



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

***Touch the Future - Plant a Tree***

CONOR MORGAN  
ACTING TREE WARDEN

**MINUTES OF THE SALEM TREE COMMISSION  
JULY 17, 2023**

A meeting of the Salem Tree Commission was held on July 17, 2023, 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; Members: Naomi Cottrell, Cady Goldfield, Paul L'Heureux, Rachel McCarter, Jane Rumrill and Susan Yochelson; Raymond Jodoin, Director of Operations, DPS; and Conor Morgan, General Foreperson, Cemetery/Tree Division, DPS. Absent was Kirt Rieder.
2. **Conor Morgan, DPS Report**

Seventy-seven tree issues reported in the month of June 2023, 70 were resolved; 46 were requests involving pruning/branches broken; 11 were tree health inspections, and 11 were fallen tree limbs.

The month of June was dominated by three issues: machinery breakdowns, development of Greenlawn Cemetery, and survey, assessment, amelioration of and payment for spring tree planting. The tree crew's effectiveness was reduced by breakdowns of the bucket truck/forestry package. The tree crew were deployed with poles to tackle a very unusual and timely glut of tree pruning/lifting/clearing building requests which they tackled to the best of their ability.

There were numerous meetings and discussions with the various stakeholders and actors re: ongoing plans to develop Greenlawn. The Burke lot is being surveyed for new burial plots. Discussions centered around which trees need to be prioritized for retention.

After Cassidy Landscaping finished planting the 49 spring trees that we had contracted for, I carried out a full survey of the trees and their planting methods including full examination of the root ball and planting medium. The full pictorial survey is on file with pictures and comments on each tree. This approach was the most time efficient and could be carried out without interference.

Of the 49 trees: six trees were rejected immediately and four were potential candidates for rejection. Eight trees were ultimately rejected due to drought shock and poor-quality specimens. I inspected most of the trees at Mack Park prior to planting. The group that I could see appeared to be of good architecture. Of course, the very poor specimens were hidden at the back of the group or may not have been there at all.

Drought shock: I personally observed root balls breaking apart during planting and wilting immediately after planting, I believe that the clay root balls had been neglected prior to planting, having not been watered enough. This situation would have been completely impossible to observe prior to planting. Mr. Cassidy was also unlucky with hot weather during planting, pushing some trees over the edge almost immediately.

Of the 49 trees, a handful were planted in very small pits and so high-quality planting was never going to be possible. For the entire remainder of the trees, I insisted that Mr. Cassidy all but replant the trees. I oversaw every single intervention. I stressed a lot of standards and expectations to Mr. Cassidy prior to planting and one expectation seems to have taken root. The planting height was correct with flare roots exposed properly. The amelioration methods which I demanded for nearly 40 trees involved careful excavation around every tree, the removal of all poor-quality soil around the root balls. This was then replaced with quality loam and thoroughly watered in. This resulted in a very high standard of planting ultimately achieved for most of the remaining 41 trees.

Ms. Melis raised concerns about root balls breaking apart. Mr. Morgan explained that all root balls are encased in clay, which makes keeping them wet difficult. Clay keeps root balls together, but it is hydrophobic and must always be kept wet. If the root ball dries out even once, the tree will become damaged. If the top is continuously watered the tree could look green or alive, but the root ball could be dried out. We should look at containerized trees in future because it is very hard to get good quality root ball trees.

There was extensive discussion about where trees get planted and concerns were raised about suboptimal planting conditions, including tree pits that are too small. Planting concerns that were raised include:

- Should tree plantings be spread throughout the city, even if some areas with narrow sidewalks and small tree pits do not have appropriate planting conditions?
- Should homeowners get to have a tree planted just because they request it?
- Will the homeowner who requests a tree be responsible for watering it?
- Under what conditions should we take on the expense and effort to enlarge and engineer tree pits?
- What is the minimum acceptable size for a tree pit?
- Would we be better off purchasing containerized trees, which are smaller and cheaper, but healthier?
- Should we allow ornamental trees to be planted under wires when taller trees would do a better job of shading the street?
- What kind of literature and information do we need to give homeowners?
- Do we plant more trees or trees that are likely to be successful?

The gist of the discussion was to try to expand the tree pits for better tree health. The dimensions of promising tree pits plus structural planting medium can be found in Figures 16 through 20 in the [Salem Tree Manual](#). Planting at the back of the sidewalk is also available for the Tree Warden with permission from the homeowner. Homeowners should receive literature ahead of planting to encourage their participation in watering the tree. Mr. Morgan will investigate good sources of containerized trees.

