

“There is not a village in America, however badly planned at first, or ill-built afterwards, that may not be redeemed, in a great measure, by the aid of shade trees in the streets ... and it is never too late or too early to project improvements of this kind.”

Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852)

2022 Report of the Trees and Public Greenery Committee

The Trees and Public Greenery Committee is appointed by the Mayor and City Council and presently consists of Vice Chair Richard Adams, Patricia Bagley, City Arborist Charles Baxter, Deborah Chag, Urban Forester, A. J. Dupree, Michael Griffin, ~~Chairman~~ Peter Loughlin, Peter Rice, Director of Public Works; and Dennis Souto. The Committee met at City Hall (or on Zoom) on the second Wednesday of each month during 2021 holding 25 hearings on tree removal requests and working with the City Arborist and other City Officials on matters related to trees, greenery, and open space.

Section 1.413 of the City Administrative Code provides:

The main purpose of this Committee shall be to advise and assist the City’s Tree Warden in enforcing the provisions of this Ordinance as well as to ensure the proper expansion, protection, and maintenance of the City’s Urban Forest consistent with best arboricultural practices, horticultural practices, aesthetic concerns, and public safety... and shall offer recommendations for actions to better achieve the proper maintenance and expansion of the City’s Urban Forest.

This report is to affirm that, as we approach the City’s 400th birthday, the City’s “urban forest” is likely in better shape than at any time since the 200th anniversary when much of our 16 square miles was still largely forest and farm. The robust condition of the present “urban forest” did not just “happen.” Although the importance of city trees was reflected in the comments of Andrew Jackson Downing as quoted above and although tree planting in the American Urban Parks and Recreation Movement in the second part of the 19th century and the foresight of such citizens as Frank Jones and Henry Richards resulted in a number of tree lined streets, the health benefits and aesthetic benefits of trees were not always highly valued. The mid-20th century brought two plagues that led to a low point in the City’s urban forest: the “progress” that led to the widening of Islington, Middle, and State Streets with the elimination of large numbers of trees, and the ravages of Dutch Elm Disease in the 1950’s and 1960’s.

It was not until 1968 when Clotilde Struss, Charlie Vaughn, and Sam Maddock initiated a modest tree planting program that the City began to make an effort to replace some of the trees and the beauty that had been lost. Dr. Clotilde Struss became the volunteer City Arborist

and held that position until the late 1990s. In 2003 Mayor Sirell created the Trees and Greenery Committee to assume the duties of Dr. Struus.

Since its creation, the Trees and Greenery Committee has been vigilant in working to “ensure the proper expansion, protection, and maintenance of the City’s Urban Forest consistent with best arboricultural practices, horticultural practices, and aesthetic concerns.” However, unlike Clotilde Struss and her volunteers in the 1960’s, the Trees and Greenery Committee has had the support of City Administrations and funding from successive City Councils. Most importantly, especially during the last dozen years, the Tree Committee has had the enthusiastic support and cooperation of the City’s Public Works Department. Trees and greenery are not an afterthought but part of every project and operation.

While they share the traditional duties of other public works employees such as snow removal and public infrastructure maintenance, the city is very fortunate to have within its workforce a cadre of workers with a passion for, and special training regarding, trees. The City’s de facto “arborist crew” is made up of City Arborist Charles Baxter, Max Wiater, and Steve Burns, all members of the International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborists. You may have seen them on a stormy night removing a tree that has fallen across a roadway (which otherwise would have required a private tree removal contractor), or during the spring tree planting season. The City’s 90 miles of public rights of way, multiple parks, and historic cemeteries create an urban forest of roughly 10 to 15,000 trees and requires a year- round commitment.

Not that many years ago, the city would routinely hire private contractors to plant 50 or 60 trees per year. In the spring of 2021 (after missing a planting year due to Covid), the arborist crew planted 200 trees using city forces. In addition to the robust planting program, the arborist crew maintains a strict 2-year watering routine for new trees, employing a deep root injection gun, which applies water below the surface at low pressures preventing runoff, evaporation and also increasing soil pore space. These arborists have developed their own formula of “compost tea” for new plantings which has resulted in an almost unheard of 96% survival rate.

To reduce risk of liability for the City, and more importantly to prevent injuries to residents, the arborist crew is continually involved in pruning, removal, risk management, storm damage cleanup, and other programs for the protection/preservation of city trees. They also oversee the planting of trees on contracted projects such as the Islington Street corridor, Market Street and Lafayette Road gateways, and similar projects to ensure that the trees are planted in accordance with the standards that they have developed to ensure a lasting investment for generations to come.

Preservation and pruning of historic trees in parks and cemeteries has become a specialty of this crew. This type of pruning includes removal of dead and diseased wood, crown reductions to stimulate growth, and removing hazardous limbs while working around obstacles such as tombstones from the 1600s and 1700s. All historic trees are also treated with compost tea and

inoculated with mycorrhizae to improve root development and soil conditions. The historic North Cemetery is an excellent example of their recent work.

A decade ago, the Trees and Greenery committee was regularly receiving requests for removal of the stately silver maples on Aldrich Road, Elwyn Avenue, Lincoln Avenue, and other locations throughout the city. The committee reluctantly granted some of those requests as there seemed to be no alternative at the time. In the last two years, the arborist crew has performed what they refer to as “retrenchment pruning” on a number of these trees throughout the city, thus mitigating storm damage risk and preserving these trees as long term economic benefits. Similarly, the arborists are continually monitoring large trees in all the parks and rights of way and around city facilities, removing dead or high risk trees that pose a threat to safety of residents. On the way to City Hall you may have noticed the removal of the large standing dead oak at the entrance to Langdon park off Lincoln Avenue or the large Linden that recently fell on a car on High Street next to Rudy’s restaurant, requiring this crew’s technical skills to remove without inflicting additional damage.

As you can imagine, tree care is an evolving science. The arborists are constantly updating their training and monitoring developments in industry publications documenting success in other municipalities at saving and promoting the urban forest. * You may have noticed the “Porous Pav” placed around some of the downtown trees. This recycled porous material allows water to pass through but keeps trash out and prevents compaction on the surrounding exposed area of the tree. This product is installed in house, and, together with the strict three-year pruning schedule has made an incredible difference in the vigor of downtown trees.

I appreciate the time you have taken to study this report. I realize that not everyone is a “tree hugger” like the members of the Trees and Public Greenery Committee, but all of us enjoy the benefits of our “urban forest.” Whether we live or work in the South End, West End, Gosling Meadows, “the Crick,” Elwyn Park, Maple Haven, or Tuckers Cove, the “urban forest” adds to our quality of life and is a meaningful, worthwhile investment of City funds.

Respectfully Submitted,

May 12, 2022

Peter J. Loughlin

Chair, Trees and Public Greenery Committee

*In April the City was awarded the Arbor Day Foundations Tree Growth Award for the work done in 2021. This is the highest award given by the Foundation and this was the fourth year in a row that the City was so recognized. It is based on a combination of ongoing training certifications and documented outstanding programs for the planting, pruning, and general maintenance of trees.