

Report on Results of Community Survey



West Newbury Tree Committee

September 2021

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

The Town of West Newbury (WN) is a semi-rural community that spans 14.7 square miles on the North Shore of Massachusetts and that is bordered on the north by the Merrimack River. West Newbury has approximately 4,700 residents; commercial development is very limited; and there are no industrial facilities.

West Newbury is comprised mainly of a green landscape interspersed with significant water features, agricultural lands, and residences. Approximate land uses are:

- tree cover and forests (57%),
- wetlands (6%)
- open water (9%)
- agriculture (10%)
- non-agricultural grass lands (10%)
- soil or bare ground (1%)
- impervious surfaces (i.e., roofs, roads, and driveways) (7%)

The West Newbury Tree Committee (TC) was initially formed in August of 2019 with primarily an educational and advisory mission. The TC has established a number of ongoing programs and routinely advises residents on issues related to maintaining and enhancing the trees and forest of West Newbury. The TC also maintains a website replete with information and advice on trees and forests.

B. Community Survey

From May 25 to June 15, 2021, the Tree Committee conducted a community-wide survey to gather the views of WN residents. The goals of the survey were to assess community attitudes towards the trees and forests of WN and to help the TC determine appropriate priorities for the coming years.

The survey consisted of 13 questions, 11 of which asked respondents to select among a variety of choices (see Part III of this report). Two questions also sought narrative responses answers (see Part IV and the Appendix). 151 responses were received.

Over the late spring and summer of 2021, the TC reviewed the responses and prepared this Report. Our intention is to present this information and analysis to the Select Board, the Planning Board, and the residents of West Newbury in the near future.

II. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES - Multiple Choice Questions

- Over 92% of respondents indicated that trees and forests are viewed as "extremely" or "very important" to the character of West Newbury.
- Just under 75% of respondents value trees primarily as providing wildlife habitat and secondarily as enhancing the natural beauty and landscape of West Newbury. Mitigating climate change was the third most important.
- On the question of the biggest threats to WN trees and forests, over 70% chose (1) insect disease and damage and (2) clear-cutting during property development.

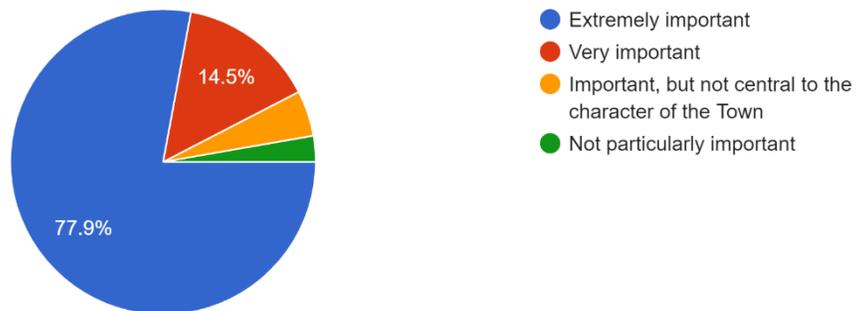
- Respondents identified three priorities for the Tree Committee:
 - (1) advising the Town Planning Board on developer applications (71%)
 - (2) publishing guidance on protecting trees during construction (61%), and
 - (3) facilitating tree planting along public roads (60%).
- Respondents supported plans to protect existing trees, plant new trees, and restore the tree canopy along Rt. 113/Main Street. Two-thirds of the respondents indicated support for budget initiatives relating to such projects.
- When asked about "useful and appropriate" measures for developers, respondents indicated preference for:
 - (1) avoiding cutting down any significant or remarkable trees onsite (81%)
 - (2) following guidelines on protecting trees during construction (80%)
 - (3) submitting tree protection plans as part of a permit application (71%)
- 87% supported an initiative for elementary and/or middle school educational programs about local trees and forests

