

Chicago Urban Forestry Advisory Board

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Minutes Meeting February 1, 2024

Minutes submitted by Jess Vogt, UFAB Vice President. Generated from a meeting recording, as well as notes by Jess Vogt and Leslie Perkins.

1. Call to Order

- Meeting was called to order at 2:05 pm.
- Agenda modifications:
 - Add to New Business: State of Illinois Exotic Weed Act updates
 - Add to New Business: Christmas Tree Recycling update

2. Roll Call

- In attendance: Malcolm Whiteside, Jr., Jess Vogt, Gaby Wagener-Sobrero (DOE/CSO Angela Tovar proxy), Daniella Pereira, Jim Semelka, Rolando Favela, Sean Wiedel (CDOT/Tom Carney proxy), Randy Conner Jr., Cathy Breitenbach (Parks/Rosa Escareno proxy), Leslie Perkins (Ald. Maria Hadden proxy)
- Not in attendance: Cindy Schwab, Nuri Medina, Ciere Boatright (DPD)

3. Welcome new Commissioners to UFAB

- Malcolm Whiteside recognizes the 3 new commissioners that have been added to UFAB: Randy Conner (DWM), Ciere Boatright (DPD), and Tom Carney (CDOT)

4. Public Comments

- Nancy Wade notes that the process for registering as a public speaker is not transparent or available on the UFAB website, nor is the location of the meeting.
- Alma Olveria-Gallegos, Openlands:
 - Requests that there should be a plan with clear criteria for when trees are high risk and when they can and should be removed and calls for “a tree risk management plan” for the City, which the speaker notes would provide a “standardized check-list” for at-risk trees in all parts of the city.
 - Calls for more transparency about meeting times and places, the timely posting of minutes (at the time of meeting, no minutes had been posted for December or January meetings), for a point of contact for questions/concerns listed on the UFAB website, and for better public access to the meetings.
- Amy Abramson:
 - Thanks the board for allowing public participation in meetings and discussions, and Jess Vogt for facilitating January subcommittee discussions, which the speaker hopes can be woven into agendas today and in the future.
 - Specifically, the speaker hopes to hear more about coordinating between agencies, for example, other departments attaching signage improperly to trees (e.g., with too many staples and string left on). Speaker notes that this is what the public sees on trees and sets a poor model about how trees are treated by the city.

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- Would like to hear more about how the City/BoF can transition away from hauling away of woody debris from private property – the speaker would like to learn more.
- Nancy Wade, Save Your Ash Chicago:
 - Called to treat as many Ash as possible with the \$1 million budget allocation, because, due to the scientific ash tree death curve, the rest that are not treated this year will be untreatable or dead next year. Provided a handout to attendees with the facts and figures. Asks whether the current contractor will be able to treat all the trees that need to be treated.

5. Action Items

- Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Injection Contract Update - John Lough, Senior City Forester, Bureau of Forestry, DSS
 - Contract was awarded and treatments will start in April or May: need to start after leaf-out, so depends on weather. Leaf-out is essential to evaluating tree condition because they would like to treat only the viable ash with good condition.
 - The contractor will treat as many diameter-inches as possible: treatment is dependent on tree size. Process is to evaluate all trees whether or not they are treatable, then measure size and determine appropriate pesticide dosage (the legal application of the pesticide requires on-site measurement of tree size), then treat with the same pesticide used in prior treatments (several years ago).
 - BoF will give existing data about where Ash trees were 6 or 7 years ago the last time but recognizes that some of these have been removed. Will start in the tree equity areas with treatment and proceed with a grid system.
 - If the contractor has the capacity to exceed the \$1 million allocation annually (\$5 mil over 5 years total), a budget amendment that requests additional \$\$ can be passed through City Council that would hypothetically allow treatment of greater numbers of Ash trees.
 - BoF will receive daily reports from Contractor and can provide data to UFAB at our quarterly meetings.
- Area Trimming Update – Malcolm Whiteside Jr-President
 - BoF: 74,000 trees have been trimmed since April 2023, a 153% increase in the number of trees trimmed since implementing the grid system.
 - BoF on pace to surpass 90,000 trees trimmed by April of this year.
 - BoF goal is to be on a 5-year pruning cycle: means every street tree in the city trimmed within 5 year period.
 - Daniella raised concerns about “liontailing” (extreme crown raising), improper stub cuts. Malcom clarified that they have contacted their crews and told them to “calm down on this” and that the goal when trimming an individual tree is to trim the tree so they don’t have to come back for 5 years, and asked anyone to bring examples of liontailing or improper pruning results to Forestry with photos when anyone comes across this so that Forestry can address this with the crews.
 - Cathy Breitenbach/Parks reports on Parks District trees trimmed: 9,846 trees trimmed in 2023 year.

