

# Bedford Arbor Resource Committee

The Selectmen  
Town of Bedford  
Bedford MA 01730  
November 21, 2016

To the Selectmen:

A significant part of BARC's committee charter is to advise our Selectmen about the state of our urban forest and to suggest ways to maintain and, ideally, to enhance its health.

## **Regarding our two requests**

We have come to you tonight because, after extensive discussions with the DPW Director and acting Tree Warden, we believe it is time to address the decline of our beautiful tree-lined, canopied streets and significant loss of woodlands. We think two actions would be effective.

- First is to develop a comprehensive policy regarding the regulation of all publicly-owned town trees.
- The second is to create a dedicated line-item in the DPW operating budget to water trees that the town plants for two years.

With the satisfactory execution of these two initiatives and your approval of both, our hope is that they will function to begin to enhance the sustainability, viability and quantity of our urban forest.

## **I. Regarding THE POLICY**

Recent court decisions have left a significant portion of town-owned trees uncovered by policy or legislation. We would like to have your permission to work with the DPW over the next few months to craft a policy that you will find is comprehensive, maintains a high level of transparency and incorporates an appeals process within the framework of town government.

## **II. Regarding THE BUDGET**

The current line item 001.4003.5566, funded at \$17,446 in fiscal 17, is for a broad array of plantings – including trees, shrubs, grass, and seed-- for town fields, schools and holiday plantings. This line item is inadequate, in part because it does not accommodate the cost of watering young trees that are planted as part of the landscaping of a town project. Without watering for the first two or three critical years, many of those saplings will grow poorly or die.

The line item currently does pay for purchasing and planting—but not watering – five to ten trees a year. These are trees that are planted within the framework of the (almost) Free Tree Project, an innovative public-private partnership developed by the DPW to supplement our street tree population within current budgetary restraints. The trees are planted in the town-owned section of a volunteer-resident's front yard, so the tree is a publicly-owned shade tree. In exchange, homeowners water these trees for the first three critical years.

### **Primary Factors That Have Caused the Decline of Our Urban Forest**

Over the last year alone, we have suffered significant cumulative loss of our tree stock for public, as well as private, needs. The causes are Bedford's prolonged period of development, the demands of infrastructure—that is, for roads and utilities—and natural causes exacerbated by the extended drought. Highlights of the actual and planned loss of public trees within the last year—include for

**Development:** about 450- 500 trees (You have the details in your packet)

- over 360 trees for the Liljegren ball fields
- 65 trees trees to enlarge the Shawsheen Cemetery
- 5 for Sabourin field press box
- 45 to 100 trees for the Job Lane School project

**Infrastructure needs:** several hundred trees

- about 70 to 80 roadside trees for public safety by Eversource
- hundreds of trees to be cut down for the Middlesex Turnpike phase 3 project, which is in addition to the hundreds that were cut down a few years ago for phase 2

and due to **natural causes such as—drought, gypsy moth, winter moth, the microburst and storm damage**, the DPW removed about 70 trees as hazards in 2015 and 2016.

Effects of drought exacerbate the harm caused by infestation and become more pronounced over time. Some of our more vulnerable mature trees have been weakened by these causes, making them more susceptible to disease and infestation, thereby shortening their natural life span.

## **Moving toward a solution**

### **The Survival of Newly-Planted Trees**

The survival of newly-planted tree stock is one circumstance we can have some control over,

because regular watering during the first two to three years is the single most important element for their survival.

### **The Benefits of the Urban Forest**

But why should we expend limited public resources to stem the loss?

We need the ability to plan for our town's future urban forest because with fewer trees, our town loses more than the beauty and character of tree-lined, canopied streets. A very limited summary of what we lose includes

- environmental and health benefits, like cleaner air and water and carbon sequestration
- financial benefits, like higher property values and a more vibrant business community
- safer streets, through traffic calming – because roadside trees tend to slow traffic
- the biodiversity that keeps wildlife and insects in sustainable balance, and
- the ability to mitigate the projected costs of climate change.

A budget would protect town investments. Most town projects involve some new plantings.

- The new section of the Shawsheen Cemetery includes landscaping to make it more appealing as a place to visit and reflect. If those trees are not watered for the first two or three critical years, their survival becomes questionable and that investment will likely be wasted.
- The town also anticipates planting trees as part of other projects—for the Safe Route to Schools project at the Jenks Nature Trail arboretum, the Police Department and others.

*--And people like trees and tree-lined streets.*

### **The Budget Proposal**

The goal is to water trees that the town has planted in the past two years on a variety of town properties. We believe this is a minimum for a viable program. An ideal budget would cover a more limited watering program for trees in their third year if severe drought conditions continue and they remain at risk.

We'd like to accomplish this goal balancing efficiency and cost-effectiveness. We've begun working with the DPW Director and acting Tree Warden on this project, and, given your approval, will continue to do so. Obviously, their accord and expertise are essential.

Their preliminary research suggests that a proactive watering program such as we envision would require the use of a tanker truck, and using contractors removes the need to purchase additional equipment. Early

estimates suggest an annual price tag of around \$60,000. Given your approval, the DPW has said they will continue researching and developing more specific details.

### **Conclusion**

Addressing this situation is urgent if we are to maintain the benefits of a healthy New England urban forest. A clarified, comprehensive policy regarding the regulation of all publicly-owned town trees and a dedicated budget for tree maintenance would be a step toward protecting the investment the town makes in landscaping, protecting the vision of the original project plan over time and keeping the town a beautiful, vibrant and welcoming place for residents and businesses.

To keep Bedford the beautiful, healthy, safe town with tree-lined streets that it still is, please support this line item in the DPW operating budget.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline S. Edwards  
Chairman, Bedford Arbor Resources Committee

Melinda Dietrich, member  
Jerry Mendenhall, member  
Ken Prescott, member  
Ruth Robinson, member