III. GRAPHS - Multiple Choice Questions

A. Importance and Values of Trees

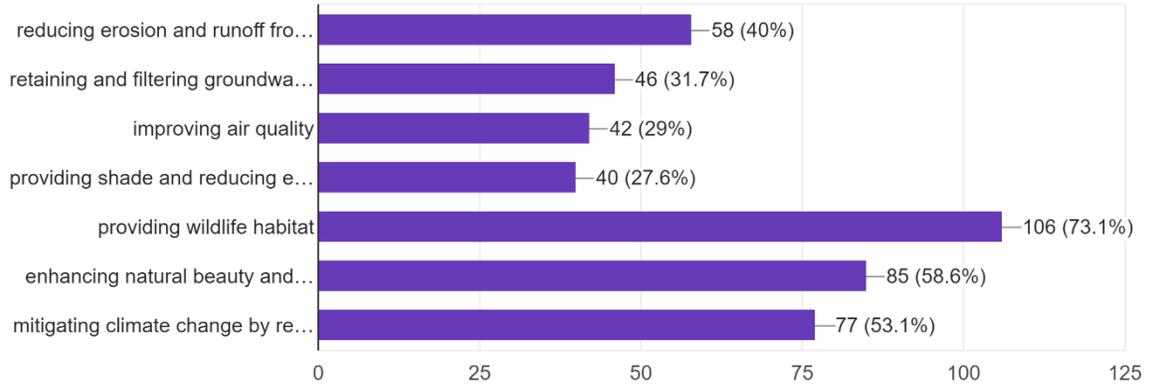
1. How important in your opinion are trees and forests to the character of West Newbury?

145 responses



2. Which value of trees and forests are the most important in your opinion? Please check up to three from the list below.

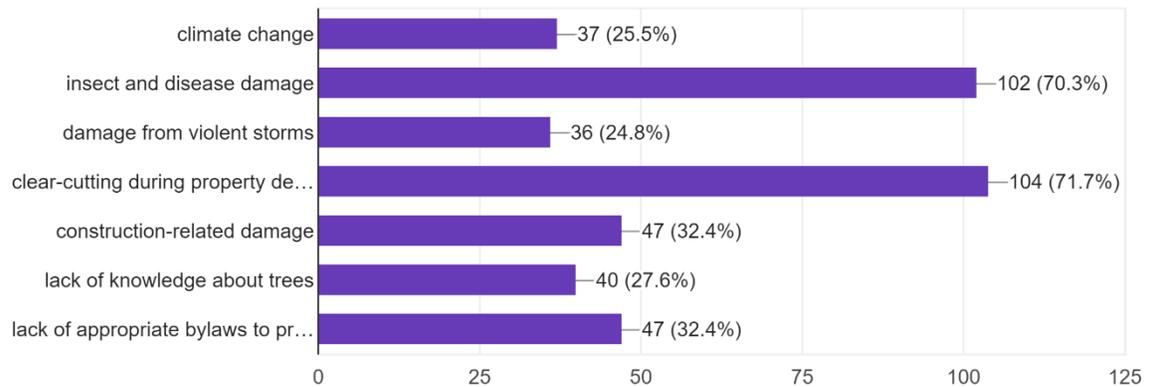
145 responses



B. Major Threats to West Newbury Trees

3. What do you think are the major threats to the trees and forests in West Newbury? Please check up to three from the list below.

145 responses

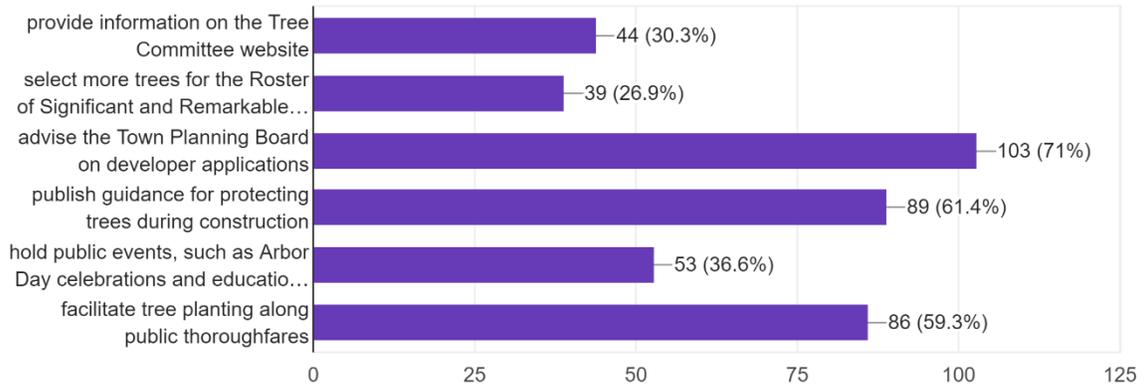


C. Priorities for Tree Committee

4. What are activities that you would like the Tree Committee to prioritize in the next two years?

Please check up to three from the list below.

