

December 8, 2021

To: Marblehead Board of Selectment

From: Sustainable Marblehead Town Trees and Urban Forestry

Regarding: ARPA Fund Allocation for Urban Forestry Infrastructure

Sustainable Marblehead's Town Trees and Urban Forestry team requests that Marblehead's Board of Selectmen allocate a portion of the ARPA infrastructure rebuilding funds to expand the Tree Department in order to 1) enhance the visual appeal of Marblehead for residents and to draw more tourist activity; 2) create a comprehensive Urban Forestry Management Plan that would increase public safety and utility resilience; and 3) enhance environmental protections through green infrastructure that will support our changing needs due to climate change.

Starting in the late 1800s trees were planted in towns as a source of beauty, shade, wind breaks, and privacy. Until the advent of Dutch elm disease and other introduced plagues, streets were lined with single species -- Elm Street, Chestnut Street, Laurel, Birch, Cedar, Maple ... Since the 1970s the mono-culture approach to urban planting has been modified. The Abbot Hall grounds, with tulip trees and other species, are an example of that rethinking completed circa 1977 after the elm trees were decimated by disease.

However, the focus on urban trees was still an unsophisticated science in the 1970s and so led to planting practices with poor long-term results. Non-native and poorly chosen trees were planted because they offered rapid growth and spring blooming spectacles. The trees chosen in the 1970s through the early 1990s included short-lived ornamentals such as the cherry, pear, and crab apple and also shallow-rooted trees such as the Silver and Norway maples. They were also planted without regard to their life cycle requirements, urban conditions, and size. Therefore, they were planted in areas that now disrupt safe passage and utility wire access throughout Marblehead. Further, since they were mostly planted within just a few years of each other, they are collectively reaching the end of their natural urban lives. As a result, many neighborhoods are stripped of trees and in others the weakened limbs and roots are becoming a serious threat during the increased storm events we've been experiencing. This places additional economic and safety burden on the Electric, DPW, Fire, Police and other town departments called in to address emergency situations.

This also poses a major dilemma. Simplistically, cutting down all the offending trees removes the problem. However, that approach introduces heat islands which increases residential heating and cooling costs and places additional strain on the electrical and utility grids. Furthermore, no one wants to live in an ugly barren neighborhood with no visual appeal; baking hot in the summer, no protection from wind and rain, and inundated by dust and foul air from motorized traffic. In addition, from an environmental perspective, trees are more than just a pretty face on our landscape. They quantitatively add to environmental and physical health for the land, the inhabitants, and the sea by cleaning air, dampening winds, and capturing water.

Therefore, the answer is NOT to remove all trees but to create and implement a comprehensive assessment and plan for reforestation that addresses visual appeal and environmental impact within appropriate safety and access requirements.

Marblehead does not currently have the resources nor the personnel to properly address this infrastructure reforestation investment. We need to have a project-focused approach to strategic planning, hazard remediation, planting, and ongoing structured maintenance for immediate and future generations.

Our Tree Warden is highly creative, talented, and educated but at less than 20 hours/week he cannot possibly organize and address this complex planning process adequately or in a timely manner. Further, he and a single Town Planner are not sufficient to research, apply for, and administer all the possible Grants from the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), USDA, US Forest Service and others that could help fund projects. We need ARPA funding to create more staffing hours, initiate and complete the assessments, and develop a multi-year management plan. We also need more investment and access to human expertise and mechanical resources so that we can choose the right plants for the right location and planted in the right soil conditions. Grants will be important for the ongoing work, but ARPA funds should be allocated to make an immediate impact.

Marblehead Light Board, Water and Sewer, DPW, and the Health Departments should also be directly funding the Tree Department's planning and maintenance requirements as their infrastructures are directly impacted by the quality of the urban forest health and welfare.

Our Town Trees and Urban Forestry team has been working with both the Tree Warden and the Recreation and Parks Commission with volunteers, some expertise, and some minor funding. Our 32+ members include landscape architects and designers, members all the garden clubs, and prominent 'Headers. We have collectively provided as much help as we have been allowed – it is not enough. The list includes:

1. Supporting the Atlantic Avenue tree planting
2. Writing, consulting, and editing the original Request for bids on the Atlantic Avenue tree planting
3. Gathering 30 volunteers from the High School and Garden Clubs to plant neighborhood street trees last April
4. Volunteering to inventory town trees as soon as the Tree Warden can arrange our start time
5. Adding donations to the Town Tree Fund at Abbot Hall
6. Designing a website for the Recreation and Parks Department to collect donations in the name of people/organizations to re-landscape and improve our public spaces – the first example was the landscape design of the Jacobi Community Center garden provided by our member, Kathy Bradford

In Summary -- The goals for Urban Forestry cannot be focused on just beautifying the town with an unsophisticated general planting of pretty trees that get in the way of pedestrians, bicyclists, and snowplows. We must change our investment mindset to address environmental needs -- to reduce heat islands, create safe access for all citizens, and ensure unparalleled resilient electrical, health, and utility systems. This will result in a well-managed, attractive, and safe town that will continue to draw high quality social experiences, citizen investment, and recreational opportunities for years to come.

Thank you for your time

Palma Bickford, (palbick@gmail.com)
53 Longview Drive
Chair, Sustainable Marblehead Town Trees and Urban Forestry
And the following members:

Christine Cudihy
Nancy Powell
Don Gardner
Kathy Bradford
Eileen Mathieu
Teresa Hawkins
Sue Guertin
Phil Blaisdell
Louise Yarmoff
DL Kaulbach
Chris Everest
Jason Bobowski
Esther Mulroy
Charlene Tyler
Karin McCarthy
Elise Brink
Jim Harshbarger
Brigitte Lagoutte
Kira Clingin
Ed Lewis
Frances King
Sandra Winter
Larry Simpson
Mary Spitzer
Polly Whitmore
BJ Bucknam
Tom Krueger
Laura Wilson
Will Smith
Erin Trahan
David Hooks