

# THE GLEN RIDGE SHADE TREE COMMISSION YEAR-END REPORT: DECEMBER 2017

Respectfully submitted to the Mayor and Council in appreciation of  
their unwavering support by:

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## The Year in Highlights:



In 2017, the Shade Tree Commission was finally able to catch its breath and face forward, rather than relentlessly backward. When the Commission was reestablished in 2010, the borough was hemorrhaging trees. The number of public trees had decreased from a high of 4,700 in 1938 to 2,900, and many remaining trees were reaching the end of their lifespans. Yet the majority of takedowns were, mid-aged (10- to 15-inch caliper) maples, suffering from “maple decline.” And the fact that 67% of the borough’s trees in 2011 were maples, meant that this attrition would not end anytime soon. But the final nail in the coffin was the loss of 80 trees to the “October Snowstorm” in 2011 and 120 trees to “Sandy” in 2012.

It was at this nadir that the Mayor and Council came to the rescue with funding to plant 1,000 trees over 5 years. Since this plan’s inauguration in the fall of 2014, 813 trees have been planted. Unfortunately, during this same period, some 310 trees have been removed, for a net gain of just over 500 trees. Nonetheless, an important corner has been turned. When one rides down Clark Street, Chapman Place, High Street and many others, it’s impossible not to notice

the phalanx of new trees. What is more, getting on top of the tree-planting crisis has allowed the Commission to begin to get ahead on other tree-related problems.

Perhaps the most significant of these is the emerald ash borer (EAB) crisis. Native of Asia, the borer hooked a ride to the Midwest in the 1990s and began its relentless killing of millions of trees as it moved east. The Commission was warned that it had arrived in this area in the late summer of 2016. Unfortunately, once a tree is infested, it becomes dangerously dry and brittle, making takedowns dangerous and expensive, so immediate decisions had to be made. Admittedly, Glen Ridge was relatively lucky in having only 49 public ash trees. But most of them were mature, healthy and truly beautiful.



Therefore, the decision was made to treat all structurally-sound ash trees larger than 6- inches in diameter. Consequently, only 9 ash trees were removed, and they have already been replaced.

This year also marked the first time the Commission could commence what will be a regular, 4-year cycle of maintenance pruning throughout the town. Proper pruning, of course, is essential to tree health and safety. It minimizes the spread of disease and pests and reduces wind resistance. Systematic pruning, therefore, will prolong the lifespans of our valuable mature trees, while ensuring public safety. Since a mature borough street tree is valued at approximately \$7,500, the financial benefits of this program could be substantial.

## A Year in Specifics:

### Planting:

The Commission planted 197 trees in 2017, 116 in the spring and 81 in the fall. The latter planting involved mostly tree requests and tree replacements. But what characterized both was the variety of tree species planted. In the spring, nine species were used (scarlet oak, white oak, saphora japonica, sweetgum, blackgum, red maple, london plane, cherry and Japanese lilac), and in fall, seven (blackgum, willow oak, crabapple, yellowwood, scarlet oak, red maple and Japanese lilac).

The EAB crisis suggests why biodiversity is so important. But there are other compelling reasons. Being flexible in terms of tree species helps ensure that we get the best tree stock available at the moment. It also means that we can select the ideal tree for each planting site. For the past two years, for example, we have been using Japanese lilac trees for dismally narrow planting strips and they have thrived. It turns out that, despite their fragile-looking beauty, they are actually very scrappy! Another key reason for using a variety of species is that it stimulates residents' interest in our trees. When the yellowwoods bloomed spectacularly last spring, they sparked such a buzz on Facebook that we had a slew of planting requests for them. Unquestionably, the more interest residents take in their trees, the more care they will give them.



## Tree Removals and Tree Maintenance:

As was the case in 2016, the summer's drought hastened the decline of a significant number of the borough's street trees. One hundred trees were removed during the course of the year, 62 of them by the DPW and 38 by contactors.

These takedowns included 9 ash trees. Of the remaining ash trees, 28 were treated with an injection of an azadirachtin-based insecticide in June. Additional trees will be treated this spring. These injections, it should be noted, will have to be repeated every 2 or 3 years until the EAB is no longer a threat to this area, or until better treatment options become available.

During 2017, at least 45 trees were pruned on an "as-needed" basis. This involved removing large branches, hanging limbs, broken limbs, limbs over houses, as well as line-of-sight trimming at parks and ballfields. Many more trees were "elevated" to improve pedestrian safety.

In December, the Commission also launched its cyclical, maintenance pruning program by contracting for the systematic "removal of dead, dying, diseased, interfering, objectionable and weak branches" on all the street trees in the area bounded by Belleville Avenue and Bay Avenue. Happily, all the bids came in significantly below the anticipated sum.

## Community Outreach:

The Shade Tree Commission relies on residents to care for newly-planted saplings – especially in terms of watering. So, public outreach has always been a key focus of its time and attention.

In honor of Arbor Day, the town forester Rich Wolowicz gave a presentation called "I've Got This Big Tree, Now What?" It was essentially a homeowner's guide to tree care and maintenance. Clearly, it was of interest to many, as participants at this well-attended event sat in rapt attention and lingered to ask perceptive questions.

Additionally, two Girl Scout troops volunteered to go throughout the town to place protective collars on saplings that had previously had gator bags. They also left letters for the respective homeowners reminding them of their tree's continuing care needs. Troop 20088 consisted of 4<sup>th</sup> graders under Patty Ratish and Beth Mikros, while Troop 21265 included 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> graders under Cynthia Garcia.

But the official Arbor Day celebration was held at the Ridgewood Avenue School. It involved not only a tree planting on the front lawn, but also a bulletin-board-display contest in which the classes vied to best depict the value of trees to the community. The results were so phenomenal that different winning categories had to be established.



Generally, the annual eco-fair provides the Commission's best opportunity to interface with the community. Preparatory to last year's, 98 redbud tube seedlings had been purchased, along with pots into which children could plant them for Mother's Day. Of course, the eco-fair was cancelled. So it was the commissioners who planted the seedlings in order to distribute them at the library.

In October, the Commission held its third annual "tree" tour. Called the "Old Souls" tour, it was held in the historic Bloomfield Cemetery, essentially an arboretum of spectacular and notable trees. This, too, was a very well attended event, and it did not disappoint.

Clearly, the Commission's outreach efforts are paying off. The opening rate of its "Green Flash" e-newsletter makes it a Constant Contact superstar. In addition, the Commission has been the recipient of a significant uptick of emails and inquiries, suggesting that residents increasingly see it as their resource for all things "trees."

### **Looking Ahead:**

The Commission is already gearing up for a spring planting of at least 100 trees. Conceivably, it will reach its 1,000-trees-planted goal in the fall of 2018. It will also carry forward its new maintenance pruning cycle, its EAB treatment program, and its public outreach.