



CITY OF CONCORD
New Hampshire's Main Street™
Community Development Department

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City Planner

FROM: Tree Subcommittee of the Conservation Commission
DATE: March 23, 2023
SUBJECT: Resolution authorizing the appropriation of \$10,000 from the Urban Tree Trust Fund for the purpose of planting trees within public rights-of-way under the Sustainable Tree Program; and, an annual update from the Tree Subcommittee.

Recommendation

Accept this report and approve the attached resolution for funding to plant trees on City property and within public rights-of-way under the Sustainable Tree Program.

Background

In 1999, the Urban Tree Trust Fund was established utilizing donated funds for street tree planting in the right of way in urban areas of the City. Additional funds have been deposited into the Trust Fund since City Council approved a change to the Zoning Ordinance that allows property owners to provide in lieu payment to the Urban Tree Trust Fund for the cost of the required trees not installed, in accordance with the requirements of Article 28-9-4 (b).

In April 2019, Council appropriated \$7,500 from the Urban Tree Trust Fund for the purpose of planting trees in the public rights-of-way. In early 2020, the Tree Subcommittee organized a tree inventory in the downtown area to identify potential locations for tree plantings. Using data from an inventory completed in 2000, the 2020 tree inventory found that there was a 30% decline in the number of trees in the area surveyed. As part of the study, members also identified that most of the suitable planting areas were on private property adjacent to street rights-of-way. The Subcommittee concluded that it would be important to engage residents moving forward, to assist in restoring and improving the urban tree canopy by planting trees on private property.

In 2021, with City Council approval, the Tree Subcommittee initiated a cost sharing strategy to the Sustainable Tree Program to expand access to more residents. Twenty-five residents were able to plant trees in 2022 by utilizing the funds. The Tree Subcommittee has found that providing financial support has had great success in engaging residents as intended. The Tree Subcommittee and Conservation Commission want to continue this program into the future to help restore and improve the urban tree canopy, in accordance with the Street Tree Policy that was adopted by City Council in 2015.

Discussion

Tree planting in 2022

The Tree Subcommittee teamed with the TPAC Bike and Pedestrian Subcommittee to make recommendations for both traffic calming/pedestrian safety measures and tree locations as part of the repaving of South Street and South State Street. Conversations with neighborhood residents resulted in trees being planted using funds appropriated by City Council. Given the challenging nature of urban tree planting (i.e. conflicts with utilities and sight lines), the tree planting aspect of the project was limited. However, this “paved the way” for additional conversations and projects. For instance, the Tree Subcommittee has identified over 20 locations associated with the road paving/reconstruction project in Penacook in Summer 2023. Members are starting to reach out to homeowners at those sites to see if they are interested in planting trees on their property. To the extent that resources are available, the Subcommittee requests that Council support the use of the funds from the Urban Tree Trust Fund to defray the cost of trees to those homeowners through the Sustainable Tree Program. The Tree Subcommittee feels this would be an appropriate use of the funds collected from Wheelabrator, a Penacook business that contributed \$6,750 towards the Urban Tree Trust Fund under a Conditional Use Permit in 2021, by providing the benefits of tree planting in the Penacook area.

Sustainable Tree Program (STP) Promotion

City staff planted 35 trees in 2022, 25 of which were partially covered by the incentive program. The cost of the tree scholarship program in 2022 was \$6,000. Given that the program is oriented towards those who have stated their desire to have a tree on their property, there is a much greater chance the trees will be cared for and survive; the funds will be a good investment in that regard. The cost of trees has also gone up significantly, now up to \$400-\$500 wholesale, making the cost sharing more important for those who want to participate.

The Subcommittee notes that the STP was so successful last year that it went from having extra capacity to plant trees, to now maintaining a waiting list for the upcoming year. The program has also made good use of the promotional lawn signs. A sign reading “Future Home of a Tree,” is installed in the planned location, and upon planting, is replaced with a sign that reads, “Another Tree Making Concord Green”. These are temporary signs, all removed prior to winter, and reused the following year in new locations.

This cost sharing initiative, rolled out in Spring 2022, along with outreach efforts by the City, resulted in one of the most successful years ever for the STP. The Subcommittee hopes the program will continue in 2023, utilizing appropriated funds to augment the STP for those that cannot afford a tree.

Additional Updates from the Subcommittee

Interacting with schools

In 2021, the City staff and Tree Subcommittee worked with the school district to plant 2 trees at the Concord School District building (Dewey School). Subcommittee members also worked with students at Concord High to sponsor a tree planting on the campus associated with a pollinator garden. This resulted in a plan for future collaborations, including reviewing options for grants to help with getting more trees to the schools and to find teachers interested in including trees as part of student studies or activities.

Outreach

In addition to the great work by the City and General Services staff, the Tree Subcommittee members were involved in several outreach opportunities, including the Farmers' Market and annual Arbor Day celebration. The clever and attractive Farmer's Market displays succeeded in raising the profile of the Sustainable Tree Program and the plight of urban trees. On six separate Saturday mornings, subcommittee members set up the display and talked to many people, promoting the Sustainable Tree Program and the benefits of proper tree planting. The 2022 Arbor Day event, co-sponsored by Modern Woodman of America, took place at White Park, and was attended by groups of children from local day camps, several City Councilors, and the Mayor. ConcordTV also created a video that was posted on the City's webpage.

In addition, subcommittee members lobbied for trees to be planted at the Legislative Office Building, and with the help of Mayor Bouley, two trees were planted by the State in a prominent area.

Finally, given the complexities and conflicts with planting trees directly adjacent to streets, the subcommittee is exploring ways to focus support for residents to plant trees in their front and back yards, outside the City right of way. City staff would not be involved in the plantings, but other forms of support from the Subcommittee (i.e. sourcing of trees, training, outreach) could help to improve those initiatives. For instance, the Subcommittee is co-hosting an event on May 16th at the Citywide Community Center with the NH Division of Forests and Lands to teach residents proper planting techniques, and provide educational resources for successful plantings using bare root and containerized stock, which is more affordable for residents.

A welcome addition to the resources available to the Tree Subcommittee has been the regular attendance of Liz McKinley who is the new Community Forester at NH Division of Forest and Lands. She is very knowledgeable about grants and alternative funding programs, including a grant for planting 4-5 trees on school properties, which is rolling out this Spring.

Tree Champion Award

In 2023, the Subcommittee is committed to launching a Tree Champion Award program that recognizes individuals and businesses that make a significant contribution to the tree canopy of the City. This could be through donations of time or trees, or by a business carefully maintaining the trees on their property.