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- Dead Tree Removal - Malcolm Whiteside Jr-President
 - BoF: ~3,800 trees scheduled to remove/removed this past year (2023), 1,200 remaining to inspect – expect ~150 of these will likely need removal. Trees inspected twice to make sure they really need removal. Tree removals ongoing throughout the year.
 - Daniella queries how Forestry knows removals are needed. Malcolm mentions that these come from 311 requests or trimming crews that report trees needing to be removed to their supervisors and then those are inputted into 311. (Later in meeting, Malcolm clarifies that 20,000-some requests for removals are received through 311 system; only a couple thousand of these actually merit removal.)
 - Parks: 1,255 trees removed in 2023.
- Tree Planting Citywide Update – Malcolm Whiteside Jr-President
 - BoF, 2022-23: 43,000 trees in 2 years. Ahead of schedule for 5-year program. On pace to do 14,000 in 2024.
 - CDOT will do another 5-6,000.
 - Parks will likely plant 3,000 in 2024.
 - These efforts help make out for years when they only planted a couple thousand.
 - Will work on heat index areas this year to guide tree planting locations.
 - Watering: There's a question about how watering of new trees happens. Malcolm says that only in a drought does the City tell the contractors to water the trees and they are reluctant to "push that button" when it's really needed. Otherwise, educational door hangers are left for property owners on water needs.
 - CDOT arterial streets survey: 95+% 2-year survival rate on warranty guarantee for trees planted in 2022-23. The remaining 5% are put in a warranty request and are immediately replaced by contractor at their expense, but there is no guarantee on these trees. (Sean Wiedel clarifies later that this is actually "thriving," per contract language, not just alive.)
 - Per the Our Roots trees, Rolando Favela asks how they measure "success rate" of this program per planting numbers: Raed Mansour, CDPH (in attendance per later Our Roots presentation), clarifies that at present, it is just #s of 311 planting requests received. The Tree Ambassadors program is working on developing tracking metrics for tree health on the trees that are planted as a result of the program.
- Discretionary Removal Letter – Ald. Maria Hadden
 - Leslie Perkins from Committee on Environmental Protection and Energy mentioned that more engagement with City Council (of UFAB) and aldermanic education might need to happen given an ordinance (re: tree removal prerogatives of alders) that was introduced in 2023 fall in response to BoF transitioning to grid trimming.
 - Tabled as Chairwoman Hadden was not available to attend this month's UFAB meeting.

6. Subcommittee Reports

- ~~Public Education Update~~ – Ald. Maria Hadden
- ~~Policy / Landscape Ordinance~~ – Daniella Pereira
- Jess Vogt reports on the January Subcommittee meetings. These were brainstorming sessions at which Jess, Cathy Breitenbach (Parks proxy), a few City

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personnel from BoF (Joe McCarthy) and CDOT, and lots of general public and were present. UFAB members have the summary memo in their emails.

