

## Nature in the Neighborhood, March 2020

Have you hugged a tree today? Maybe you should. Did you know that people who live on tree-lined streets are less likely to report conditions such as high blood pressure, obesity, heart disease or diabetes? Numerous studies are touting the health benefits of trees including a study conducted in Toronto and reported in the on-line journal Scientific Reports: <https://www.nature.com/articles/srep11610>

The study found that “people who live in neighborhoods with a higher density of trees on their street report significantly higher health perception and significantly less cardio-metabolic conditions.” Interestingly, the Toronto study found that the health benefits reported stemmed from trees planted along roads, not in parks or private residences, thus showing the value of caring and investing in our town’s street trees.

And it’s not just your health that benefits. Another report found that the trees that line California’s streets are worth an estimated \$1 billion a year for the work they do in, among other services, removing air pollution, storing CO<sub>2</sub>, cooling homes, and reducing rain runoff. The report calculated that, for every \$1 spent on planting or maintaining a street tree, that tree returns, on average, \$5.82 in benefits. Not a bad investment.

Add to this is the fact that trees are, well, just nice to look at. If you live on or near a tree-lined neighborhood, consider for a moment what that street would look like if all the trees were gone. Likely, much less appealing. It’s hard to find anyone who doesn’t enjoy looking at trees. That’s why landscaping with trees can increase property values, in some cases as much as 20%.

Recognizing the important role they play in our lives and in our communities, Swampscott has taken steps to ensure that its street trees are cared for and appreciated, first by having a designated **Tree Warden** who is responsible for the protection and maintenance of all public shade trees.

In addition, the town’s website has a **Forestry Division** page that provides general information as well as a link to a list of acceptable tree species for planting along streets: <http://www.swampscottma.gov/forestry-division>

Like many towns already have, Swampscott is also in process of developing a **Tree Bylaw** designed to help preserve and protect the public shade trees in our community and provide standards for their proper care. It will codify many of the policies the town now has regarding street trees, such as prohibiting certain activities that may adversely affect town trees and requiring a public hearing before a tree’s removal.

Swampscott is also proud to be one of 89 communities in Massachusetts that has been awarded **Tree City USA** status. Greening up cities and towns across America, the **Tree City USA** program provides a framework for communities to manage and expand their public trees. Learn more at: <https://www.arboday.org/programs/treeCityUSA/index.cfm>

You too can help foster Swampscott’s tree canopy! You can request that the town plant a tree on your street. There’s currently a waiting list, but the Department of Public Works typically plants 20 to 25 trees a year (in the spring and fall). You can get on the waiting list by calling or emailing the DPW, or, to avoid waiting, you can visit a local nursery, purchase a tree from the accepted tree species list (which is on the town website noted above). Deliver the paid receipt to the DPW office and they will call Dig Safe, pick up the tree from the nursery, and plant it within 1 to 2 weeks of purchase (excluding winter months).

You can also make a donation to the town’s **Tree Gift Fund** to be used for the purpose of purchasing trees for planting on town-owned property. See <http://www.swampscottma.gov/forestry-division/pages/tree-gift-fund> Donations will be accepted publicly at a Select Board meeting or accepted anonymously, and you can indicate a preference of where you’d like to have the trees planted.

There are many ways we can all help support trees in our neighborhood ...

But you can always start with a hug.