

Urban Forestry Advisory Panel

Minutes of Meeting held on 11 April 2019

Date : 11 April 2019

Time : 2:30 pm

Venue : Communal Conference Room 3, G/F, Central Government Offices

ATTENDANCE

Chairperson

Miss Janet WONG	Head of Greening, Landscape and Tree Management Section (Atg)	Development Bureau (DEVB) (Works)
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Members

Ir. CHAN Yun-cheung

Prof. Leslie CHEN Hung-chi, JP

Mr. Kingsley CHOI Lim-cho

Mr. Evans IU Po-lung

Mr. Patrick LAU Hing-tat, JP

Dr. WONG Fook-yee

Ms. Florence KO	Head/Tree Management Office (H/TMO)	DEVB (Works)
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Mr. David CHAIONG	Chief Leisure Manager (Passive Amenities)	Leisure and Cultural Services Department
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Ms. Winnie KWOK	Senior Conservation Officer (Technical Services)	Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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Miss Tracy LAM	Senior Landscape Architect/Tree Management Development & Construction	Housing Department
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Secretary

Ms. Olivia CHEUNG	Assistant Secretary (Tree Management)3	DEVB (Works)
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IN ATTENDANCE

Ms. Vina WONG	Head of Greening and Landscape Office (H/GLO)	DEVB (Works)
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Mr. Edmond LAM	Assistant Secretary (Tree Management)1 (AS(TM)1)	DEVB (Works)
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Dr. Samuel LAM	Assistant Secretary (Tree Management)2 (AS(TM)2)	DEVB (Works)
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Ms. Louisa NGAI	Assistant Secretary (Greening and Landscape)1 (AS(GL)1)	DEVB (Works)
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Mr. HSU Ka-man	Tree Management Officer 5	DEVB (Works)
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ABSENT WITH APOLOGIES

Dr. Paul BARBER

Prof. CHAU Kwai-cheong, JP

Ms. Cecilia CHEUNG So-mui

Mr. Mark DUNTEMANN

Mr. Kevin ECKERT

Dr. Billy HAU Chi-hang

Dr. David LAU Tai-wai

Mr. Frank RINN

Mr. Ian SHEARS

Dr. WANG Xiao-ming

Mr. Perry TO	Senior Landscape Architect/Vegetation Maintenance (Special)	Highways Department
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1. Opening Remarks

- 1.1 The Chairperson welcomed Members to the first meeting of the 2019-20 term of the Urban Forestry Advisory Panel (UFAP). In particular, she welcomed the new non-official Member and the new official Member. She also advised Members that another new non-official member was unable to attend the first meeting due to prior work commitment, and Dr. Paul BARBER could not join the meeting via Skype due to internet connection problem.

2. Confirmation of the Minutes of the Last Meeting Held on 8 November 2018

- 2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were confirmed without amendment.

3. Urban Forestry Support Fund (UFAP Paper No. 01/2019)

- 3.1 AS(TM)2 briefed Members on the four initiatives under the proposed Urban Forestry Support Fund (the Fund) and invited Members to contribute in the following aspects:
- (a) To provide suggestions on how to assist the arboriculture and horticulture industry to establish a professional regime;
 - (b) To encourage relevant higher education institutions to jointly support or co-organise with the Government the upcoming international urban forestry conferences;
 - (c) To publish technical papers, give speeches or participate in panel discussions in the international urban forestry conferences; and
 - (d) To be our invited speakers at public seminars to enhance the public's understanding of tree care.

Action

- 3.2 A Member asked whether the manpower shortage involved professionals or skilled workers of the arboriculture and horticulture industry. AS(TM)2 responded that the manpower survey for the arboriculture and horticulture industry conducted by the Greening, Landscape and Tree Management Section (GLTMS) of the Development Bureau and completed in 2017 projected that there was a shortage of about 2 500 practitioners in 2018, of which about 750 were qualified tree management personnel including arborists and skilled tree workers.
- 3.3 A Member suggested stepping up promotion and publicity events, through the use of Announcements in the Public Interest (APIs) and advertorials, to promote the industry to a wider audience, especially young people.
- 3.4 A Member commented that attractive remuneration and good career prospects could be incentives to attract new entrants to the industry. The Government might also consider reviewing the contract provisions for landscaping works among various government departments to avoid different employment requirements for practitioners and under-estimation of contract rates.
- 3.5 A Member concurred and added that it was also important to ensure the quality of service of practitioners. There should be a set of criteria to specify the skills, knowledge, practice standards, qualifications and training required for the practitioners to perform various tasks in a professional manner. He further said that site supervision staff (e.g. field officers) for landscaping projects were in short supply and more training places should be provided to fill the gap.
- 3.6 A Member proposed that tree management departments should consider offering internship opportunities to trainees for them to acquire practical working experience.

3.7 The Chairperson responded that the Fund served to encourage more (young) people to pursue training and acquire work experience in arboriculture and horticulture by providing financial incentives such as course subsidies or scholarships. In parallel, GLTMS would work closely with tree management departments and the industry to identify training places for trainees. Besides, GLTMS was currently studying the introduction of a registration system for tree management personnel in the industry with a view to standardising qualifications, and would review the contract provisions for government's landscaping works to align the requirements and improve the quality of works. GLTMS was also working with the Qualifications Framework Secretariat of the Education Bureau to assist the arboriculture and horticulture industry to develop the Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) for the industry, which would be completed in late 2019. The SCS would form the basis for the introduction of the registration system. It was expected that the list of qualified tree management personnel under the registration system would assist the public, especially private property owners and property managers, to identify qualified practitioners to handle tree works.