- Jess suggests that UFAB member should assign themselves to subcommittees, noting that no more than three members can be in a subcommittee without triggering the Open Meetings Act (necessitates in-person meetings that significantly complicate the scheduling of activities, formal agenda, posted location, public welcome, etc.). At this time representatives/proxies are not subjected to the OMA at this time. There is an ordinance in the works (Angela Tovar is working on this) to allow proxies to be official UFAB members (and therefore contributing to quorum, able to vote should that become necessary), which could make them subjected to OMA in the future.
- Subcommittee should have between 1-3 goals for the year, small “easy wins” and larger more long-term goals. Subcommittees should also have a dedicated leader from UFAB. Discussion ensued regarding the formation of these two subcommittees, who the relevant key City personnel are, and their goals/timeline; see below.
- Policy—Landscape Ordinance Update/Review subcommittee:
 - *UFAB leadership member:* Daniella Pereira
 - *Key personnel:* Joe McCarthy (BoF), Jeff Brink, 2FM (Fleet and Facilities Management)) representative, Ben Reynoso (CDOT), DPD Zoning person (ask Patrick Murphey, Zoning Administrator, for appropriate contact), Leslie Perkins (Environmental Committee), Dept of Buildings representative (Green infrastructure contractor?), Luke, Jess Vogt (DePaul) as UFAB back-up, can come off committee if too many per OMA
 - *Goal:* Revise the Landscape Ordinance. This is two parts:
 - Revise the Landscape Ordinance language itself. This text will be presented to Committee on Environmental Protection and Energy (and possibly Zoning if there are Zoning changes suggested) City Council.
 - Revise the “Landscape Ordinance Guidebook” that is currently on BoF website.
- *Plan/Timeline:*
 - Before first meeting - mark up ordinance with suggestions
 - Guide edits can come after the ordinance itself; this may need more edits.
 - Goal is to have the guidebook portion done by June so UFAB can determine a budget ask for any consulting/marketing needs to make guidebook finalized.
 - Will have Zoom/Teams meetings virtually in between the monthly official UFAB subcommittee meetings at which the general public are welcome.
- *Discussion:*
- Jess asks if there is bandwidth for other policy-related committees, e.g., Heritage Tree Ordinance as discussed during January subcommittee brainstorm, or Tree Risk Management Policy proposed during public comment or others?
 - John Lough and Malcolm Whiteside note that there is a city policy for tree risk management that they can present at next UFAB full board meeting. UFAB can discuss additional policies that they might undertake at that time. Daniella Pereira notes that the Table 17 in Chicago UF Management Plan there is a list of other tree policies that the city does not have and UFAB

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should look at this list in considering what else the advisory body wants to do.

- Gaby Wagoner-Sobrero suggests that Tree Ambassadors and Tree Equity Working Group participants should be engaged if possible. Daniella says these people are welcome to monthly subcommittee meetings (next two are March 7, 2-4 pm, and April 4, 2-4 pm).
- Education Subcommittee:
 - This work started a bit last fall when Alderwoman Hadden engaged with CPS to have them bring back Oaktober.
 - *UFAB leadership member:* Ald. Hadden (need to confirm), Jess Vogt (joint leadership)
 - *Other key personnel:* CDPH, DOE, Our Roots/Tree Ambassadors, Openlands (Molly Roche, TreeKeepers), CRTI, other UFAB members (as many can show up as interested because the Education subcommittee will, as of now, only be meeting on the monthly subcommittee dates, next two are March 7, April 4)
 - *Goal:* Will be determined at the meeting, but broadly the goal is to educate the community, alderpeople, and to have forums with City departments.
 - *Plan/Timeline:* Will be determined at the subcommittee meeting, to be based on goal.
 - *Discussion:*
 - Daniella Pereira notes the important distinction between Aldermanic education and community education so people understand why trees are beneficial and correcting misinformation.
 - Sean Wiedel notes that it's very important to not re-do existing city efforts, e.g., Our Roots.
 - Jess notes the importance of some "easy wins" such as Q&A with City Council or EPE Committee
- Sidebar, Update on City public tree inventory: Cathy Breitenbach reports that she (for Parks) and Joe McCarthy (BoF) are, separately, writing grants to get funding to conduct 100%, ground-based, city tree inventories (prioritizing underserved areas, but ideally this will inventory all public trees, not just a sample). Deadline for grant is in March. They will keep UFAB updated.
- Sidebar, additional Old Business that Daniella Periera would like an update on:
 - New "Inspect Tree" dropdown in Chi311: In addition to Tree Removal, Tree Planting request, Pick-up Debris, within Forestry, there should be a new Inspect Tree option. This was discussed originally discussed at December meeting. Malcolm says they give Salesforce the information and can't think of a reason why this can't be a new dropdown and will look into it.
 - UFAB webpage email address: UFAB needs a single email address for people to email someone with an issue or question they have. Malcolm will check on this also.

