

MINNEAPOLIS TREE ADVISORY COMMISSION
Meeting of May 19, 2022
Held remotely via Zoom
Decision/Consensus/Assignment items are set out in bold.

**COMMISSION MEMBERS ARE RESPECTFULLY REQUESTED TO REVIEW THESE MINUTES CAREFULLY
FOR ASSIGNMENT AND ACTION ITEMS PERTAINING TO THEM**

The Meeting of the Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission (MTAC) of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) convened at 5:30 p.m. on May 19, 2022, with the following Commission Members in attendance: Co-Chair Peggy Booth, Co-Chair Peter MacDonagh (U of M), Steve Nicholson (MN Shade Tree Advisory Committee), Carol Sersland, Tim Keane, Giuseppe Marrari, Steve Collin (Public Works), Don Willeke (Mayor’s Representative), Ralph Sievert (MPRB Forestry Director), Curt Hartog (Executive Director for MPS Facilities, School Board Representative) and MPRB Commissioner Steffanie Musich (District 5).

Not in attendance: Susan Olmsted

Guests in attendance: Jeremy Barrick (Assistant Superintendent for Environmental Stewardship, MPRB), Michaela Neu (Green Minneapolis), Kat Yushchenko (Marcy-Holmes neighborhood), Philip Potyondy (MPRB Sustainable Forestry Coordinator).

CALL TO ORDER AND MINUTES

Co-Chair Booth called the meeting to order. Introductions by Board members as well as guests were made. **The MTAC meeting minutes for April 21, 2022, were approved.**

**MPRB FORESTRY FUNDING –
CARBON OFFSET PROGRAM & AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) FUNDING**

Barrick reviewed the *Green Minneapolis (GM)* process for acquiring funding. It’s been about a year since David Wilson and Barrick made a presentation to the MTAC about a) growing/expanding the tree canopy and b) raising money to do that. Last summer the MPRB entered into a Memo of Understanding (MOU) with GM to find alternative funding to the recently expired tree levy for canopy replacement (approx.. \$2.1 million).

GM has been working in the downtown area to water trees and increase volunteering for tree maintenance.

Barrick reviewed the carbon credit market approach to funding:
California has State legislation that says corporations have to be carbon neutral and if they can't do it by reducing their carbon output, then they can buy carbon credits on the carbon market. The “carbon market” is kind of the hot new thing across the country. But there is no ‘regulatory’ carbon market in Minnesota, but we have an “intrinsic” one. So it’s pretty common for major corporations to want to be stewards instead of corporate citizens with a lot of talk downtown about how we invest locally in ‘sustainable measures or carbon markets.’

Rather than donating to plant trees in the rain forest far away GM connected with a group called CITY FOREST CREDITS¹, out of Seattle, led by Mark McPherson, who is the brother of USDA Forest Service and UC Davis scientist who is behind the I TREE application (Greg McPherson).

Sievert and Potyondy pulled the data from the last three years of planting: 23,500 trees which would be included in the tree planting “bundle”. To start: bundle the tree planting together and get it certified with a carbon market registry like CITY FOREST CREDITS. Then, those credits can be sold on the carbon market with the commitment that the trees would be maintained and replaced for 25 years.

The concept of bundling our trees that we already planted, or that we plan to plant is the foundation of this initial fundraising agreement and as the ARPA funding from Covid was becoming available that GM got involved with in Boulder, CO to get tree planting to be considered eligible for the ARPA funds. That was successful and so tree planting is categorized as eligible. GM then worked with Kim Haber, City of Minneapolis Sustainability Office Director, to put up a proposal for \$2.1 million. This proposal included staffing for both GM and the MPRB, and procurement of trees. This ARPA funding would get efforts rolling - but the activities got rolling without the ARPA funds. Then the mayor’s office recommended that the Council approve funding \$1 million for tree procurement to start ‘growing’ the canopy. This was presented this to the City Council on May 4th, with a press event on May 16th, and the next hurdle is the Council vote on the ARPA funding on May 26th. There would be two years to spend the money. Currently, MPRB has approximately \$300K in the general fund for planting. The plan would be to use the ARPA funds to supplement this by \$500,000 per year for the next 2 years.

