

THE GLEN RIDGE SHADE TREE COMMISSION YEAR-END REPORT FOR 2019

Respectfully submitted to the Mayor and Council by:

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Although it almost defies belief, February 2020 will mark the 10th anniversary of the Shade Tree Commission.

In 2010, the number of public trees had dropped precipitously, leaving yawning gaps along many of our streets. Making matters worse, between 60 and 100 trees were being removed every year, absorbing the entirety of the “tree” budget. Particularly disturbing was the fact that, despite an aging tree population, the vast majority of those being taken down were mid-aged maples, suffering from “maple decline.” Given that maples constituted over 60% of our town trees, it was clear that the hemorrhaging of trees would continue, threatening to make Glen Ridge’s iconic tree-lined streets a thing of the past. It was to deal with this crisis that the Commission was established.

It must be noted, however, that the Commission would not have been established, much less succeeded, had it not been for the determined and ongoing support of the mayor and council, former town administrator Michael Rohal, and, especially, current town administrator Michael Zichelli. So it is with our profound thanks to these many stakeholders that we submit this report.

A Decade in Perspective

In the past decade, the Commission has had many achievements and marshalled a substantial turnaround. An inventory was taken for the first time in memory, a Master Plan was drafted, and a major replanting of the town commenced. Indeed, 2019 marked the planting of our 1,000th tree. It must be noted, however, that the number of take-downs each year remains high.

Nonetheless, one can't help but notice the rows of saplings now gracing our streets. And those planted during the Commission's early years, such as the swamp oak pictured, which was planted in the spring of 2010, are reaching meaningful size.

In addition to planting, the Commission initiated a regular cycle of maintenance pruning throughout the borough. Such systematic pruning not only helps to preserve and prolong the lives of our trees, but also significantly reduces potential risks to public safety.

The Year in Review

Management Cost

The total tree management cost for 2019 was \$19,947.53.

Planting:

With the tree population throughout the borough basically stabilized, the Commission took a somewhat different approach to planting in 2019. Previously, the arborist had been the one to choose the planting sites. But this year, the Commissioners decided to walk the entire town, street-by-street, to get a better grasp of canopy gaps and streetscape needs. As a result, the decision was made to focus the spring planting on Forest. Consequently, some 27 trees were planted on that avenue alone. All told, 92 saplings were planted, representing seven different species. But DED-resistant elms predominated. Of the nursery stock available, the elms were particularly impressive, and remain so. The total cost of the planting was \$29,279. There was no tree planting in the fall.

Removals:

Unfortunately, 2019 saw the removal of 96 trees, the majority of which were maples. Apparently, the cold and intensely rainy spring precipitated the death of many declining trees. The DPW removed 39 of these trees. The remaining 57 were contractor take-downs. Consequently, the borough ended the year with a net loss of 4 public trees. The money disbursed to contractors for these take-downs was \$77,567. But the actual financial and environmental loss to the borough was far greater, constituting a deficit that can't be closed for decades to come. As is well documented, mature trees provide verifiably substantial benefits in



terms of reducing the heat-island effect, sequestering carbon, providing oxygen, soaking up storm-water, etc. Considering that the average contractor take-down tree this year was a maple with a DBH of 23 inches, these removals constitute, according to the National Tree Benefits Calculator, an *annual* economic loss to the town of about \$13,000. Of course, the loss of a mature street tree also has a negative impact on real estate values.

Pruning:

Obviously, the Commission is endeavoring to preserve the borough's mature trees by means of systematic maintenance pruning. Although emergency and expedient prunings were undertaken throughout the year, 2019 marked the second year of "zone" maintenance pruning. The zone covered this year was from the East Orange border to Maolis, save Ridgewood Avenue. A total of 219 trees were pruned at a cost of \$28,050.



Proactive Treatments

This year also saw the second phase in the treatment of our ash trees. The cost of the chemicals used was \$938.24, the labor was in-house. Obviously, this is a small sum to pay for the preservation of 25 large trees, especially when the potential cost of their removal is taken into account. Also treated, at a cost of \$1,137, were the town's four historic American elm trees in the municipal complex.

Community Outreach:



In 2019, Arbor Day was celebrated with 40 "vacation-care" children, ranging from pre-K to 2nd grade, at Linden Avenue School. After some memorable discourse with the children on the importance of trees, Commissioner Lisovicz, using her children's librarian skills, read Dr. Seuss' "The Lorax" to rapt audiences. Afterward, the children decorated name cards for the individual willow cuttings each was given to take home.

The Commission would like to acknowledge the enthusiastic support of Raven Adams,

supervisor of the after-care program in Glen Ridge, for helping to make this an utterly stellar occasion.

This year, the Commission also oversaw the inauguration of a useful public outreach tool: an online “Tree Request” form, which generates an immediate email message to the Shade Tree Commission. This form has allowed the commission to respond to residents’ legitimate concerns in a timely and personal manner, while allaying (for the most part) unwarranted ones. Certainly, it has given the Commission a larger “face” in the community.

In addition, the Commission remains a Constant Contact “super star.” Its e-newsletter “Green Flash” enjoys an average opening rate of 30%, representing more than 400 individuals.

Looking Forward



2020 is on track to be a dynamic and busy year, filled with promise. Starting in March, the Commission will inaugurate its second comprehensive public-tree inventory. This time, however, a new and state-of-the-art browser-based technology will be used. It will allow for the integration of mapping, tree particulars, and ongoing tree-management updates, all of which can be accessed online. Such an inventory will not only generate an immense amount of data about specific trees and species, but it will also make questions of maintenance far more pertinent and efficient.

In addition to the inventory, the Commission will work with Arteriel, a Montclair-based landscape architectural firm, to develop a new Master Plan. It will be designed to address the exigencies of the next decade, especially climate change and nature deficit disorder.

To that end, the Commission is also looking forward to the establishment of a small arboretum of native trees in the Upper Glen. It is our hope that it will become a refuge for wildlife, as well as a space in which people of all ages can learn about tree ecology. We wish to thank the anonymous donor who is making the development of this arboretum possible.