

# MINNEAPOLIS TREE ADVISORY COMMISSION

Meeting of November 16, 2023

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 November 16, 2023, with the following Commission Members in attendance: Co-chair Peter MacDonagh (U of M liaison), Chris Linde (District 1), Co-Chair Giuseppe Marrari (District 2), John Kruse (District 3), Mary Bolla (District 4), Barb Schlaefer (District 6), Tim Keane (At-Large), Don Willeke (Mayor's Representative), Ralph Sievert (MPRB Forestry Director), Steve Nicholson (MN Shade Tree Advisory Committee), Curt Hartog (School Board Representative), Steve Collin (Public Works), Sydney Schaaf (City Trees Program Manager), Billy Menz (MPRB Commissioner, District 1), Linea Palmisano (City Council, Ward 13).

Not in attendance: Carol Sersland (District 5).

Guests in attendance: Danielle Schumerth (Forestry Outreach Coordinator), Jeremy Barrick (MPRB Representative), James Proctor (Friends of Eloise Butler Garden), Pierce Hastings (Parks and Power), Craig Pinkalla (Forestry Preservation Coordinator), Philip Potyondy (MPRB Sustainable Forestry Coordinator), Mitchel Hansen (neighborhood representative), Roxanne O'Brien (citizen), Paul Masono, Felix Miner, Piers Hastings.

## CALL TO ORDER AND MINUTES

Introduction of attendees. Co-Chair Marrari called the meeting to order. **The MTAC meeting minutes for October 19, 2023, were approved as delivered.**

## MPRB FORESTRY DEPARTMENT UPDATE

### Ralph Sievert and Forestry Staff

Sievert reported on an application of a tree health product, at Minnehaha Falls Park. It helps to aerate and invigorate the soil around oak trees then cover with mulch as this is the ideal time of year to apply. *Prep Prescription Organic Matter* is made in Minnesota and was donated to the City. Because of the heavy foot traffic in the park, they are attempting to help trees survive.

Potyondy then updated the MTAC on the recent hiring of tree arborists. Crews have been out pruning, collecting water bags, and installing stem protection on trees. Challenges for the crews have been the stolen vehicles on the streets interfering with operations.

Ms. Schumerth updated the MTAC on the November 2nd workshop with MPRB Commissioner Elizabeth Schaefer (District 4) at the Kenwood Recreation Center in Schaefer's park district. Many members from the community were present. The discussion was on the neighborhood members caring for trees, especially watering. Our MTAC members, Barb Schlaefer and Mary Bolla were in attendance. Mary Bolla **requested the presentation for the meeting, which Schumerth has not received yet, but will send when she receives it.**

Jeremy Barrick reported on the World Forum of Urban Forests in Washington, D.C. in October. Attendees included urban forestry professionals and others from all over the world. Examples of impressive projects mentioned: In India there is massive reforestation project. Amusement parks that are nature based. Planting hundreds of thousands of trees a day. There was industry conversation around metrics for measuring successful urban forestry in which, e.g. that everyone can see 3 trees from a window or live 300 meters from a park. What is the proper metric for canopy cover? As Minneapolis is a Tree City of the World – Potyondy reported on the conference, quite a few from Minnesota were represented at the conference. Schaaf connected with other cities involved in private property planting management. Schumerth was impressed at the many technical presentations and the many opportunities to network. Schumerth took a field trip to Baltimore in a community where the residents got together to plant trees in excess sidewalk areas, and it's been a success to increase property values.

### **BUCKTHORN REMOVAL EFFORTS**

**James Proctor, Friends of Eloise Butler Flower Garden and Mary Bolla, MTAC Member**

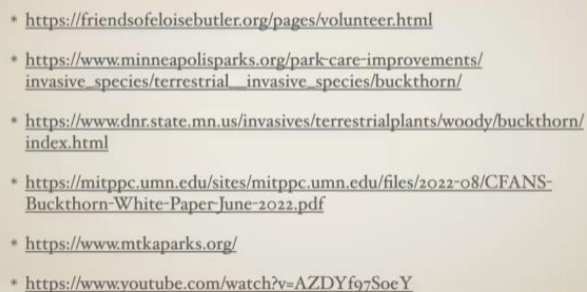
Bolla introduced James Proctor, who has been working on buckthorn removal and management for over 17 years, primarily in Theodore Wirth Park.

