

## Title: Treasuring our Trees

Swampscott is blessed with a robust canopy of mature trees, growing in town parks and bordering our streets. However, a significant percentage of these trees are getting up there in years, and need both protection and continuing care to stay healthy and strong. The town also needs a well-constructed plan in place for replacement of these valuable green assets when the time has come to do so.

*How important are healthy street trees to our local environment?* Consider the mature oaks lining many of Swampscott's streets as an example. Aside from sequestering carbon, providing shade, diminishing stormwater runoff and beautifying our roadways, researchers have determined that oak trees are major contributors to food webs. The ecologist Douglas W. Tallamy in his recent book, *Nature's Best Hope*, calls the oak the "the king of deciduous trees" for its contribution to the food web. Tallamy's research has demonstrated that oaks in the mid-Atlantic region support over 500 different species of caterpillars, which, in turn, are food sources for many varieties of birds and other wildlife.

Swampscott has taken a number of positive steps recently to address the propagation and preservation of our town's trees. At the Fall Swampscott Special Town Meeting, members voted to approve a local Tree Bylaw that formalizes current Department of Public Works (DPW) practices regarding trees growing in public spaces. It addresses town trees which are in parks and on town-owned property, and public shade trees which are within or on the boundaries of a public right of way. The Bylaw was drafted by a group of volunteer residents, including members of the town's Tree Task Force, working closely with DPW staff. It provides clear guidance to residents on public tree planting, care, and removal.

DPW Director Gino Cresta noted that when the elected Board of Public Works was dissolved in 2002, Swampscott was left without formal procedures regarding street trees. "There are over 2,900 public shade trees in town," states Cresta, who believes this new Tree Bylaws "will be instrumental in continuing to protect our public trees." He gave special thanks to Assistant Engineer Kelly Stevens who recently became Swampscott's first certified Tree Warden.

Complementing the new Tree Bylaw, the town recently received a \$1,500 matching grant through the Massachusetts DCR Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grant program to conduct a survey of the condition of town trees along main roads and routes around schools and public properties. The goal of this ongoing project is to identify trees with a probable or imminent likelihood of dying within the next three years. The results will help the town prioritize future forestry work including where replacement trees should be planted.

Old age is not the only cause of tree loss in town. Climate stresses also play a major role. The *Boston Globe* recently reported that the severe drought conditions we experienced this year have changed the structure of trees' root systems which begin to atrophy and die without water. Added to this stressor, winter storms, such as the ones we had during January and March, 2018, will likely take down a large number of older street trees.

A GoFundMe campaign started by a Swampscott resident after the 2018 storms raised over \$2,500 in donations to replace downed trees. Motivated by this public support for public trees, a Tree Gift Fund has been established to accept ongoing donations to fund the purchase of public trees. The balance in the fund currently stands at \$800

While the town does budget annually for the planting and replacement of public trees, there are many competing priorities for use of these public dollars and the waiting list for a replacement tree can run up to 40 trees or more. Additional funding from grants and private donations is clearly desirable.

If you want to donate to the Fund, a sample donation letter is available on the Swampscott DPW Forestry web page at: [swampscottma.gov/forestry-division/pages/tree-gift-fund](http://swampscottma.gov/forestry-division/pages/tree-gift-fund). Such a gift helps to treasure the trees that so enrich our neighborhoods and protect them for generations to come.

Written by Jim Olivetti, Vice Chair of the Swampscott Conservancy