



# City of Milwaukee

200 E. Wells Street  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
53202

## Meeting Minutes

### CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS COMMITTEE

**ALD. JOSEPH DUDZIK, CHAIR**

**Ald. Robert Bauman, Ald. Michael Murphy, Ghassan Korban,**

**Martin Matson, Mark Nicolini, and Mariano Schifalacqua**

**Staff Assistant: Tobie Black, 286-2231; Fax: 286-3456,**

**[tblack@milwaukee.gov](mailto:tblack@milwaukee.gov)**

**Fiscal Planning Specialist: Kathleen Brengosz, 286-3926,**

**[kbreg@milwaukee.gov](mailto:kbreg@milwaukee.gov)**

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Wednesday, May 23, 2012

9:00 AM

Room 301-B, City Hall

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Meeting called to order at 9:04 a.m.

**Present:** Bauman, Nicolini, Matson, Schifalacqua, Korban, Froh

**Excused:** Dudzik

**Also in attendance:**

**Kathy Brengosz, Fiscal Planning Specialist**

**Michael Daun, Comptroller's Office**

**1. Review and approval of the minutes from the April 26, 2012 meeting.**

*The minutes were approved as written.*

**2. Presentation of the Forestry Condition Report.**

*Individual appearing:*

*David Sivyer, DPW-Forestry*

*Mr. Sivyer said that the City did a complete a canopy assessment in 2009 to assess tree condition and to quantify species composition, structural replacement value and service value. The survey found that Milwaukee has 3.4 million trees and 21% canopy cover. To replace all trees on a size, species and condition basis would cost \$1.4 billion.*

*Mr. Sivyer said that the City has 193,000 street trees with a replacement value of \$300 million. The City's inventory contains 138 species. 89% of the City's street trees are in fair or better condition. Mr. Sivyer stated that the condition rating is somewhat subjective and he believes the City's condition assessments are on the conservative side. Approximately 2% of the City's trees are removed and replaced annually because of disease, decline, storm damage and construction activities.*

*The 2009 assessment determined that the value of the benefits provided by the City's street trees was \$2.5 million in air pollution removal, \$1 million in energy savings, and*

*\$15 million in storm water benefits.*

*Mr. Sivyver showed aerial maps that compared the 1956 tree canopy to the City's current canopy. He said that in 1956 when the Dutch Elm epidemic began, the tree canopy was largely contiguous – there was full canopy coverage across most streets. Approximately 200,000 trees were lost to Dutch Elm disease. Fifty five years later you can still pick out individual trees in the canopy on an aerial photo. Mr. Nicolini asked if the department could estimate the amount of tree canopy lost to Dutch elm disease and how much of it has recovered. Mr. Sivyver replied that the department plans to conduct a study this summer using new technology to examine the canopy benefits in 1956 and calculate the loss.*

*Mr. Schifalacqua asked if the City is using trees that have the same type of canopy as elms. Mr. Sivyver replied that most elms were replaced with maples because they do well here and at the time it, was the most readily available species. Maples have a more condensed canopy. Ash trees have a more arching form than maples, but no species in the city's inventory has the full arching canopy of the American elm, which was the perfect shade tree. He added that the canopy is also getting shorter. Street trees average between 50 and 55 feet in height, but elms were typically 80 to 90 feet tall.*

*Mr. Sivyver explained that the pruning cycle was heavily researched in the 1990's and it was determined that the best cycle was a 3-6 year split. Trees that were less than 12" were pruned once every three years and trees that were greater than 12" were pruned once every 6 years. Mr. Sivyver said that Budget constraints moved the cycle to five years in 2005 and the City is currently on a six year pruning cycle.*

*Mr. Sivyver discussed the May 13th article in the New York Times about claims that New York has had to pay because of deaths and injuries caused by falling limbs. New York used to have a regular pruning cycle, but to control costs it switched to "task and request" pruning. Ms. Brengosz asked how long New York has been without a regular pruning program. Mr. Sivyver said the article did not specify the date but implied that it was recent and related to the recession that began in 2008.*

*Mr. Sivyver said that the primary reason for maintaining a regular pruning cycle is public safety. The goal is to keep trees safe for public use and enjoyment. Other reasons for pruning include reducing the City's exposure to liability, early identification of threats such as emerald ash borer and greater efficiency. Mr. Sivyver stated that the department can prune two trees "in" cycle for every tree that requires pruning "out" of cycle.*

*Mr. Sivyver said that the department actively manages trees during street construction. A full time technician, who is funded through the capital budget, reviews projects, writes special provisions, and provides inspection services. The City used to do pre-construction pruning but it is hard to keep up. The department is working with Infrastructure Services to shift the responsibility for pre-construction pruning to the contractors.*

*Mr. Sivyver said that Forestry provides hazardous tree code enforcement on private property and emergency storm assistance for public trees. For hazardous trees on private property, the department sends a notice to the property owner to mitigate the risk. Owners are typically given 30 days to remove the hazard. Forestry contracts for the removal of unmitigated hazards and the cost is assessed on the owner's property tax bill. He said the department receives between 5,000 and 6,000 storm related calls for service in an average year. Last year there were 3,300 calls. Storm calls are related to both the pruning cycle and weather conditions.*

Mr. Sivyer said that there are 33,000 street trees at risk of emerald ash borer (EAB) infestation. Forestry's multi-prong strategy includes the mapping of host trees, proactive treatment of street trees and a public awareness campaign.