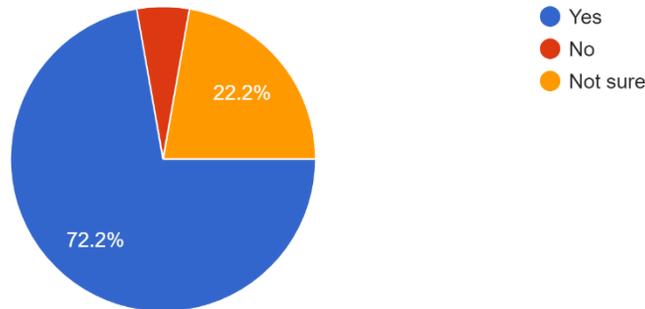
145 responses



D. Community Interest in Specific Projects or Measures

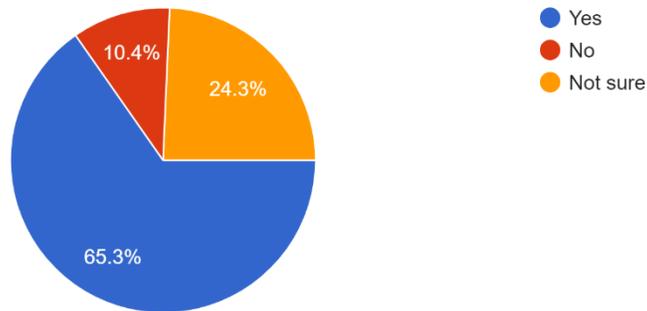
5. Would you like the Town to do more to protect trees and restore the tree canopy along Rt. 113/Main Street?

144 responses



6. Would you support a budget initiative for planting more trees along Rt. 113/Main Street?

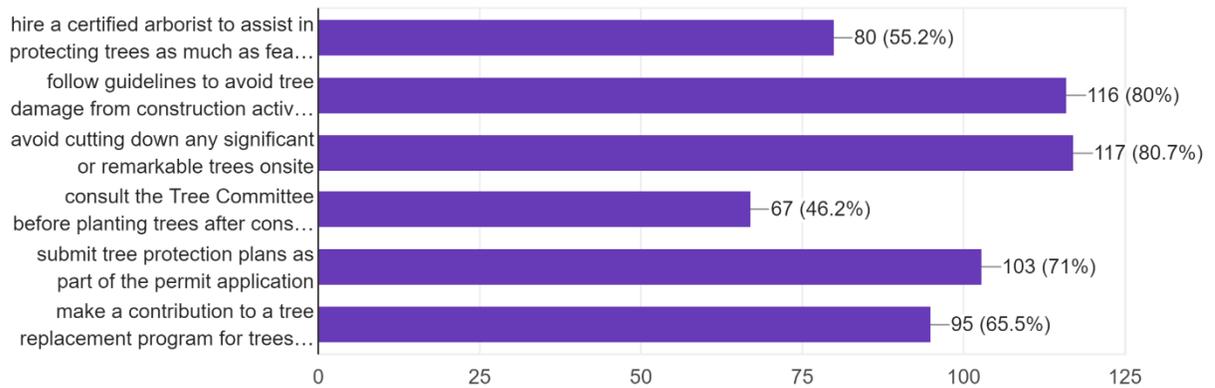
144 responses



E. Other - Development and Education

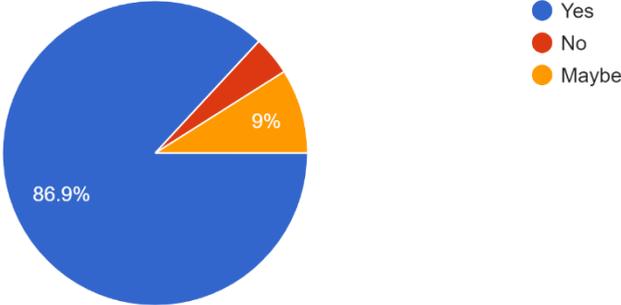
7. When land is being developed in West Newbury, do you think it would be useful and appropriate for the project developers to do any of following..(check all that you recommend from the list below)