7. New Business

- Our Roots Chicago Update – Raed Mansour – Project Admin (DPH)
 - Raed Mansour shared a slide deck presentation to the group of its outreach efforts via the Our Roots tree planting and advocacy program.

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- Our Roots looks at how the tree canopy overlays with public health data in Chicago to help prioritize planting and preservation of trees and canopy in 22 priority communities
- Our Roots Chicago is part of the CDC's One Health effort, which stipulates that the health of animals, humans, and nature: "when we protect one, we protect all."
- New data will be on CRTI website soon. Lindsay Darling with CRTI is the contact here.
- Our Roots has 22 communities but they are trying to figure out if there are communities that should be added or removed based on new CDC data available this year.
- The Our Roots program has a goal that is in terms of the percent of trees planted by Our Roots Tree Ambassadors. In 2022, goal was 30%, in 2023, goal was 40% - more than 40% were planted in equity areas, so will need to see if they need to increase that goal in 2024.
- Planting in available parkway spaces is challenging: There is underground infrastructure that doesn't always allow an adequate space to be cut out of the pavement (4' x 6' rectangle needed).
- Still, the Our Roots plantings have stemmed the net loss of trees in the city by the numbers.
- Overall, only 37% of available planting space in the City as a whole is parkway space, the rest of the space, 63%, is on private property, so there is a need to engage with property owners on outreach efforts for private property tree planting.
- As of January 2024, 24,203 tree planted in 2023, but Raed notes that the numbers they keep quoting are changing month-to-month because the data input is lagging. One of the things they'd like to work on with BoF is how to get more "real-time accounting" of trees planted.
- Our Roots is interested in getting communities actively involved. They surveyed community organizations and discovered they don't have the bandwidth to plant themselves, so the Tree Ambassadors program was born to help knock on doors and increase 311 requests.
- Tree Ambassadors...
 - Individuals affiliated with an organization.
 - Trained in a one-time 3-4 hour training, survey tree planting sites and recruit interested residents, and submit the 311 request, which then in the equity areas get bumped to the top of the line. Goal is for each TA to get 100 trees requested and in the ground in their neighborhood.
 - TAs may develop their own culturally-appropriate tree education materials or ask Our Roots staff for technical assistance.
 - They might hold events to get neighbors interested and educated.
 - TAs are not TreeKeepers, TKs would be the next level of tree-advocacy training.
 - Organizations that apply to be Tree Ambassadors are usually just 1 person.
 - TAs get \$\$ for their organization to support the Tree Ambassador work.
 - Program started off with CDPH but is now officially run through the Morton Arboretum.

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- IRA funding and congressional earmark funding will allow the Morton Arboretum to fund 32 more Tree Ambassador community organizations in 2024. \$20k per organization.
- Applications to be new TAs open mid-year. Contact Melinda Escobar at Morton Arboretum/CRTI with inquiries/interest: mescobar@mortonarb.org.
- Related: Chicago Heat Watch: Drove heat watch routes last summer to map heat in the city. This data is now available and people within CDPH are working to get this info from just data and maps to actually impacting policy. Go to: Chicago.gov/coolchi to see.
- Currently CDPH is working on additional tech to help improve tree location data as a layer with the rest of the City's data (currently addressed-based, but one address may have 5 trees, etc.).
- Next steps:
 - Planning their Arbor Day 2024 kickoff; details forthcoming.
 - Are using digital billboards to advertise the Our Roots program and Chi311 request platform.
 - Community Opinion Survey through CRTI to see what people in different communities feel about trees.

○ State of Illinois Exotic Weed Act, 525 ILCS10, Updates

- Tree species added to the State of Illinois invasive species list, effective immediately: Tree of Heaven, Callery Pear, Amur Corktree
- BoF has amended approved planting lists to exclude these species and all agencies will make sure these species are not planted on parkways.
- Questions emerged about whether these species need to be removed? John Lough clarifies that existing trees of these species do not need to be removed.