Therefore, MPRB/GM intends to bundle the future general fund trees and put them on the carbon market registry, but according to the City Finance Office, the ARPA funded trees could not be used. Barrick continued, “To do that, we could do 3,000....say, we plant 8,000 trees and total 3,000 paid for out of the general fund and 5,000 out of the ARPA funding, we could bundle the 3,000”. GM wants to challenge the Finance Office’s interpretation and has started conversations with the Finance Office about eligibility who asserts that ARPA funded trees are generating revenue and therefore ineligible.

Barrick introduced Ms. Neu. She is a Project Coordinator with GM.² Ms. Neu has been recently hired by GM to focus efforts on carbon offsets. Her focus will be on the “Twin Cities Climate Resiliency Initiative”. This is a public-private partnership focused on expanding the urban tree canopy across the Metro Area. It is a 20-year vision to increase metro area tree canopy by (or to?) 30% through planting and maintaining millions of additional trees on public and private lands.³ MPRB is the pilot partner on the initiative. GM has several environmental nonprofits that have joined the initiative (e.g. The Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, Minneapolis Parks Foundation, Friends of the Mississippi River) which are advocating for tree funding.

The carbon offset program is one of a number of tools to ‘obtain additional funding for tree planting projects in which the private sector desiring to offset their carbon footprint would pay for carbon

¹ <https://www.cityforestcredits.org/carbon-credits/carbon-registry/minneapolis-forest-carbon-offsets/>

² [Michaela Neu with Green Minneapolis- mneu@greenminneapolis.org]
www.greenminneapolis.org

³ <https://www.greenminneapolis.org/projects/climate-resiliency-initiative/>
<https://us14.campaign-archive.com/?u=8f56b87e39a24e6515ad9f9af&id=1cc4b44abe>
Green Minneapolis' Climate Resiliency Initiative's goal is to plant and maintain 5 million trees across the 7-county metro area over the next 20 years, increasing the Twin Cities tree canopy by ~30%, sequestering millions of tons of carbon and mitigating the most severe impacts of climate change on Twin Cities residents.

credits which would then be invested in our local tree canopy and communities. The steps in the program:

1. Established partnership with CITY FOREST CREDITS as GM's carbon registry
<https://www.cityforestcredits.org/contact-us/>
2. MPRB Tree data (2019 to 2021) has been submitted to CITY FOREST CREDITS
3. Data is being verified and certified
4. Legal documents will be presented at the MPR Board meeting by mid-June
5. Once approved by the Board, GM will have credit available for sale by mid-summer
6. GM is anticipating having 5,000 credits released
7. 'Interestingly, all of the 40,000 urban tree credits that were available in March sold as a bundled sale at \$36/credit (\$1,440,000)' 'this sale price was about four times greater than that for offsets from rural forests'...'one entity purchased all urban credits available'
8. Currently, GM is in discussions with corporate buyers based in Minneapolis, interested in a) becoming a founding partner of the initiative and b) committing to a long term multi-year purchase of our credits
9. GM is also seeking other interested buyers for a) the remaining credits and b) those credits that will be released over time.
10. With this first project coming to a close, GM is stepping up efforts to work with other local governments to complete additional tree planting projects in the metro area.

If we know of other organizations that would be interested in learning more about GM's efforts reach out to Ms. Neu.

Questions: will information regarding which entity is buying the credits be public? Ms. Neu answered, yes, this information will be available.

Barrick mentioned that GM will be presenting another agreement to the MPRB in June on the transfer and arrangement of these credits. There will be a more detailed presentation on how the bundling and the transfer of credit work because a) you can't sell all the credits up front, you can only sell 25% and b) then you can release the sale of credits later as you show that you are responsible for keeping the trees alive.

Barrick mentioned one other item to be aware of; there's criticism of 'carbon offset' programs as potential 'greenwashing'.

