



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

March 17, 2021

REPORT OF THE OPEN SPACE, ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Katjana Ballantyne	Chair	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	Vice Chair	Present	
Ben Ewen-Campen	Ward Three City Councilor	Present	
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Ward Two City Councilor	Absent	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Ballantyne at 6:31pm and adjourned at 8:00pm.

Councilor Scott was absent due to illness.

Others present: Lauren Racaniello - Mayor's Office; George Proakis - OSPCD; Viola Augustin - OSPCD; Luisa Oliveira - OSPCD; Vanessa Boukili - OSPCD; Nick Antanavica - ISD; David Shapiro – Law

Approval of the February 17, 2021 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Ban Utensil Ordinance

207884: That the City Solicitor draft an ordinance to ban the use of plastic flatware.

Chair Ballantyne shared that previous discussions suggested streamlining the language and conferring with the Office of Sustainability and Environment, the Law Office, and the Commission for Persons with Disabilities. These have all been accomplished, and they are all supportive of the current draft.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Ballantyne, Mbah, Ewen-Campen, White Jr.
ABSENT:	Scott

Native Species Ordinance

203365: That the City Solicitor draft an ordinance requiring native tree and plantings for

all open space, to meet the goals of sustainability and biodiversity.

Chair Ballantyne highlighted the changes, which were made in conjunction with the administration, and focused on extensive green roof, invasive species, and straight species definitions. Additionally, the USDA website was identified as a reputable source for a list of invasive plants. Sections 7 and 8 were added to read: Sec. 7. For the purposes of this ordinance, the City shall, to the extent possible and to the extent such plants are reasonably available, prioritize sourcing native plants that have not been treated with neonicotinoids; provided, that as of January 1, 2026 the City shall not source native plants that have been treated with neonicotinoids. Sec. 8. For the purposes of this ordinance, the City shall, to the extent possible and to the extent such plants are reasonably available, prioritize sourcing native plants that are straight species. And the effective date (Section 12) was updated to take effect in 60 days rather than 90 to align with the Fall planting season.

Chair Ballantyne emphasized that this is the first ordinance of its kind to set percentage requirements, rather than aspirational goals. Ms. Oliveira agreed that the City is at the forefront of this. Dr. Boukili added that this has been a collaborative effort and thanked everyone for participating. Councilor White commended the work on this but expressed opposition to the inclusion of a sunset clause for something that is not under the City's control. If there is no commercial availability of the products (native plants that have not been treated with neonicotinoids), a future City Council will have to amend the ordinance. Chair Ballantyne recognized Tori Antonino and Renee Scott for their work, and Councilors Mbah and Ewen-Campen also thanked everyone involved and noted that this is a great step for the environment and will have significant benefits.

Chair Ballantyne moved to recommend approval of the ordinance draft titled "Native Species Draft Ordinance 3.17". The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (White, Ewen-Campen, Mbah, Ballantyne), 0 opposed, and 1 absent (Scott).

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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206495: That the City Solicitor consider the attached language in the drafting of a Native Tree and Plantings Ordinance, as ordered by #203365.

See 203365.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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205683: Tori Antonino submitting comments re: #203365, calling for a native planting ordinance.

See 203365.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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207999: 3 residents submitting comments re: #206495, the proposed native plant ordinance.

See 203365.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208567: Elizabeth Lundgren submitting comments re: #206495, the proposed native plant ordinance.

OSPCD

210135: That the Director of SPCD and a representative from the MBTA discuss with the Committee on Open Space, Environment and Energy, the plan to recapture the trees and green space lost after the decimation of the GLX forested corridor.

Mr. Proakis introduced Ms. Augustin from the Mobility Division to speak on this item. Ms. Augustin shared that alongside the Green Line Extension (GLX), there will be an extension of the Community Path. The land along the GLX is owned by the MBTA, with an agreement with the City to maintain the Community Path and adjacent space. The extension will add approximately 1.9 miles to the current 0.9 miles of the Community Path, with 8 additional access points, including points on both sides of McGrath Highway. The grades will never exceed the ADA accessible 5%, but it will vary along the path. Further, there will be approximately 2 acres of land, much at a slope and not easy to walk along. The initial proposal for these areas were gravel, and the City has secured an agreement for plantings, specifically of native species, in this area instead.