### **3. Greening the Gateway Cities Program**

David Bresnahan from DCR said they had a successful season, planting 175 trees in Salem this spring. Twelve were at Gonyea Park and 5 at the Arbor Day Celebration at the Broad Street playground/Collins Middle School. Thirty-six trees were planted between the Church Street Parking Lot and Riley Plaza Parking Lot, including 4 trees planted at the Starbucks Plaza across from Riley Plaza. Several trees were planted at Salem State University (SSU) in a wet area to soak up water in the bioretention area. Eleven additional trees were planted at the Housing Authority site at Bridge and St. Peter Streets, and the DCR crew helped with watering at Gonyea Park.

Mr. Bresnahan said even with all the rain, tree recipients should be reminded to water newly planted trees weekly because the water is not getting to the bottom of the root ball. Total planting in Salem so far is 709 trees, with a goal of 2,400. DCR is looking forward to a successful fall planting season. Mr. Bresnahan said it was a great partnership this year with the city and Salem Sound Coastwatch (SSCW) Program and Greenscapes Coordinator Anna Sheridan. Postcards mailed to people in the planting zone have created lots of requests.

Ms. Melis asked about mulch volcano domes on the SSU Campus. Dave Bresnahan will look into it and contact the coordinator at SSU.

### **4. Annual review of tree species recommendations – p. 22 – 25 Salem Tree Manual**

Ms. Melis reviewed the Salem Tree Manual pages 22 to 25, 6.A, “Recommended Large and Medium Street Tree Species.” Mr. Morgan suggested removing the American Beech trees from the list and perhaps adding the Catalpa tree which provides shade and is fast growing. He will do some research to see if it is appropriate.

### **5. Salem Common Tree Planting – Century Tree Tags**

Ms. Melis reported that 37 trees have been planted at Salem Common. She requested approval for Century Tree tags for trees that were funded through donations to the Salem Tree Fund. Five trees were funded by Salem Five Bank and the Pequot Charitable Fund, [two were](#) donated by the Friends of the Salem Common in honor of US Representative Michael Harrington, owner of the Hawthorne Hotel and one in honor of Attorney Jerome F. Twomey, Esq. A total of 15 trees have been planted under the Century Tree Program. The estimate is about \$21 to print each tag.

There was discussion about whether tags on the newly planted trees on the Common will affect the warranty. Ms. Cottrell made a motion to accept making and installing the Century Tree tags on the condition that Lahey Landscape has no objection to tagging

these trees during the warranty period. Seconded by Ms. Rumrill. The motion was carried unanimously.

**6. Possible statement from Dave Twomey regarding names of donors on CT tags**

There has been a request to have the name of the donor and/or the person being honored on the tree tags. Our policy has been that individual donors are not credited for the planting; the tag reads: “Made possible by donations to the Salem Tree Fund.” The problem with naming living things as a memorial is what to do if the tree dies. Because trees are perishable, it is generally recognized that tree tags should not carry names of individuals unless there is a large endowment fund to replace the tree. It was agreed that we should not put the name of individuals on our tree tags. The suggestion was made to honor donors with a list on the website.

**7. Review of Mulching Poster program spring 2022**

Ms. Goldfield proposed having an entertaining cartoon showing how to place mulch around trees for the next poster. She will develop the idea and bring sketches. The suggestion was made to do a fall mulching poster.

**8. Volunteer Form**

Ms. Melis contacted City Solicitor Beth Rennard who drafted a “Participant Release, Waiver of Liability and Indemnity Agreement” for folks who volunteer which says that they are working at their own risk and cannot sue the city. When it is needed, more details will be inserted about the work that volunteers will be expected to do, such as water, weed, prune dead branches, etc.

Mr. L’Heureux made a motion to approve the Participant Release, Waiver of Liability, and Indemnity Agreement. Seconded by Ms. Goldfield. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion was carried unanimously.

**9. EAB concerns – Cady Goldfield**

Ms. Goldfield shared concerns about the Emerald Ash Borer beetle which has caused extensive damage to ash trees city-wide, especially on Loring Ave. Will it be possible to replace the ash trees that will be removed, especially since the state has placed many signs on the sidewalks?

**10. Approve Tree Commission Minutes of May 15, 2023**

Ms. Goldfield made a motion to approve the Tree Commission Meeting Minutes of May 15, 2023. Seconded by Mr. L’Heureux. Ms. Melis proposed inserting this line in the minutes: “After the Tree Hearing the roll call was taken and the Tree Commission meeting was convened.” A roll call vote was taken, Ms. Cottrell abstained, and the motion was carried unanimously.

**11. New Business: None**

12. **Next Meeting Dates:** **August 21, 2023** and Monday, **September 18, 2023** at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom.
13. **Adjournment:** There being no further business to come before the Tree Commission this evening, Ms. Goldfield moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Ms. Cottrell. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion was carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at **8:41 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**