145 responses



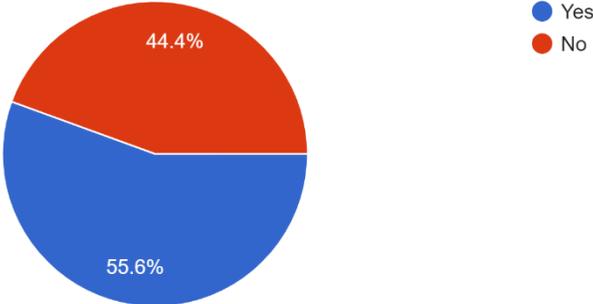
8. Would you support an educational program in our elementary and/or middle schools about local trees and forests?

145 responses



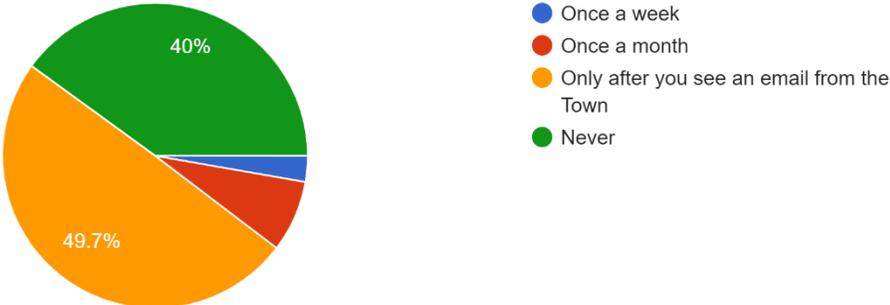
9. Do you know how to contact the Tree Committee on a particular matter of concern?

144 responses



10. How often have you visited the Tree Committee website at www.wnewbury.org/tree-committee?

145 responses



NOTE: Question 12 about potentially joining the Friends of WN Trees has been omitted.

IV. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES - Narrative Questions

The Appendix to this report contains the text of all the narrative responses to Questions 11 and 13. Question 11 asked for opinions and recommendations on what more could be done by the Town to protect WN trees, and Question 13 asked for comments or suggestions for the Tree Committee to consider.

Five major areas were raised in the narrative responses to Questions 11 and 13:

- Property development and tree cutting/removal (21 comments)
- Native trees (7)
- Control of invasive plants and pests (12)
- Planting and protecting trees (27)
- General comments on Tree Committee (27)

In addition, 24 comments on a wide range of other topics were submitted. Only 3 comments out of the total of the over 110 written responses indicated that no more action should be taken by the Tree Committee. One comment stated that Question 7 was flawed.

- Property Development and Tree Cutting/Removal: An overwhelming majority of the 21 comments wanted the Town to address the cutting and removal of trees as property development occurs. Comments included a variety of means to achieve this goal, ranging from reducing the amount of development to instituting more rules and requirements on developers related to tree cutting and removal. Many comments displayed a strong preference for retaining the natural character of the WN landscape.
- Native Trees: Almost all of 7 comments on native trees indicated that respondents valued native trees and plants and wanted more information on what species to plant.
- Control of Invasives and Tree Disease: Twelve respondents had significant concerns about controlling and removing invasive plants and pests and, in particular, oriental bittersweet. Roadside problem areas were mentioned in a number of comments.
- Planting and Protecting Trees: The greatest number of comments addressed this issue, although most did so in a general way. A thread of support for increased town action and funding appeared in many of the comments. Two comments opposed town action or funding and cited the natural reforestation of WN forests as sufficient.
- General Comments Related to Tree Committee: Community support for the Tree Committee was strongly manifested in 27 comments, with an emphasis on asking for more education of residents on tree and forest management.
- Other: As mentioned above, a wide range of other topics appeared in response to Questions 11 and 13. Education on a variety of topics (maple syrup making, history, tree benefits, etc.) was supported or requested in 11 of the 24 comments. Removal of trees or limbs around power lines also appeared in 4 comments.