Using 18 employees, Forestry inoculates 13,500 ash trees each summer. This treatment program will allow the city to manage the schedule of ash tree removal and transition to other species over time. The Canadian Forest Service (CFS) has recently developed a branch sampling protocol to aid in the detection of EAB. Mr. Sivyer said that during the winter months the department took small branches from untreated trees on park property close to known areas of infestation in Oak Creek and Franklin. The branches were peeled and examined for evidence of EAB larvae and none were found. Michigan State University will be doing a study this summer to determine the extent to which the aggressive chemical treatment in Milwaukee is slowing the spread of EAB throughout southeast Wisconsin.

Mr. Sivyer said that Forestry is working to prepare the community for EAB. A 2009 billboard campaign raised awareness about EAB and the general benefits of urban forests. In 2011 there was a radio campaign that will be continued in 2012. The campaign was paid for with a \$5,000 grant from the WI Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The department also created a website with ads and videos intended to educate the public and help people locate resources. The department visited properties in 2010 and 2011 to confirm the presence of ash trees and to provide property owners with information about protecting existing trees or removing and replacing them with other species. Most property owners did not know that they had ash trees on their property so they weren't paying attention to the earlier messaging.

Mr. Sivyer said that Forestry is trying to develop a market and awareness for potential urban forest products. The department has been working with a saw mill to create wood products, and there has been some interest in using the City's biomass for pellets. A recent rehabilitation project in the 5th ward used wood from Milwaukee. The wood was harvested by the City, milled by Kettle Moraine Hardwoods, and installed by Urban Wood Furniture.

Mr. Sivyer said that the City has approximately 20,000 trees in its 160 acre nursery. The City harvests approximately 3,600 trees each year. Mr. Schifalacqua asked how long trees stay in the nursery. Mr. Sivyer replied that trees stay in the nursery between four and five years depending on the species. He added that the nursery offers the advantage of being able to economically produce trees and absent a catastrophic loss, it assures that the City will have stock for its tree planting program.

Ald. Bauman asked what the minimum size is for an effective nursery. Mr. Sivyer replied that it depends on the size and needs of the community. He said that he believes the Milwaukee nursery is appropriately sized. Ald. Bauman said that the city has between 2,000 and 3,000 vacant lots and asked if there was any utility on the lots in terms of growing ability. Mr. Sivyer replied that there may be some potential. He added that soils might be an issue and any utilities or existing infrastructure might be a challenge, especially the basements that are often left behind after a house is demolished. He also expressed concerns about the City's ability to harvest trees from vacant lots.

Ald. Bauman said that Detroit grows Christmas trees on vacant lots and asked if there was potential for us to do that here. Mr. Sivyer replied that the Christmas tree market is very competitive. He said that it is probably cheaper to buy them than to grow them but he would have to do a cost benefit analysis to be sure. He added that

*Forestry is investigating the growing of poinsettias and increasing the production of perennials to provide additional sources of revenue.*

*Mr. Sivyer said that in the past, the City has diversified on a street or block basis. This method is more efficient for pruning and maintenance but it does not provide protection against pests and diseases. To reduce the exposure of individual blocks to the possibility complete tree loss, Forestry is moving toward an inter-block diversification strategy. New species will be introduced into blocks to increase diversity. The goal is to have at least four species in each block and no more than two contiguous trees of the same species.*

*Ms. Brengosz asked how the trees that will be added as part of the Sustainable Boulevard plan will affect the six year pruning cycle. Mr. Sivyer replied that the new trees will provide an additional burden but that the increase in workload will be quite small compared to the number of trees that are already maintained.*

*Ms. Brengosz asked if the department has noticed or quantified an increase in transplant losses due to the bed only irrigation policy. Mr. Sivyer said that the department has not quantified the transplant losses but that it would probably be worthwhile to do so.*

**3. Discussion of the legislation establishing the authority, responsibilities and activities of the Capital Improvements Committee.**

*Mr. Schifalacqua said that as the committee was discussing its recommendations there were a number of times that it came up that a certain item was not under the purview of the committee. There was discussion that perhaps the ordinance needs to be revised to include those items. He asked what items are not under the purview of the committee.*