Proctor started with the history of buckthorn management: 2006 was the beginning of weeding. Buckthorn supports very little to no habitat for other species. Why is it so difficult to eradicate? Because after cutting the buckthorn merely creates an opening for MORE buckthorn (and garlic mustard). The previous process used was cutting large buckthorn and then treating with herbicide to kill it. A replacement tool for this process is to cut and revisit the site to remove the new growth and seedlings for several years. The two-year process he and his volunteer crews use is to cut at elbow height and volunteers return later to prune off all new leaf growth. Seeding immediately with native species must be implemented. After a few years the site is finally replaced with species diversity and a healthier environment.

Bolla shared the presentation with the MTAC by e-mail on November 28<sup>th</sup>.

**It's a great opportunity for neighborhood groups to become involved in buckthorn management.**

Bolla shared a number of references on buckthorn management. Here is an image of the slide:

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- \* <https://friendsofeloisebutler.org/pages/volunteer.html>
  - \* [https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/park-care-improvements/invasive-species/terrestrial\\_invasive-species/buckthorn/](https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/park-care-improvements/invasive-species/terrestrial_invasive-species/buckthorn/)
  - \* <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/terrestrialplants/woody/buckthorn/index.html>
  - \* <https://mitppc.umn.edu/sites/mitppc.umn.edu/files/2022-08/CFANS-Buckthorn-White-Paper-June-2022.pdf>
  - \* <https://www.mtkaparks.org/>
  - \* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZDYf97SoeY>

Barrick mentioned that there is funding pending to help with buckthorn management.

Schlaefter posed a question about Forestry's role in managing natural areas in the city's parks. Barrick answered that environmental management assists with the natural forested areas. There are 6,500 acres of parkland, 1,100 acres are considered "natural". Of that 1,100 acres they can manage about 400 acres with the natural resource group. Forestry manages 250,00 boulevard trees.

Nicholson posed a question about the allelopathy<sup>1</sup> caused by buckthorn, what are you doing with the waste material. Reply: It is hauled away as much as possible.

Proctor offered tours to the Commission to be able to understand the scale of what's been done and what needs to be done.

## **EMERALD ASH BORER (EAB) IMPACTS: PRIVATE PROPERTY CONCERNS**

**Co-Chair MacDonagh**

**Guests: Mitchel Hansen and Roxanne O'Brien**

### EAB Removal process discussion

A summary of activities to date was presented by MacDonagh.

Co-Chair MacDonagh introduced guests: Mitchel Hansen and Roxanne O'Brien. Their comments are summarized here:

Ms. O'Brien thanked the Commission for the 10 minutes provided, while they usually only get 2 minutes. She provided background information about herself and her family and their ties to the north Minneapolis community, and on the positions she has held. She discussed the property owners who have been affected by the tree condemnation process. She stated that White supremacy has put in place this process for condemning trees. She said the people with whom she has dealt have been rude and non-communicative. O'Brien discussed her mother's experience with the tree removal process in Minneapolis. She said tree removal equipment has caused shifting in the ground around her mom's home and therefore caused foundation problems. She asked why the info about the diseased trees was not relayed to her mother before she bought the home. Because of all the other social circumstances in the City at the time (around 2021), it has adversely affected them and she holds the Park Board accountable. O'Brien maintains that she and others have not been heard and have not been listened to. Two City Council members have been engaged with them. She said more than 800 households have been affected by the tree condemnation process, of which 50% are Black and from the North Minneapolis. She said, "This is a prime example of environmental injustice and environmental racism. This is a new form of redlining. We have proof that a lot of this is about land acquisition and not necessarily infected trees. It wasn't our fault. Somebody must have brought this infestation to our community". She continued with demands for investigations into these problems.

Mr. Hansen expressed his frustration about the information regarding the spread of the EAB infestation. Assessments were levied on the north side in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and every single year. He asked why North Minneapolis trees the most dangerous if EAB spread there last. He said he walked through the Camden and Harrison neighborhoods and talked to people living on property, much of which he said are owned and managed by LLC's. Keith Reitman and other "slumlords" have \$325 tree removals while property owners like resident Willis White are charged \$6,800. Hansen was told by a tree provider that they're not supposed to talk to citizens asking questions. Hansen has a condemnation list that he acquired and asked Potyondy to explain what the 'trunk cost' is (an additional \$200-\$400 additional). Potyondy indicated that it is the sales tax applied to the service.