Neu recognized that a) 80% of the sale of carbon credits proceeds go back to the planting partners, so the MPRB would get 80% of all credit sales going forward and b) GM is looking for partners that have already made efforts to reduce their carbon footprint.

Discussion continued about the maintenance and survivability of the trees that GM plants. Barrick stated that there will be watering trucks. GM contracted watering downtown last year. Monitoring is continued to verify a 80% survival rate.

Clarification of the credits to be sold: 5,000 credits (about 10% of the first project or 50,000 credits) at \$36 per tree, but the \$36/tree was a different project not necessarily this program with the MPRB.

There was a question regarding the geographic scope of the tree plantings: can a Minneapolis organization buy credits and then the MPRB use those credits to plant trees in Wirth Park, or, outside the city limits, e.g.? Musich replied that the plantings must be on Park Board owned property.

For the MPRB, CITY FOREST CREDITS made legal adjustments in their standard template agreement. Their standard template maintains that the tree and the property had to be the same owner. For park tree planting this is not an issue, but boulevard trees pose a different scenario in that the City owns the land (not the Park Board), so the template was adjusted to “owning the tree”.

Barrick: with the ARPA funding, MPRB will prioritize the ‘green zones’ which we’ve been prioritizing for the last 3 years

Goal of this program with GM is a self-sustaining model in which planting trees recovers the carbon credits to buy more trees.

Question: is there a way to know how much MPRB’s credits would sell for? Answer: not really.

Put this topic on MTAC’s June agenda.

Co-Chair Booth requested that Musich or Barrick notify the MTAC of the MPRB meeting dates, with a link to that meeting, this will be before the Board.

MPRB PLANNING: PROJECT PROTOCOLS FOR TO PRESERVE EXISTING MPRB TREES MTAC CO-CHAIR MACDONAGH

There is interest in creating a program that would save trees that provide maximum canopy and how to implement such a program. There doesn’t seem to be a standard operating procedure for evaluating if trees will be “saved” or condemned in the park planning process. Craig Pinkala, the forestry preservation coordinator, is involved in the process but that’s one person to review many plans. There could be a protocol instituted during the planning process in which e.g. the canopy is kept at least the same as project start. Currently, MPRB Planning and Forestry are at cross purposes: trees are removed for park redevelopment and then Rorestry needs to make up the tree canopy shortfall. Unfortunately, add the removal of the EAB large trees and canopy is at an all-time low.

Co-Chair MacDonagh stated that in 1950s’ = 50% canopy, currently it’s around 20 to 30%. American Forests indicate that 40% should be our goal.

Ms. Yushchenko shared her ideas about increasing and maintaining the existing large-canopy mature trees. Her familiarity involves Father Hennepin Park project. She looked at the MRPB website for projects⁴ to find out more about tree removal/ retain /replace plans. Then she attended MRPB meetings to find out more about what to expect.

Reviewing the 2023 to 2026 MPRB Comprehensive Plan, it focuses on tree planting which is good, but Yushchenko proposes the need to add tree conservation:

Goal should be, by 2026, implementation of sustainable quantifiable tree canopy increase plan that strengthens the resiliency of parks and riverfront territory and grows the overall canopy by 25%. Tree conservation would be the priority.

⁴ https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/park-care-improvements/park-projects/current_projects/father_hennepin_bluff_park_-_upper/

1. Plant 2 trees for every tree cut down while maintaining a sustainable and even mix of tree age and type to boost resilience.
2. Increase the tree canopy by 25% while decreasing tree removal by 50% with the focus on preserving “older” (established) trees. Factor in the trees that need to be cut down because of storms, etc.
3. Ensure that all Minneapolis improvement projects summarize the total loss of trees for that project and then list justification for every tree removed using established tree removal criteria and value standards, balance the needs of the local area with sustainability and carbon neutrality goals. Denote this criteria in all planning materials available to the MPRB and the public. Establish clear targeted tree removal guidelines for both urban planners and construction contractors to ensure that loss of tree life is minimized and sensitive critical areas such as the bluffs are treated with special care.

Goal: let everyone know what and how many trees are being removed.

