

October 10, 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my disappointment and concern over the removal of dozens of trees from Beacon Street in Somerville on the morning of October 6.

Tree removal

On the morning of the 6th, I commuted by bicycle down Beacon Street from my home on Ivaloo Street to an 8AM business meeting near Kendall Square. On the way, I saw a number of tree removal crews setting up between Park Street and the Cambridge/Somerville line.

By the time I made my way home, around 9:30AM, the majority of the trees were gone.

Once home, I logged into an online neighborhood forum. I found confusion, sorrow, and outrage. One neighbor had made a photographic tally of 37 fresh tree stumps. Frustratingly, I found no answers. By the end of the day, an update had been posted to the city website. The city shared our confusion and surprise. The update clarified that the city had not authorized the removals, and that a process of notification exists for removing even single trees – much less for razing an entire street.

Suggestions for the Trees

Before going into the process issues below, I have specific considerations for the replacement of the trees.

- The replacement trees should be mature, comparable in age and number to the ones that were removed. We should not have to wait 20 years for our shady boulevard.
- These trees should be of diverse species, to allow a steady cycle of replacement as they age or fall victim to insects or disease. This will avoid single-species blights like the emerald ash boring beetle, and similar mass die offs in the future.
- The replacement should be done in an intentional and planned way, not rushed or cheapened to appease our current anger. Specifically, it should wait until after major construction is complete. The trees should be planted in Spring, when the trees have the best chance of survival.
- The plan should include ongoing funding for tree care, including regular watering and treatment for insects and disease.
- *The city must not authorize any new construction or changes to the plan that would prevent full replacement and healthy growth of our trees.* If we hope for a Beacon Street lined with mature trees in 20 years, we must act as if the trees are still there now. Otherwise, whatever new trees are planted will have no space or light to grow, making this weekend's loss permanent. We must guard an empty space – tree stumps - with more vigilance than we accorded the original trees.
- We must strengthen citywide protections against this sort of action by contractors. Once the trees are dead, we have no choice but to move forward. The penalties for this sort of unauthorized destruction should be severe enough to discourage crews

from using vandalism to advance a project schedule or open the door to downstream work.

Transparency and Accountability

The city's update says that the, "street trees were anticipated to be removed in Spring of 2018," to accommodate "intricacies related to underground utilities and placement within the new sidewalk / street configuration." It specifies that the trees were not sacrificed to accommodate a protected bicycle lane.

If there was a plan to remove some or all of these trees, if this was merely a mistake of scheduling and notification, *residents deserve to see that plan*. It should be specific as to which trees were to be removed, and why.

To that end, I am quite interested in learning how the crews on Friday morning were authorized and coordinated. The work I saw on Friday certainly *looked* planned. I would like to know how far in advance the tree crews were scheduled, and whether appropriate police details were on hand. I would like to know what specific trees were to be removed, and how that list aligns with the ones that were cut on Friday.

This sort of accountability, transparency, and attention to detail will be critical, given the amount of work being proposed, citywide, over the coming years.

Looking Forward

The work on Beacon Street has been long and tiresome for residents. Since 2015 we have had traffic disruptions, dust, dirt, and noise from dawn to dusk. This has had a significant negative impact on local business and home life. I understand the scale and complexity of the work: We are replacing an 1800's era wooden sewer under an active commuter street, with all the surprises and changes that entails.

For all that, it has been getting worse for us. There have been several weeks this summer when we have had no usable sidewalk on *either* side of the street for blocks at a time. The parking and shoulder areas of Beacon near Park and Kirkland have been increasingly filled with construction equipment, pallets of bricks and pipe, and even the construction crew's personal vehicles. The city should consider the impact of this sort of overlap, including equipment and material storage, when authorizing concurrent construction.

There is simply not enough space for all of the work currently being done. It makes accountability hard to define.

The trees must be a turning point. It is past time for the city and the residents to be treated as partners and stakeholders in this and other development projects.

Respectfully,
Chris Dwan