Hansen reiterated his concern, voiced at the previous month's meeting, about the MPRB's special assessment bonding bills" in which the Park Board ranked financial support for private tree removals the priority number 26 out of 26. Hansen said Detroit is paying for all the EAB tree removals. He

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<sup>1</sup> Allelopathy, the influence, usually detrimental, of one plant on another, by toxic chemical substances from living plant parts, through their release when a plant dies, or their production from decaying tissue. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/agricultural-and-biological-sciences/allelopathy>

maintains that the spread of EAB didn't happen as reported. He went on to mention how ridiculous the "carbon offset stuff is and the money that was promised for that program.

O'Brien mentioned that the AG's office questioned why the Park Board did not update their website, and she said she would be open to talking with more folks from "this team".

Then Hansen went on to describe a drive he took around the Kenwood neighborhood and said the "most expensive assessments that you had were on Met Council property". He mentioned again that people were told not to talk with them.

MacDonagh thanked O'Brien and Hansen for their comments and apologized that people were told not to talk with them.

MacDonagh invited Marrari to share a statement from the MTAC. He also pointed out that all Board members serve as volunteers and receive no remuneration for their service. Hansen then demanded to know if all Conflict-of-Interest forms had been submitted and wants the **Forms to be emailed to Hansen and O'Brien.**

Marrari thanked them for their time being here and was interrupted by O'Brien. He went on with the statement.

Marrari requested documentation from O'Brien and Hansen regarding the claims they made during the meeting, as it is difficult to respond to claims without some form of evidence. O'Brien responded that they will not be made to "do more research".

MTAC Statement by Co-Chair Giuseppe Mararri: see statement following the Minutes.

Continuing the discussion, Marrari mentioned the possibility that a statement could be included in "Truth in Housing" documents about the condition of trees on the property at the time of sale.

O'Brien responded that she doesn't know if she could "really trust the lobbyists that you guys have available like Brian Rice and such". "Twenty minutes is not enough to go down this rabbit hole".

Park Board Commissioner Billy Menz explained recent efforts by the Park Board to find private funds or other funds to use to help with the assessments. A resolution was put forward on the agenda in the Administration Finance Committee to pause condemnations until March 1<sup>st</sup>. Resolution was postponed until the December 6<sup>th</sup> meeting. He continued that it seems the MTAC needs to make a motion to do work to investigate this from an impartial lens using the information the organization has provided and from the information that we have from the Forestry Department. Menz acknowledged there is "rightful anger" on the part of the activists and the MTAC could act as a mediator in sharing information with the community.

NOTE: On December 2nd the Park Board sent an email with this information:

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) has received a \$500,000 donation from the Margaret A. Cargill Fund of the Saint Paul Minnesota Foundation that will be used to offset costs to remove diseased trees from private homesteaded properties in certain areas across Minneapolis.

The funds will first be applied retroactively to all private property tree removal assessments on [homesteads residing within census tracts](#) defined as disadvantaged.

MTAC member Chris Linde described his experience with EAB in 2013 with 2 mature boulevard trees' removal and talked with the Department about the situation including their goal to remove all public trees in 8 years. But he did not realize that the Department would then move on to tree removal on private property. He said, His first question when he joined the Commission was regarding EAB removal policy on private property.

O'Brien had further allegations in response to Linde's comments regarding formation of "nuisance laws" at the state level.

Schaaf thanked O'Brien and Hansen for attending this meeting and "all of your continued advocacy on this issue". She has been working with them on funding for EAB removal over the past months.

Hansen noted that MTAC minutes were not publicly available and should be posted on the MPRB website.

Further discussion around the availability of information ensued.

NOTE: The MTAC minutes have been published on-line since January 2022. Meeting minutes have been kept since the Commission's inception in 2004.

For example

<https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Minutes-MTAC-20January.2022.pdf>

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

The Commission's Meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted: Carol Sersland – Commission Secretary

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MTAC Statement as read by Giuseppe Marrari during the meeting:

*"The intent of this committee is to advise the park board and city council of Minneapolis in regards to the urban forest. As an advisory committee, we are not given power to vote on issues at the park board or city council. We, as volunteers, are not compensated in any way, nor do we have a budget allocated for tree initiatives. We are citizens that try to bring the voice of the community on trees to the table.*

*As a result, we advise on issues, but are obliged to defer to decisions made by the park board and city council.*

*We applaud your efforts on being heard and urge you to continue your work towards equity and fairness. As a board appointed by the park, we have access to the wealth of experience within the Forestry department. We can serve as a conduit to information to help in your commitment to justice."*