Councilor White commended the staff on this work and asked about the City's maintenance obligations regarding the path, which Ms. Augustin shared are still being negotiated. The City will not maintain the bridge structure, with other details still in discussion. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if there are plans or renderings to depict the green space, and if there will be more opportunities for additional plantings in the future. Ms. Augustin noted that the Community Path Maintenance Agreement should detail how the plantings can be changed, and the City will likely retain this jurisdiction and will work with the community on continuous improvements. Currently, the technical drawings are protected by a nondisclosure agreement, though Ms. Augustin may be able to share some diagrams. Councilor Mbah asked if there will be more trees, and Ms. Augustin noted that trees will not be allowed in those areas, but other plantings will be in their place. There is not much land to allow for the trees to grow, with the tracks, retaining walls, and path. Councilor Mbah asked as well if the trees removed could be redistributed in other parts of the City. Ms. Augustin noted that the majority of the trees removed were on MBTA land, and she is unclear on the City's options for recourse. Mr. Proakis added that citywide, the goal is to plant as many trees as possible, so the goal is to plant at least as many trees as the MBTA removed.

Chair Ballantyne agreed that the removal of trees was upsetting, and noted that there are sloped areas along the MBTA tracks where trees exist, such as in the Fenway/Longwood area. Ms. Augustin confirmed that the administration has asked the same questions, and the MBTA would not entertain the discussion, citing safety and maintenance concerns. Councilor Ballantyne also asked about the native species and Ms. Augustin that the City would use the native species ordinance when it takes maintenance jurisdiction. Councilor White suggested that a resolution could be made to ask the MBTA to consider the native species ordinance and/or to address the trees in general.

Councilor White moved that the Somerville City Council entreat the MBTA to utilize native plantings as set forth in the City's native species ordinance in connection with the land abutting the Green Line Extension.

Councilor White moved that the Somerville City Council entreat the MBTA to, wherever possible, plant trees to replace those removed in connection with the Green Line Extension.

The motions were approved on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (White, Ewen-Campen, Mbah, Ballantyne), 0 opposed, and 1 absent (Scott).

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

204968: That the Director of SPCD provide this Board with a list of all city owned parcels, indicating any brownfields, and any plans to remediate those sites and use them for housing.

Mr. Proakis shared that there are 120 City-owned parcels identified, noting that the list includes 90 Washington Street, which is actually owned by the Somerville Redevelopment Authority. Approximately 10 of those parcels have some order for cleanup. There are a few - 90 Washington, Art Farm, Police Station (D-1), and the Homans Building in particular, where brownfields and reuse/redevelopment converge. These four sites may be a starting point for future discussion and work. Councilor White added that the Police Station (D-1) building site is planned as a hotel and commercial office building, and asked whether the developer would be responsible for the cleanup. Mr. Proakis confirmed that there may be a way that the City could use grant funding to more efficiently do the work, and then pass the cost along to the developer when the site is delivered. The same could take place for the Homans Building site, though the City is still in discussion with the neighborhood groups and there are many phases of planning before a disposition takes place.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

209655: That the Director of SPCD and the Director of Inspectional Services report to this Council how they plan to monitor and enforce green roof, tree planting and other green zoning requirements that require watering and maintenance, beyond issuing certificates of occupancy.

Mr. Antanavica shared that the process that is in place is complaint-based. There have not been any circumstances yet where enforcement has been needed. Chair Ballantyne asked how this might change if the department had more robust staffing, and Mr. Antanavica shared that entities could be required to submit annual reports about maintenance, noting that there may be different levels needed depending on the requirements. Another option could be to require inspections as part of the annual building Certificates of Inspection. This would also require additional training for inspectors to properly implement.

Chair Ballantyne asked how many buildings currently have green roofs and whether there is tracking of that information. Mr. Antanavica noted that there is no current tracking method, but they could be compiled from the various permit approvals. Mr. Proakis suggested that the list is small, and most have been voluntary, rather than a required condition for permit approval. The City is 15 months into the new zoning ordinance including the green score requirement, but Mr. Proakis emphasized that the number will increase as the new projects are implemented. Chair Ballantyne suggested finding a way to start tracking this information as a first step, so it can be revisited in the future when there are more affected developments.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Creating Fields - Inner Belt

205709: That the Administration immediately pursue creation of a public fields and

recreation area in the Inner Belt District pursuant to the Fields Master Plan.

Mr. Proakis shared that Inner Belt is considered a transform area, with the possibility for significant open space. Potential strategies could include purchasing land to develop into open space, which may involve removing a commercial tax payer, or working with private developers to have open space built, in exchange for allowing greater density. It is currently a low-density zoning district. Councilor White added that there has been contemplation of a prohibition of open space within 300 feet of the center line of McGrath Highway due to air pollution concerns. Mr. Proakis noted that this has led to some rethinking of open space, but there may be some options for buffering. He elaborated that the preference would be to accept payments in lieu of open space in these highway-adjacent areas, in favor of investing in open space elsewhere.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210916: Director of SPCD responding to #205709 re: public fields in the Inner Belt District.

See 205709.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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Referenced Material:

- 2021-3-11flatwarecleanversion (with 207884)
- 2021-3-11flatwaretrackedversion (with 207884)
- Native Species Draft Ordinance 3.17 (with 203365)
- City Owned Properties -2 (with 204968)