

# MINNEAPOLIS TREE ADVISORY COMMISSION

Meeting of December 21, 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 December 21, 2023, with the following Commission Members in attendance: Co-chair Peter MacDonagh (U of M liaison), Chris Linde (District 1), John Kruse (District 3), Carol Sersland (District 5), 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: Co-Chair Giuseppe Marrari (District 2), Mary Bolla (District 4).

Guests in attendance: Danielle Schumerth (Forestry Outreach Coordinator), Jeremy Barrick (MPRB Representative), Jaci Landstrom (invited to introduce themselves but would not).

## CALL TO ORDER AND MINUTES

Secretary Sersland called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm. Co-Chair MacDonagh assumed Chair of the meeting at approximately 6 pm. **The MTAC meeting minutes for November 16, 2023, were approved as delivered.**

## MPRB FORESTRY DEPARTMENT UPDATE

**Ralph Sievert and Forestry Staff**

### FORESTRY WEB PAGE UPDATES

The website has been updated to reflect the number of MTAC members at 18. The 2023 October minutes were added.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST FORMS

Sievert will resend the forms to the MTAC members for completion.

### 2024 TREE SPECIES PLANTING LIST

The bid specifications for 9,000 trees planned for planting are being prepared for submittal to the nurseries. The Department reviews what the tree inspectors have entered into the computer system. The plantings are reviewed to verify the tree types are in the places they are suited for. See January 2, 2024, email from Sievert. (If you want to compare with 2023 plantings look for the 2/27/23 email.)

### STUMP GRINDING

After the first of the year the Department will be using the new budget, and because of the weather conditions the stump grinding contractors will be completing deep grinds in preparation for the spring planting.

## ASH CONDEMNATIONS AND REMOVALS

At the December 6, 2023 MPRB meeting the Commissioners passed Resolution 2023-232 to stop the removal of ash trees on residential property until the IRA Grant is in place (because the Grant won't cover tree removal retroactively). This does place an inconvenience for the contractors because they have paid for performance bonds but are not getting paid for work to remove trees. Sievert: the Department is sending a letter to property owners who have a 'marked' tree to let them know there will be a delay in the removal process.

Question: if the tree removals occur after June that will be too late for avoiding the EAB's flight season. The Department, however, has not been concerned about the infected tree removal timing because EABs are everywhere. Would not removing the trees affect other areas of the state? (such as the latest DNR announcement that EAB has been detected in Morrison County). Bottom line is that if the Grant is not finalized by June no trees will be removed until then.

Question about the stump grinding process and timing; Sievert explained that contracting goes through the City procurement Department and in 2023 there was new staff as well as new bid specifications in contrast with this year's contract specifications that will be the same as 2023's. The outcome is that there is not enough money in the budget for all necessary stump grinding to be completed.

## OUTREACH EFFORTS

Danielle Schumerth presented:

- the date for 2024's Arbor Day celebration at McRae Park in south Minneapolis (corner of 46<sup>th</sup> Street and Chicago Avenue): the last Friday in April, April 26th. She welcomed any of us to join the Committee. Trees are ordered.
- Working with U of M on developing a "tree stewards" program with the City having a role, as well as Hennepin County
- Met with citizens who would like to tap maple trees in King Park, and what might work.
- The annual Tree City USA award application is being drafted as well for the Growth Award

Ms. Schlaefer inquired about the MTAC having the opportunity to review the 2024 planting list in the context of neighborhood comments she has heard. Sievert replied that the list is not finished yet and described circumstances in which requests are made and areas are designated for certain types of plantings. For example, to plant only native trees in and around Robert's Bird Sanctuary north of Lake Harriet.

NOTE: Mr. Sievert emailed the proposed planting list to the MTAC on January 2, 2024'

**Discussing the planting list will be added to the January Agenda.**

## **MTAC ADVISORY ROLE DISCUSSION**

### **MTAC Co-Chair MacDonagh**

*The Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission (MTAC) was established in 2004 by the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board (MPRB). The charge of the MTAC is to provide advice on the enhancement of the Minneapolis urban forest and its long-term health. The goals are to coordinate issues related to trees across City jurisdictions; to evaluate issues related to trees; to report annually to the MPRB and City Council; and to explore new ways to acquire resources that increase support for urban forest establishment and management.*

Ms. Schlaefter reflected that this past year MTAC's role has not been advisory but more about becoming educated.

Menz commented on the advisory role of the MTAC and how our role could help the MPRB to better communicate with constituents; the issues we are advising on and how we are advising.

Linde, formerly of the Minneapolis Bicycle Committee, in which that committee was asked for their input. MTAC has not been advising on anything. He'd like to see the MTAC's role expand to more aspects of "trees in our city" "especially in north Minneapolis" and "especially in parts of the City that normally get overlooked".

Kruse divided the advisory role into two realms a) science/biology and b) social justice/politics. Agreed that we could be more assertive about what we recommend for treatment and removal.

Schaaf presented the idea to find out more about how other Advisory Boards operate.

Nicholson discussed the perspective that the Park Board has a solid and respected Forestry Staff, so advising on the forest management may not be as necessary as bringing the Department and the Park Board together in consensus. The fact that the new members have not experienced assembling the Annual Report (submitted and presented to the Park Board and the Council annually) in which past accomplishments and recommendations for future activities is compiled. The preparation of the Report presents the opportunity to talk about issues.

He reminded us that there are other forestry authorities that provide advice and information for best practices, organizations like the MNDNR, the US Ag Department, the U o M Extension Service.

