the contractors want to reprice their contracts, making future planting more costly. He will explore having planting done in-house and correctly.

3. Greening the Gateway Cities Program - David Bresnahan, DCR Forester

David Bresnahan said for staffing, it is only himself. DCR has been in touch with the annual seasonal employees, some will be returning but some have found year-round work. He is confident that he will be able to fill the positions. He would like to hire people from within the community where they are planting, so if anyone knows of friends, relatives, neighbors etc. looking for work they will be hiring again in March. He spoke about public tree survival which has been very good in Salem. Only a few public trees—street trees, schools, public housing-- have been lost. He is seeing good vigor and vitality. He has estimated a loss of less than 2% of trees planted in public right of ways since 2021.

There is a Municipal DCR grant for spring planting, which is separate from the DCR Implementation Grant. \$30,000 in funds has been awarded for use in fiscal year 2024, which ends June 31, 2024. These funds provide reimbursement for assistance on tree planting projects in the GGCP zone. In spring of 2022, these funds were used to remediate the soil and plants on the traffic island on Washington Street; in 2023 the funds were used on the Church Street lot and Riley Plaza. This spring there is not a large project planned, but they will work with the city to provide trees throughout the planting zone. Fifty locations have been identified where public trees can be planted. These include the Bridge Street neighborhood and Boston Street as well as some abutting homeowners where trees would be planted on a one or two basis. Work includes soil remediation and gas testing.

In preparation for Arbor Day, DCR would like to plant at least four trees at Witchcraft

Heights Elementary School, which is the only school in the planting zone where no trees have been planted.

Fencing placed on berms around newly planted public trees worked well for protection and will be continued this year. And be aware that deicing products such as salt and sand are hazardous to trees and should be kept outside the planting berm.

There was a discussion of when trees will need their first pruning. Structural pruning should be done 3 – 4 years after planting. This will be next winter for Salem’s GGCP trees. Now that tree planting under the commission has been continuing since 2019, Salem has trees that should be pruned. Mr. Morgan will review the list of trees that have been planted to see what pruning and maintenance is needed. The list is on the Tree Commission website:

https://www.salemma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf7986/f/uploads/fy22-fall_21_planting_lists_for_publication.pdf

4. Review of Tree Replacement and Tree Donation Funds

Ms. Melis said Anna Freedman, Finance Director, has forwarded a summary of the Tree Replacement and Tree Donation Funds that have come in. Originally, they were together in one pot, but in 2023 they were separated. There is \$17,300 available that can put towards trees. Ms. Melis suggested that since only 15 trees have been planted in the Century Tree program, using requests from SeeClickFix could be a way to identify new locations for Century Trees. Mr. Morgan reported that many of the requests for street trees do not have viable planting locations but agreed that they may be good candidates for Century Trees on personal property. He has forwarded the list to Ms. Melis. She would like someone on the Commission to help identify if any of these would be viable Century Tree locations.

5. Rotary Club speech – “Planting Trees in Salem, the Work of the Tree Commission,” January 16, Hawthorne Hotel, 12:15 PM

Ms. Melis said there will be two speaking engagements at the Hawthorne Hotel. She will be speaking on January 16, 2024, regarding planting trees in Salem and the work of the Tree Commission. On March 12th, Dave Bresnahan and Anna Sheridan will be speaking specifically about the Greening the Gateway Cities Program.

6. Planning for Tree Steward activities

Ms. Melis approached the PEM with concerns about young elm trees on their property with over-mulched root flares and to request that they hold a demonstration about root flare remediation on Earth Day, Monday, April 22, 2024. This would inform the public and improve the existing trees.

There was a discussion about planting a number of trees on the bikeway along Canal Street. Kirt Reider said the soil there is very compacted and would need remediation. This could be a location for the DCR Municipal Grant. Mr. Morgan will follow up with Dave Bresnahan.

There was a discussion of the two weekend volunteer remediation activities at the Community Life Center and whether they should be continued. Ms. Goldfield reported that the soil was depleted, compacted and poor, and tree growth is stunted. There is still more work to be done. There was consensus to continue this volunteer project.

City Councillor Andy Varela reported that the city owns a large auger that he has that has been using at the Mack Park Food Farm. He also said there is room at Mack Park to compost leaf mold for trees. He offered to be a resource to improve tree health in the city.

7. Approve Tree Commission Minutes of December 18, 2023

Mr. Reider made a motion to approve the Tree Commission Meeting Minutes of December 18, 2023. Seconded by Ms. Goldfield. A roll call vote was taken and the motion was carried unanimously.

- 8. New Business:** There was discussion of the inappropriate clearcutting of trees and brush along Canal Street on the MBTA property in preparation for a construction project. Kirt Reider reported that this is being handled by the Conservation Commission because there is water in this area.

The Tree Commission is pleased to have Councillor Morsillo reappointed to serve as the Tree Commission's liaison.

- 9. Next Meeting Dates:** Monday, February 12, 2024 and Monday, March 18, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom.

- 10. Adjournment:** There being no further business to come before the Tree Commission this evening, Mr. Reider moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Ms. Goldfield. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion was carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joanne M. Roomey
Commission Clerk

**Know your rights under the Open Meeting Law M.G.L. c. 30A §18-25 and
City Ordinance Sections 2-2028 through 2-2033**