*Ms. Brengosz replied that there is a distinction in the ordinance between the recommendations the committee makes to the Budget Office and the specific infrastructure that is to be included in the committee's condition report. The duties of the committee include the development a six year capital program for all departments under the control of the Common Council. She said that her interpretation was that all capital requests are under the purview of the committee but only specifically identified infrastructure and facilities should be reported on. She cited DPW Fleet and the Dept of Administration – ITMD as examples of capital requests that are received by the committee but which do not report their condition to the committee. Ms. Brengosz said that even though Fleet and ITMD are not included in the condition report, they are departments that are under the control of the Common Council and would therefore be part of the six year capital program that the Committee would present to the Common Council.*

*Ald. Bauman said that his recollection was that the committee was created because of concerns about long replacement cycles for surface transportation. He said the discussion at that time specifically excluded Fleet, Fire and Police. He added that he doesn't think the purpose of the committee is to duplicate the efforts of the Budget Office or the Finance and Personnel committee.*

*Mr. Schifalacqua said that departments are now on a regular reporting cycle for condition and that is a big accomplishment. Before the creation of the Capital Improvements Committee, some departments were tracking condition but it wasn't necessarily part of their yearly routine.*

*Ms. Brengosz said that she believes there are two separate issues when discussing what is included and what is excluded from the committee's review. For the purpose of reporting on condition, things like Fleet, ITMD and the Tax Incremental Districts were not listed in the ordinance as items the committee was required to report on. For the purpose of creating capital priorities and evaluating borrowing and debt targets, it is necessary to look at all capital spending. It doesn't make sense to exclude items such as Fleet when determining overall capital spending priorities.*

*Ald. Bauman asked if the Budget Office had an opinion. Mr. Nicolini responded that he thought budgeting was best left to those who have to pay for it, i.e. the officials elected to propose and levy taxes. He said that the primary benefit of the CIC is the more intense review of condition and evaluation of ways of achieving the goals of the capital program.*

*Mr. Matson said that his primary concern was the City's debt and what is being retired and what is being renewed every year. He said that he was uncertain of the value provided by the committee but he had not been aware that there was a reporting cycle for the condition of infrastructure.*

*Mr. Korban said he thinks the committee brings a more holistic view and greater consistency to reporting and evaluation. But he said he unsure if the committee is making significant a difference in what the City is doing on an annual basis.*

*Mr. Froh responded that a long range planning perspective is something the committee can bring forward. He said that he believes the City's emphasis on long term planning has slipped somewhat in the last 20 years. He added that you can't develop a capital budget without looking at the corresponding financing and policies and that policy drives the capital planning process. The committee doesn't have to develop policies, it can respond to them.*

*Ald. Bauman said that the committee should be establishing the ideal because someone else will be making the tradeoffs. It's the committee's job to establish what the capital improvement plan should be in a perfect world.*

*Mr. Schifalacqua agreed and said that when the committee was formed he thought that it would be a semi-independent body to look at the City's capital needs and make recommendations. The ultimate decision-makers have to weigh all the information and actually prepare the budget. He said that the committee has had some excellent discussions, so why not bring in some of the other major capital elements. It would allow the committee to make recommendations to the appropriate decision makers that the committee feels are in the City's best interest.*

*Mr. Daun said that there is an oversight component to the committee. It has been charged with monitoring the completion of the capital program, providing semi-annual progress reports on the status of large scale project in relation to pre-determined construction schedules and estimated costs, reporting on the condition of infrastructure and evaluating the adequacy of the city's efforts to preserve infrastructure and facilities and eliminate any deferred maintenance. All of these items fulfill an oversight function and are not duplicative.*

#### **4. Set next agenda.**

*Ms. Brengosz said that the Library is scheduled to give a condition report.*

*Ald. Bauman posed the question as to whether the committee should be hearing from*

*the Library. Mr. Matson said that he personally sees the value on having these departments discuss their challenges and needs, and he also believes that it is useful for the committee to have knowledge about the capital needs when the budget process occurs.*

*Ms. Brengosz said that the committee is responsible for reporting on the condition of buildings, and there is condition information about the Library buildings that needs to be presented to the committee.*

*Mr. Daun said that there are 16 systems referred to in the ordinance as it relates to the committee's reporting responsibilities: city sewerage, storm water management, streets, street lights, traffic control, underground conduit and wired communications, water treatment and distribution, city buildings, bridges, alleys, sidewalks, parking, harbor and urban forestry. The committee is required to monitor their condition and opine on the adequacy of the City's investment in these systems. There is a vital public interest behind that objective.*

**Meeting adjourned at 10:06 a.m.**

**Staff Assistant Tobie Black**

**This meeting will be webcast live at [www.milwaukee.gov/channel25](http://www.milwaukee.gov/channel25).**