4. Tree Risk Assessment and Management (TRAM) Enhancement (UFAP Paper No. 02/2019)

4.1 AS(TM)1 briefed Members on proposed TRAM enhancement measures. It included updating the tree group and individual tree inspection reports (covering both Form 1 and Form 2), enhancing the qualification requirements for Inspection Officers, improving the tree risk assessment method by incorporating the latest international practice, strengthening accountability of Inspection Officers, and enhancing the quality assurance of Form 1 and Form 2. GLTMS intended to complete the updating of the Guidelines on TRAM Arrangement, Form 1 and Form 2 in mid-2019 for progressive implementation starting end of 2019.

Action

- 4.2 A Member pointed out that Inspection Officers recommended mitigation measures based on the tree conditions at the time of inspections. He questioned whether the Inspection Officers would be able to state the residual risk rating at the time of inspections, i.e. before the completion of the recommended mitigation measures. AS(TM)1 responded that Inspection Officers were expected to use their professional judgement based on their risk assessments at the time of inspections to arrive at the residual risk rating as expected of after the recommended mitigation measures have been implemented.
- 4.3 The same Member further asked whether the suggestion of another Member at one of the previous meetings that some other simplified inspection forms should be introduced had been adopted. AS(TM)1 confirmed that the simplified inspection forms proposed by the Member had been suitably incorporated in the revised Form 1 and Form 2.
- 4.4 A Member noted the deviation in the risk ratings of the assessments carried out by 39 Inspection Officers for eight sample trees in the trial use of Form 1 and Form 2. He commented that although varying views were inevitable, large deviation might cast doubt on the effectiveness and reliability of the revised Form 2.
- 4.5 A Member echoed that the revamp should aim at producing consistent assessment results. The observed large deviation might indicate the need for systematic training on the use of the Forms, assessment methodology and yardsticks. He further suggested that artificial intelligence as well as big data analytics should be considered with a view to identifying useful observations for enhancing risk management.
- 4.6 A Member queried whether the industry could provide sufficient manpower to meet the enhanced requirements in the revised Form 1 and Form 2 and the increased qualification requirements for Inspection Officers.
- 4.7 In response to the questions and suggestions from different Members, AS(TM)1 said that adequate training would be provided to Inspection Officers prior to the progressive implementation of the revised forms. In addition, GLTMS was exploring workable solutions with the use of remote sensing technology to assist departments in collating necessary tree information to minimise the impact on workload and hence resources.

Action

- 4.8 Regarding the proposed tree removal protocol, a Member commented that tree removal would eliminate the risk of tree failure but it was inefficient for GLTMS or UFAP to review a huge number of tree removal applications. AS(TM)1 replied that GLTMS or UFAP would only handle removal applications involving Old and Valuable Trees, Stonewall Trees and Tree of Particular Interest. Based on past experience, the number of applications per year was expected to be small and manageable.
- 4.9 The Chairperson thanked Members' comments and concluded that more training would be arranged for Inspection Officers so as to minimise inconsistencies in the assessments as far as practicable. Based on GLTMS's preliminary consultation with the arboriculture and horticulture industry, there were sufficient existing practitioners in the industry to meet the proposed, enhanced qualification requirements. GLTMS would continue its discussions with the industry. As regards government departments, GLTMS would assist them to comply with the new requirements. While the existing Tree Management Information System adopted by GLTMS could not support analyses using artificial intelligence and big data analytics, GLTMS was exploring and piloting the use of different technologies for tree management.
- 4.10 H/TMO supplemented that the revised Form 2 would be based on a formal risk assessment framework and align with the latest international practice, which was a major improvement over the existing Form 2.

5. Street Ecology Study Stage II (UFAP Paper No. 03/2019)

- 5.1 AS(GL)1 briefed Members on the scope of the study, which was aimed at ascertaining the commercial availability of the 80 tree species listed in the Street Ecology Study Stage I Report and identifying measures to secure stable supply, as well as exploring means to improve the urban tree growing environment (in particular the urban soil environment) of both existing and new planting areas. She also introduced the composition of the project team, and advised that the study, which would take about two years, had started in mid-March 2019.

Action

- 5.2 Members suggested including a utility engineer and an ecologist in the project team. A Member, who was involved in the project, advised that appropriate professionals would be engaged in the course of the project as and when necessary.
- 5.3 A Member asked the definitions of “street” and “street ecology” as adopted in the study, and inquired whether the study findings would be applied to new or existing street planting areas.
- 5.4 H/GLO responded that the term “street ecology” referred to the interaction and relationship of trees in a street environment. Street Ecology Study Stage I defined the different typologies of urban streets and recommended a wider tree species list with a view to promoting vegetation diversity and more frequent use of native species. Street Ecology Study Stage II focused on ways to improve the planting environment of our street trees, in both new and existing planting areas.

6. Any Other Business

- 6.1 A Member informed that he had completed a technical note on the stability of stonewall trees and would like the Secretariat to circulate his study for Members’ reference and comment. GLTMS
- [Post-meeting note: The technical note was circulated to Members for comment on 16 April 2019. Upon receipt of Members’ comments, if any, the technical note would be finalised for publication as Ir. CHAN’s opinion regarding the stability of stonewall trees on GLTMS’s greening website for reference by the public.]*
- 6.2 H/TMO informed that a representative of GLTMS would present a paper on the subject of pruning of stonewall trees at the 53rd National Amenity Conference of the Arboriculture Association to be held at the University of Exeter, United Kingdom, from 8 to 11 September 2019.
- 6.3 There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 16:45 pm.
- [Post-meeting note: The next meeting was planned to be held in mid-January 2020 while details would be shared with Members in due course]*

Greening, Landscape and Tree Management Section
Development Bureau
May 2019