Discussion: This is a topic (convincing planning staff and process to improve accounting for tree removal/maintenance) that has been in MTAC discussions for many years. How to effectively implement is the challenge.

Musich asked Barrick to provide a summary of the basal area replacement method applied in New York City. In summary it comes down to monetizing the tree using the “Basal Area Replacement Method” from the Council of Tree Landscape Appraisers⁵. Based on the forester’s review the park plans could be overlaid on the tree data to better understand the impact on the root system. Barrick also discussed the details and ramifications of placing a dollar value on each tree.

Barrick noted that Craig Pinkala is handling this process currently. There is a difference between the ‘design platforms’ in the planning department and the Forestry Department.

Musich asked MTAC to come forward with proposals and recommendations for tree preservation ordinances including early coordination between Forestry and Planning; a) staffing needs b) process.

Nicholson mentioned his experience involving 90 communities that have Tree Preservation Ordinances (e.g. Burnsville). These types of ordinances have been implemented over many years.

Keane – in alignment with a tree impact analysis he suggested previously, a “codified tree impact analysis” would be mandatory such as the analysis completed for the Kenilworth Corridor EIS, in which the LRT construction took out 1,000 trees. His question: Have we been treating (i.e. injecting chemicals) ash trees as a matter of policy? See Sievert’s response in the Forestry Update.

MacDonagh summarized our discussion: **This commission could take the lead on reviewing tree “removal/maintenance” planning efforts.** It will take effort. People/ citizens are noticing that this is an issue.

⁵ The Council of Tree and Landscape Appraisers is a consortium composed of professionals from the American Society of Consulting Arborists, the International Society of Arboriculture, the American Association of Nurserymen, the National Arborists Association, and the Associated Landscape Contractors of America. These organizations have cooperated to publish a handbook for tree appraisal entitled “Guide for Plant Appraisal.” Copies of this handbook may be obtained by contacting the International Society of Arboriculture, Box 3129, Champaign, IL 61826.

MPRB FORESTRY UPDATE

Forestry Director Sievert started his update with a summary of the Ash Canopy Replacement Plan – starting in 2014 , 40,000 public ash trees that needed to be removed and the ash were replaced at 5 K /year. MPRB allowed residents to treat (inject) their boulevard ash trees. Communities treated to slow the disease – Minneapolis avoided using treatments to avoid impacting pollinators (in reaction to a citizen movement against using chemicals).

The Forestry Department is wrapping up planting before Memorial Day; 8200 trees have been planted, with one more shipment arriving. Shortage of tree watering bags is occurring.

Arborist candidates are being interviewed. 38 applicants with 18 who met the minimum requirements. Then 12 selected for the civil service interview and now to the final 5 in early June.

Sievert reviewed an email he sent to Commission members regarding the addition of MTAC info to the Forestry Department website: he started out with posting the agendas and minutes from 2022 and will add past Annual Reports.

https://www.minneapolis-parks.org/park_care_improvements/trees/minneapolis-tree-advisory-commission/

Question regarding the state of tree planting on Hiawatha Ave (completed for the Major league baseball All stars game). Who is responsible for upkeep? The City. But MnDOT, Met Council, and the County are involved, and their requirements must be met.

2022 ARBOR DAY, APRIL 29TH – WRAP UP

Potyondy reported on Arbor Day. Best Arbor Day ever! As testified by those of us who were there.

MTAC 2022 ANNUAL REPORT INSTIGATION / RECOMMENDATIONS

Targeting presentation of report to MPRB for August. Recommendations a) protecting trees b) long term tree maintenance and c) tree planting and care on private property particularly to achieve tree equity. Co-chair Booth also said we need to decide if the report would include highlights of the state of the urban forest and asked Sievert and Potyondy for suggestions on notable achievements or issues in last year.

Is the ARPA in need of mention in the Report? Yes, this could be. Carbon credit program could be included.

MacDonagh and Booth and Sersland will try to get a list of topics out to the Commission in the next two weeks.

ADJOURNMENT

The Commission's Meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted: Carol Sersland – Commission Secretary