V. NEXT STEPS

We look forward to meeting with the Select Board and the Planning Board to discuss the survey results and this Report. This Report will also be made electronically available to the residents of West Newbury.

Respectfully submitted,

West Newbury Tree Committee

Fred Chanania, Chair
Molly Hawkins, Vice-Chair
Francesca Pomerantz, Secretary
Rita Wollmering
Claudia Woods
Wayne Amaral, ex officio

September 2021

V. APPENDIX

Written Comments to Questions 11 and 13

Question 11. Overall, do you think the Town should do more to protect the health and shared benefits of West Newbury's trees? If so, what would you recommend?

Question 13. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for the Tree Committee to consider?

PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT AND TREE CUTTING/PROTECTION

There is so much development in this town, it is incredibly disheartening to see beautiful forests and farmland turned into cheap looking model homes. I think the town needs to reduce the amount of development that happens on otherwise undeveloped lots and prioritize protecting open spaces and forest land.

Guidelines for cutting of trees on property and for construction.

Enhance tree protection and planting requirements in subdivision and site plan review regs.

This is a beautiful landscape and too much development will destroy the reasons why we chose to live in this community.

The woodlands are what make West Newbury beautiful and unique. I cringe every time I see a new development/home being built - there are so many homes that could be fixed up on land that is already developed; to cut down the woods for new homes is an atrocity.

When people buy property, they chop down too many trees and there is too much development going on.

There should be a moratorium on development. There has been way too much building in West Newbury.

Prevent clear cutting during development.

Make development more difficult and less common.

A tree bylaw prohibiting removal of trees from property unless diseased, damaged or pose a significant risk of injury.

Mitigating major risks (disease, development).

West Newbury's forests are being whittled away in a number of areas by sequential developments, and the cumulative impact is negative for the Town's character and landscape as well as contiguous wildlife habitat and other ecological functions. In addition to land acquisition and securing conservation restrictions, and managing/planting trees on public property, I believe that the Town must take a significantly stronger stand in actively regulating the removal vs. protection of forests on private land. The Town's shared character is dependent on all of the forests on private land. Eventually the publicly protected trees and forests will be "islands" within a larger sea of subdivisions and developments, as can be seen in other Greater Boston communities that were once significantly forested, unless more is done to alter the trajectory of clearing more and more over the years. New more active bylaws and review and enforcement mechanisms are needed. There will be some who will be opposed to this approach due to a focus on private property rights, cost, complexity, etc., but the financial value of our

private property in West Newbury is significantly dependent and based on the overall character, quality, and desirability of this community. We will be able to maintain, enhance, and protect the property rights of the majority of us by applying a much stronger hand in reviewing and regulating individual developments that will otherwise shave our forests away year by year.

Focus on minimizing tree loss due to development.

More stringent rules and oversight of developers. (2)

I am concerned of clearcutting trees for development. I hope the town can put into law that during construction that trees would be taken into consideration as they develop the property.

Construction rule making site plan to include tree plan with a minimum ratio of trees removed to be replaced with new trees say 50%.

Good luck with this it is very important not to allow developers to drastically change the landscape. I think Newton has a rule of one to one to cut trees and the replacement must be the same diameter as the cut trees. Just because it is easier to clear cut a lot does not mean it should be allowed.

While the town needs to continue to develop itself it needs to take every possible precaution with preserving our trees. For me, our wildlife sets us apart from other local areas. Having a member or representative involved with permitting and construction activities would be helpful. Also, a "Tree Fund" would be a great way of helping the town replace any trees lost.

NATIVE TREES

I think it is vital that only native trees are planted and those with the highest pollinator value such as oaks for example. Doug Tallamy has more listed on-line and in his publications. When tree seedlings are given away, they must be native seedlings. Although the Dawn Redwood is a beautiful tree, it is not native and does not support native pollinators. It has little to no value in natural ecosystems and every yard should support pollinators and birds.