○ Christmas Tree Recycling

- Malcolm Whiteside shared updates on BoF annual Christmas tree recycling program. The number of trees recycled this year surpassed year's, with over 24,000 Christmas trees recycled this year. These are mulched and then composted.

8. Approving Minutes from last meeting

- December minutes passed out by Malcolm Whiteside. No questions; approved by all.
- Jess Vogt expressed a desire for more detailed minutes than were made for December and will create these for the record.

9. Public Q&A

Q: A public recommendation was made to post flyers/posters in alleys two weeks before Christmas tree recycling starts to discourage people from putting their trees in the alley

- BOF said that they rely on alderpeople to communicate the message but will take the suggestion back for consideration.

Q: Someone inquired what happened with the free Colorado Blue Spruce saplings program through BOF

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- BoF said that it was a partnership with the US Forest Service that has since discontinued.
- They had challenges with where to plant them since they could not go on parkways.

Q: A member of the public asked that meetings be published on the website as well as a link for pre-registration

- These recommendations, including the location of the meetings, will be taken back and looked into.

Q: Someone asked if there will be a virtual option for future meetings

- BoF is exploring a livestream option currently.
- UFAB members will still be required to attend meetings in person per the OMA.

Q: Nancy Wade/SYAC: Asked if the \$1 million allocation for Ash Borer treatment will be exhausted this year.

- BoF said yes, weather permitting.

Q: Nancy Wade/SYAC: Said that 7,000 Ash trees should be treated in 2024 based on the average 16" diameter guidance in the RFP

- BOF clarified that it will depend on the actual circumference of the tree as to how many trees will actually be treated. A tree that is 24" will cost more than a 16" tree, and the city has a diversity of Ash tree sizes. The 16" in the RFP was guidance only.
- With the \$1M, it is anticipated that 114,678 inches of trees will be treated in 2024

Q: *(Comment)* A member of the public noted that since most saplings die within ten years, it's important to treat mature Ash trees.

Q: Reporter from the Sun-Times asked about the process of tree removal when the request comes from an alderperson.

- BoF said that a number of factors are considered when the request comes from an alderperson (e.g., sidewalk issues, roots in pipes, etc.).
- BoF will make a determination on removal based on the circumstances.
- These requests are different than 311 because the trees tend to be alive.

Q: *(Comment)* A member of the public suggested that the Committee on Environmental Protection and Energy host a subject matter hearing on UFAB and specifically on the Bloomberg Report to be found at the end of the Chicago Urban Forestry Management Plan.

Q: *(Comment)* A member of the public mentioned a major "pain point" for tree removals is the Department of Water Management and the lead service line

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replacement program.

Q: *(Comment)* A member of the public recommended that a subcommittee take up the issue of creating a Heritage Tree Policy. This is timely with the discussion of pest control and how trees can be protected. Would like to see the City be more proactive instead of reactive.

Q: *(Comment)* A member of the public recommended better coordination of resources among City departments related to trees would be helpful. For example, it's not obvious that the Tree Ambassador program would fall under CDPH (many would expect it to be housed under Forestry). So can there be more cross linking of tree-related things on City websites.

Q: *(Comment)* A member of the public stated that the door knocker pamphlet is an ineffective educational tool per tree watering.

Q: A member of the public inquired broadly about tree species diversity as it relates to the Tree Ambassador program.

- Raed Mansour/Our Roots said that Tree Ambassadors ask residents if they have a species preference and communicate they will note it, but no species is actually promised.
- It was clarified that Forestry works to maintain species diversity and would not plant an entire block with only Maple trees, for example.
- Tree Ambassadors also follow up to follow the health of a tree once it's planted.

Q: A member of the public asked if the Tree Ambassador program could serve as a workforce development program and stated that it should be a volunteer pipeline to employment.

- Our Roots clarified that it is a workforce development program as it currently exists and that all Tree Ambassadors organizations are paid. They see the pipeline to employment as Tree Ambassadors -> TreeKeepers and/or Greencorps -> Openlands Arborist Apprenticeship program.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:15 pm.