

THE GLEN RIDGE SHADE TREE COMMISSION YEAR-END REPORT FOR 2018

Respectfully submitted to the Mayor and Council by:

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The borough's current Community Forestry Management Plan expires this year. It was drafted in 2014, replacing one drafted just 5 years before, in 2009. Yet the plans are strikingly different. The earlier plan focuses on trees solely as liabilities, reflecting the desperate state of our urban



forest at the time. Therefore, the goals it established revolved entirely around the taking down and pruning of trees deemed a threat to public safety. However, even before that plan took effect in 2010, it had essentially become outmoded by the reestablishment of the Shade Tree Commission in February of that year.

With that reestablishment, the council signaled a whole to new approach to its trees, premised on the notion of their being an asset of inestimable value, aesthetically and environmentally. So it is not surprising that the goals set out in the later plan were far more ambitious, positive and future oriented, emphasizing planting for posterity rather than removal to limit liability. But, as ambitious as these goals were, they have been exceeded.

While we, the members of your Shade Tree Commission, take great pride in what has been accomplished since 2010, we fully recognize that

none of it was possible without the unfailing cooperation and support of the town council, our administrators, especially Michael Zichelli, and our arborist, Rich Wolowicz. Together, we have made Glen Ridge a recognized bellwether of exceptional urban forestry. This year-end report is, therefore, intended as an opportunity for all of us to reflect on our shared achievements.

A Year in Review:

Perhaps the highlight of this past year for the commission was the inauguration of a regular 4-year cycle of maintenance pruning throughout Glen Ridge. Prior to this, the pruning in town had been done on an ad hoc, largely reactive, basis. But in this instance, every tree between Belleville and Bay Avenues, from the Bloomfield to the Montclair border, was systematically examined and pruned as needed, in accordance with precise specification drawn up by our forester. Studies clearly show that such pruning significantly reduces the likelihood of trees failing in a storm, while prolonging their lifespans. It also ensures that young and midsize trees reach their maturity with strong branch structures. The success of this initiative was confirmed during the succession of devastating March nor'easters: as not one tree and only one branch of any significance was lost in the entire pruned area.



Outside this designated area, an additional 393 trees were pruned. Presumably, as the cycle of maintenance pruning works its way through the town, that number should plummet.

During 2018, the Commission also furthered its mandate to plant 1,000 trees in a 5-year period. This year, 160 trees were planted, 97 in the spring but only 63 in the fall. This was largely due to ongoing complications posed by the incessant rain – coming as it did not only on the heels of intense July heat and drought, but also the previous summer's extended drought.

Trees afflicted with too little rain become more susceptible to infestations of insects and disease, as they shed leaves. Too much rain, on the other hand, displaces vital oxygen in the soil, creating a “anaerobic” condition which our street-tree species are unable to tolerate. So it is not surprising that tree takedowns in 2018 continued at an alarming rate. This year, 68 trees had to be removed, 38 by a contractor and 30 by the DPW. Unfortunately, this may be the tip of the iceberg. We anticipate that many more will fail to leaf out this spring and will have to be removed. Most will be maples.



For many years now, these northern hardwood trees have been losing their fight with rising temperatures, accompanied by dramatic swings between too little and too much rain, making this summer the *coup de grace* for many. During periods of drought, maples sprout fine filaments along their roots to draw in every bit of moisture. When rainy periods follow, those filaments become susceptible to fungus and rot. As late as 2010, maples constituted over 60% of all the borough's public trees, forming monocultures on many of its

streets. The lesson, however, has been learned. Today, our street trees are chosen from a vast array of singularly hardy species, ranging from crabapples to London planes.

Community Outreach

As in the past, community outreach remains a vital aspect of what the commission does. Simply put, it would be impossible to replant this borough without the active support of our residents. Consequently, over the years we have developed procedures designed to enlist their assistance. Currently, we not only provide tree care advice, but also specific information about the tree species planted in hopes of generating increased awareness and appreciation. As a final fillip, we install gator bags, an unsubtle visual reminder that regular watering is required. Thankfully, most of our residents are tree lovers, eager to help. Nonetheless, we take the precaution of



sending out a pre-planting letter stating our intentions to plant. If the homeowner demurs, we don't. By the same token, we make tree-planting requests a priority.

Homeowners whose saplings had gator bags the previous year also need reminding that their trees require care. So, for the second year in a row, Girl Scout Troop 21265 volunteered to put protective collars on these trees and deliver letters to the respective residents about proper mulching and watering. Since these trees are all over town, this was a significant undertaking under the best of circumstances. But that was hardly what the girls faced. Instead, they were stymied by 7 consecutive weekends of rain. Nonetheless,

they persisted, finishing up over 100 trees – on their first day of summer vacation!

Although Arbor Day is always nicely celebrated in Glen Ridge, this year's festivities seemed particularly memorable. Originally, the tree planting was to be a school-wide event at Forest Avenue School. But, when that plan fell through, we hastily enlisted the "super stars" of the Linden Avenue School aftercare program to plant a linden tree (what else?) in front of their school. The event was so well promoted by the aftercare coordinator, Raven Adams, that it mushroomed into being perceived as a distinct honor and privilege – by the children and their parents. Fortunately, our forester made it such an engaging exercise, that they were not disappointed. Indeed, we have been told that they continue to take special pride in "their" tree.



Looking Forward

The Shade Tree Commission has been in existence for 8 years, yet it continues to evolve: learning, perfecting and striving. Right now, commissioners are in the process of walking the town, street by street, to develop a complete inventory of potential planting sites. This will complement a comprehensive inventory of the borough's extant public trees, which we anticipate undertaking this spring. In addition to pinpointing location, using new GPS technology, this inventory will catalogue the diameter, relative age, and general condition of each tree. Once this database of basic information is obtained, everything that happens to a given tree (pruning, treatments, etc.) can be added to it. At the least, this will allow us to monitor more thoroughly the health and safety of our trees. But the more ambitious goal is to make this inventory internet-accessible to residents, allowing them to become more fully engaged with the rich street-tree arboretum that Glen Ridge has notably become.