Develop and provide a species preferred plan with annual publication along with the trash pickup calendar.

Offer webinars about our native trees, their importance, and how to protect them.

We need to start replacing Norway Maples with native maples.

The tree committee should work on developing and publishing a listing of tree species that residents should consider planting, in anticipation of climate change / northward progression of warmer growing zones and likely loss of existing native trees due to disease and insect damage. Focus should be on native trees currently with low prevalence due to our latitude being toward the northern extreme of their climate range, but which climate warming will make more suitable. Much as we may be dismayed, climate change is real and we should help nature adapt as much as possible.

I think working with Wild and Native West Newbury to remove invasive species that contribute to tree damage and ensuring that trees being replanted or preserved are native to the area should be a priority.

Guide townspeople about the most appropriate native trees to plant.

CONTROL OF INVASIVES AND TREE DISEASE

Get rid of invasive such that are choking trees, e.g., corner of Chase and Middle streets.

Show people how to manage invasive species like strangler vine.

Have a vine (bittersweet?) control program.

I am extremely concerned about Japanese knotweed that is creeping into the waterways and woodlands and would like to help the town mitigate the problem before it becomes unmanageable - there is still hope if we act now.

I am concerned about the bittersweet and black locust that appears to be taking over a lot of West Newbury.

Removing the thick vines that are choking the trees to death on many streets (Middle St., Crane Neck Road, etc.).

Funding, support for fighting invasive pest damage to trees.

A list of what trees/shrubs NOT to plant would be nice, so we don't introduce invasive/damaging species. Is there an initiative to reduce the amounts of harmful plants/vines/shrubs along trails and public spaces (like poison ivy, Virginia creeper, buckthorn, etc.)?

A resource for finding out which tree species that are common in WN are beneficial and which species are invasive/harmful (shrubs, too) would be helpful when weeding/pruning our yards.

Focus on damage from invasives (plants & insects).

Educate us on the biological threats and how to fend them off.

Please eradicate the poison ivy and bittersweet, especially along the sides of roads. These invasive vines strangle trees and can pull them down and they are hazardous to most people.

PLANTING AND PROTECTING TREES

Planting more trees than we lose every year.

Develop a budget for plantings and conservation.

Adopt a plan for maintenance and care of the Town's trees. This would be facilitated through a line item in the Town budget.

Plant many trees on side streets as well as on Main Street.

It would be great if the town put more of an emphasis on tree protection and perhaps could tie it in with other "green" initiatives to keep the idea pertinent and help make protecting our trees part of WN town culture.

I was uncertain about the canopy of trees along Main Street -- I love the idea but also worry about potential impact on power lines, electric and cable service, etc.

Protect really beautiful copper beech, oak and maple trees.

Develop a group of volunteers who can plant and advise on the care of trees for residents on their property (hard time digging the hole).

How to protect trees from tree killing insects.

Planting more fruit trees in certain areas to promote edible landscaping. (2)

Support or promote organizations that plant memorial or special occasion trees as a gift option

Increase funds for protected land (i.e., Essex Greenbelt).

Plant trees that future generations can enjoy, like a sugarbush of maples, street canopies, etc.

The town should do more to protect the trees that make West Newbury unique and beautiful. I recommend doing everything stated in questions 4 and 7.

Plant trees and giveaway trees.

Plant more trees along roadsides, especially Main St and Maple St.

Enforce tree cutting along the riverfront.

Inspect trees by sectors in the town every few years for damage or diseases.

Simply do all that is necessary to protect the natural beauty and beneficial rewards of well cared for trees.

Manage trees that are damaged, replant.

Protect a greater number of trees.

Organize a volunteer event to plant new trees on town property.

Important to make people aware that it isn't just about trees, but all the species, including us, that depend on them and how makes the planet healthy. Newburyport has had city-wide tree planting for decades and we need to, as well.

West Newbury does not need to do more – West Newbury's forests are all new, a function of the decrease in farming in West Newbury. Look at the pictures from 1900 – West Newbury was all fields.

Offer to consult with homeowners to improve tree variety and planting on their own property.