**Sersland proposed that the January MTAC meeting be in-person (or at least a hybrid of in-person and video conference). She also proposed that sub-committees be formed with a more action-oriented mindset.**

Which venue would be preferable for an in-person meeting: the Forestry Department on Bryant Av and 38<sup>th</sup> Street in south Minneapolis or at Park Board Headquarters. **Sievert will check on each office's availability.**

### **EMERALD ASH BORER (EAB) IMPACTS: PRIVATE PROPERTY CONCERNS MPRB Commissioner Billy Menz**

Menz gave an update on the private property issue. The Park Board has done an amazing amount of work to secure funding for property owners. There has been effective collaboration between departments. However, there is "still a lot of fervor coming from the community". He feels the Board is at the limit of what can be done financially and sources of funding. The resolution at the Park Board is that the condemnation process can continue, and if the trees are not removed, the property owners will be eligible for funding. Funding secured by Bangoura and staff from Cargill is for retroactive funding. Menz proposed an amendment asking the MTAC to "fill an advisory role on the condemnation process".

Menz is asking: What would the MTAC be willing to do in that advisory role – clearly defined – regarding the communication / miscommunication with residents. Not to advise people to treat or not to treat their ash trees, but to present as much information as we can in multiple formats.

Asking for an extra set of eyes and ears for those people who own, people who rent, non-english language people and to address the thinking that this is a city service/assessment in the same way as sidewalk repair. Because it's not the same thing for individuals – it's a loss of a living plant in one's yard. Our role can be to advise on this communication process, and eventually (perhaps) draft a recommendation.

Nicholson commented on the need to revise “living” thing to “dying” thing because that's what's happening – but the money is definitely a major impact. Important to communicate that actions are necessary.

Linde discussed the Sahan Journal article that he shared on 11/22/23 with the MTAC<sup>1</sup>. He would like to see an audit for the MPRB's condemnation process and results. He is also interested in how the condemnations were communicated to the property owners.

Kruse discussed the emotional aspects of our relationship with trees, but the data in the Sahan Journal article suggested that there is potentially great variation in the costs to cut down a tree. What are the factors that some neighborhoods could have been charged more than others? Maybe a few case studies to understand the process.

Menz inquired of the Forestry Department staff if there have been audits or review cases that have been studied. Sievert: There have not been formal reviews or case studies, but over time procedures have been fine-tuned in response to citizen comments received by the Department.

As far as existing data, Sersland mentioned the link to a spreadsheet containing the property locations and assessments included in the original email from the MPRB's announcement of the Cargill grant. This list of properties and costs could be used as a starting point. (Note that it's not just the tree diameter that determines cost, there may be other factors.)

<https://agendasuite.org/iip/mprb/file/getfile/16769>

MacDonagh reviewed the early process when EAB was first detected and MPRB had the budget to address the disease, the MTAC viewed pesticide treatment favorably as an option and that was MTAC's advice to the City Council. The Council decided against treatment. A study from that time estimated there were 217,000 ash trees in Minneapolis.

Linde noted that the St. Anthony West Neighborhood organization is treating about 115 trees and spending NRP money to do this. He and the organization were never told to NOT treat the trees.

For the audit choose 5 case studies, for example, and use the letters owners received and when, when the tree was cut down, and what were the tree conditions (size, access, surroundings, etc.).

**Sersland offered to lead a committee relating to further study of the situations surrounding ash tree condemnation and property owners.** Others who are interested in joining the committee are Park Board Commissioner Menz, District 1 member Linde, District 3 member Kruse, Sidney Schaaf.

In response to Schlaefer's question about the specifics, Menz suggested that we focus on the communication methods that were employed in the condemnation process. Would the MTAC be

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sahanjournal.com/climate-environment/ash-tree-removal-grant-minneapolis-homeowner-property-tax-assessment/>

willing to examine the process? Subsequently, MTAC could recommend a preferred process and be helpful to staff to do this piece.

Nicholson summarized info to relay: Your tree has emerald ash borer, here's what will happen if nothing is done, here are your options, if you want to know more here are other agencies that can provide information.

**Menz will contact Jeremy Barrick to draft a resolution asking the MTAC to set up a subcommittee to complete fact finding.**

Schaaf informed the Commission that her department is updating EAB materials sent to people, including assessing current resources to understand what's needed. She would like to join the subcommittee. We **request that she share the communication tools they are preparing.** Including the education materials about EAB treatment and add to the Park Board communications that are distributed with the condemnations.

Question: is there additional information about the Cargill Grant. Details regarding the Cargill Grant<sup>2</sup> and to whom it will be applied can be located at the December 6, 2023 MPRB meeting (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEiQZPBXNYw> timestamp at 1:08). The presentation outlined the full details, and analysis to determine/delineate the environmental justice areas currently assessed. Julie Weisman, Director of Finance, reviewed how the \$500,000 is allocated. Superintendent Bangoura continues to work with additional donors in order to fund a longer look-back period.

**MTAC BUSINESS**  
**Co-Chair MacDonagh**

MacDonagh brought up the development a sub-committee to produce and present the MTAC's Annual Report to the MPRB. He asked Barb Schlaefer if she would be interested/willing in heading up a subcommittee to fulfill this task. To characterize what is important, and our accomplishments. She would be interested.

Thanks for MTAC's 2023 efforts.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The Commission's Meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:00 p.m.  
Respectfully submitted: Carol Sersland – Commission Secretary

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/news/2023/12/01/minneapolis-park-and-recreation-board-receives-500000-donation-from-the-margaret-a-cargill-fund-of-the-saint-paul-minnesota-foundation-to-provide-assistance-for-some-private-property-tree-removals/#:~:text=The%20Minneapolis%20Park%20and%20Recreation,in%20certain%20areas%20across%20Minneapolis>