

# MTAC MINUTES

February 19, 2026

## **In attendance**

Giuseppe Marrari (Dist. 2 and co-chair)  
Mary Bolla (Dist. 4)  
Erica commers (At Large)  
Chris McMaster (MPRB Director of Forestry)  
Peter McDonagh (University of Minnesota)  
Tim Keane (Dist. 5 and co-chair)  
Noah Devalminck (Tree Care Prof)  
Eric Lopez (Tree Care Prof)  
Ahmed Ohmer (Public Works Representative)

## Staff

Shahin Khalili (City of Minneapolis City Trees Program)

## **Members absent**

Drew Peterson (Dist. 1)  
Don Willeke (Mayor's rep.)  
Karl Kussow (Dist. 3)  
Dan Egelhart, MPRB Commissioner  
City Council Representative  
Barb Schlaefer (Dist. 6)  
Dan Goemann (Minneapolis Public Schools)

## **Co-chair Marrari convened the meeting at 5:30 p.m.**

## **Motion to approve the January 2026 minutes.**

Approved with amendment to add a hyperlink

## **Department of Forestry Update, Chris McMaster**

Finished many park pruning plans. Urban Forest Policy review and revision is under way.

Forestry is challenged by how to handle debris from pruning, tree removal and stump grinding. The current debris site at the MPRB North Side Service Center is less than 2 acres and expensive to lease. Looking at air burners for debris, which can be loaded with forestry debris and it burns debris down 98%, with an air curtain to catch particulates. It leaves biochar that could be used for other purposes.

Erika Commers asked what the current biochar facility in the city is being used for. Shahin Khalili indicated it's being used by many entities. Capacity is a problem. Chris McMaster said the biochar facility requires they receive tree debris in chip form. Forestry has gotten away from chipping for safety reasons.

Forestry made temporary adjustments to field staffing, sending folks out in groups rather than in ones and twos, due in part to the current instability in the city caused by the surge of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Arbor Day celebration will be April 24 at Bethune Park. Dani Schumerth is organizing a separate planting event with Bethune Elementary. She's working with Downtown Improvement District for a tree planting event in March.

Forestry has an offer out to an individual to fill the position of sustainable forestry coordinator (occupied previously by Phillip Potyondy).

MTAC meeting on April 16 will be a visit to the tree inventory lot.

MPRB is moving from Zoom to Teams beginning for their April meeting.

Craig Pinkalla and Chris McMaster attended SW Parks and Rec Institute conference recently.

### **City of Minneapolis Tree Program Update, Shahin Khalili, Community Forester**

Finalized the species list for spring tree program. The City Trees Program has ordered 2,150 trees for its spring sale, May 29 and 30, ordered through the Tree Trust. Trees will be distributed citywide, with a focus on Green Zones.

The city is launching the [City Tree Ambassador Program](#). Ambassadors in this pilot program will work with their own neighborhoods to identify opportunities to plant 40-50 trees on private property. Each receives a stipend for their advocacy and work. Received 40 applicants, and could accept 10.

Discussion about the need for more community engagement with residents: Erika Commers suggested exploring collaboration with U of M Extension citizen tree pruners, now done under Tree Care Advisors. Consider a citizen forester program. Create a network of qualified volunteers. [Minnesota Tree Steward Communities](#) is an example. TRAQ tree risk assessment qualification was mentioned.

Tree Ordinance: WSB Consultant is continuing to gather input. Draft for MTAC review expected by spring

Conservation Corp member started in February. Jim Cash (sp?)

### **MTAC Annual Report Discussion, co-chair Giuseppe Marrari**

June 3 and June 17 are MPRB meeting dates targeted to deliver the annual report.

Focus on the importance of trees to the city's health, safety, beauty and economic vitality. Challenge the city's shifting funding priorities. Deliver the business case. Property values. Cost/benefit ROI. Be specific with clear, actionable recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. Make trees a budget priority
  - a. Restore annual tree purchase budget: Show how budget relies now on one-time, unpredictable external grant funding. Ask for dependable base funding for specific number of new trees annually.
  - b. Show the value/support the existing Carbon Offset Program
  - c. Stump grinding/tree debris funding needs/air burner
2. Support trees on private property
  - a. X% of land within city limits is privately owned.
  - b. Community engagement/education that advocates for healthy trees on private property.
3. Fund the management of natural areas
  - a. Minneapolis has ~1,000 acres of natural areas. Majority is overrun with invasive species. Unsafe, not suited to recreation, ecologically damaging.

- b. Support grant writer position (or consistent funding to contract out grant-writing) to source streams of natural resource funding. Secure contractors to help convert Buckthorn forests to manageable natural areas. State, regional, non-profit, regional and federal funding exists. This investment will pay for itself.
- c. Support volunteers and volunteer programs that are helping to manage natural areas.

**Other Business**

Shade Tree Short Course is full and there is no funding to supplement MTAC attendance.

**Meeting adjourned 6:50 p.m.**

Submitted by Barb Schlaefer, MTAC Rep. District 6