I don't think we should pay extra for this (planting). I would like to see more pruning and culling of dead trees. Our town used to be all fields and open. In the year 2021, we have mostly trees covering the town in comparison to the former fields. We do not need a program to plant more trees. Our trees currently re-seed and forests grow naturally. I think any program to plant new trees would be a waste of money and fiscally irresponsible.

GENERAL COMMENTS RELATED TO TREE COMMITTEE

Thank you, i.e., for your efforts, work, and tree stewardship. (9)

Follow the recommendations of the tree committee.

You seem to have a wide range of very good ideas --keep going!

Now that I know the tree committee has a website. I will definitely check it out.

I think you are an invaluable asset, and you are doing much to educate us all. I'm grateful you are here now, and I'm hopeful you will continue to "speak for our trees."

Would the tree committee have anyone who would advise on tree management in private properties?

Happy there is now a tree committee in town. (2)

I love the old photos of my family home with the two gorgeous elms out front that died from Dutch Elm disease - thank you for your efforts.

I wish I had time to join such a committee, but I don't. I am so glad that our town has you.

They should respond to the question of the right of way on Rt. 113 for National Grid Tree cutting.

I am pleased with what they do, so please continue.

I would support committee in ways I can.

Tree Committee should partner with the Open Space Committee for tree education on public trail walks. Tree Committee is hard to get an answer from; no response to emails.

Love that this committee exists and listens to residents.

Contact homeowners with explanations and suggestions.

This committee has had a great start and already doing valuable work.

The Tree Committee should weigh in on open space purchased with CPA funds. Developers clear cut forest for housing and then put in non-native species and usually dwarf size.

Provide an arborist to answer tree questions for West Newbury citizens? How to deal with disease, etc.

OTHER

Education for the residents. (4)

Silviculture is a topic not known to many, but proper forest management is essential for healthy forests. I would love to see our town help educate landowners about forest management.

I'd also like to see the town work with woodworkers so that when trees do need to get cut down, they go to artisans who will respect the lumber rather than seeing it all chipped or burned.

Implement educational programs about trees and their history in West Newbury for all ages.

We should have an appointed 'tree warden' as most towns do; I believe that 'trees' are now under the supervision of our DPW director; he has too much to do already.

Maybe teach residents how to tap maple trees for syrup, or what to do with fruit or seeds from trees that can be harvested.

Survey is flawed. Question 7 offers no option other than encroaching on rights of landowners/taxpayers. Suggest you add "None of the above" option.

Regular awareness-raising like the recent tree walk co-sponsored with ACES are great ways to get more public consciousness of trees and tree benefits.

Supporting programs of education (schools and the general public) regarding trees (benefits, care, planting).

Fund town curb side pickup and or chipping of downed tree limbs and branches after severe storms on all roadways particularly in residential areas. Restore free-to-residents wood chip pile at Pipestave Hill. If necessary, consider appropriate treatment to mitigate risk of spreading ash borer beetles.

Increasing public/protected land, finding more conservation land easements with local property owners.

Keep trees not maintained by property owners trimmed to avoid storm and electrical damage.

Continuing public awareness efforts both for public and at schools.

Many dead trees on power lines. Need to go around and cut many trees. Many fallen branches during storms and it's dangerous.

Cut dead tree branches on Main Street and side streets near power lines. They are everywhere.

Limit development of multiple usage housing, like condos where the impact is greater than single family homes.

Require major restrictions on pesticide use and lawn watering for all residential and commercial properties.

I think education is most important. Teaching our youth to respect and appreciate the nature around us. Perhaps cleanup/restoration efforts to help improve conditions.

We have been West Newbury residents for only a short time and have no tree complaints yet. Trees give life and personality to a community or street. On our hikes we have noticed many blow downs and wonder if it is end of life or disease that resulted in fallen trees.

Overall, I think the careless clearcutting of our old growth hardwoods and trees with particular value that aren't a nuisance is sad and absurd. That being said, I understand that trees can be dangerous and ultimately it should be the property owner's decision. However, I believe that many people don't see the value and resources that trees can provide.

NO MORE ACTION NEEDED

No more action. (2)

The Highway Department should keep an eye out for damage to trees in WN.