



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**

**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE  
MAYOR**

**STAN KOTY**  
*COMMISSIONER*

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*DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS*

August 23, 2016

Dear Mr. Kauffman, Ms. Luthin, Mr. Nadeau, Mr. Millette and other signatories,

Thank you for your email. The recent landscaping work at the Healey School is part of the City's ongoing efforts to provide pleasing, safe, hardy, and accessible landscaped areas at our ten public schools. Key to this effort is the addition of irrigation to allow our plants and lawns to survive during dry periods.

To evaluate current conditions at Healey, seek professional recommendations for improvements, and develop a prudent plan for the introduction of irrigation, the Department of Public Works sought the recommendations of both a landscape contractor and a professional arborist.

Their evaluation noted that the existing trees at the Healey (crabapple trees), while attractive in their flowering season, had a limited remaining lifespan. Their extensive root systems also posed a problem to the installation of irrigation as well as the school's foundation.

The crabapple trees also posed several other challenges: the trees dropped crabapples that were often tracked onto the sidewalks and into the school causing maintenance issues and slipping hazards, the abundance of fallen fruit attracted rodents, and the crabapples were planted closely together, resulting in heavy shading that prevented the successful growth of healthy grass below them. With the excess of hardtop at Healey, one goal of the landscaping improvements was to create conditions that will foster healthy grass that students can enjoy. I would note that the decision to plant crabapples and where to plant them was made prior to this administration.

The removal of the crabapple trees was recommended by both the arborist and landscape contractor in order to install irrigation and introduce a new landscape anchored by non-fruiting trees. The chanticleer pears then planted were chosen based on their visual appeal, urban survivability, hardiness, and upright form and the fact that they do not produce fruit. Flowering chanticleer pears are among the earliest trees to bloom, have

attractive glossy green leaves, and yield long-lasting, vibrant fall color. They are also prized for their non-invasive roots that pose little risk to plumbing, foundations, or electrical lines. I would note that several crabapples were also preserved.

It is important to note that planting younger trees is an industry best practice as they have a greater success rate than transplanted mature trees. It would not be advised to swap these trees out for older ones.

In terms of irrigation, it is necessary to maintain attractive and healthy school landscaping. Without it, our investments in our landscaping are poorly protected, plants and trees are more vulnerable to pests and diseases, and natural turf in these high-use locations is more likely to suffer permanent damage.

Our landscape contractor also recommended compatible plantings offering attractive color additions and visual interest including blooming quickfire hydrangeas, flowering azaleas, day lilies, daisies, black-eyed Susans, and flowering spirea shrubs. Please understand that when landscaping first goes in, it appears more sparse and less attractive than it will once it fully grows in.

I hope this answers your questions as to the reasoning and design behind the irrigation and landscaping choices. We do appreciate that you care about the landscaping of the school, just as we do. We also are aware that residents and students love the more than 13,000 public trees we maintain, and we understand that tree removal or replacement can create a justifiably strong response. DPW manages and cares for public lands across the city and regularly makes landscaping decisions. Operationally, it is not feasible to subject all of our efforts to a public process. However, we are working internally on expanding our notification protocols for tree removal, which should help keep our residents better informed of plans involving trees in the future.

Finally, we also look forward to learning about the Healey-Mystic Master Plan, which we understand is in the early, planning study phase with support by CPA funds. As you progress with your long-range goals, we hope we can likewise have your support for necessary ongoing efforts to maintain our school landscaping and school buildings.

Sincerely and with best regards,

Stanley Koty  
Commissioner of Public Works

Walter Whitney  
Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds