

THE GLEN RIDGE SHADE TREE COMMISSION YEAR-END REPORT FOR 2024

Respectfully submitted to the Mayor and Council by:

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Regarding trees, 2024 was a year of challenges, largely due to weather extremes. In spring, there was relentless rain. Too much of a good thing. Summer was extremely hot and dry, but the near catastrophic drought came in fall. These conditions hampered our planting endeavors and hastened the demise of many declining trees. Nonetheless, on balance, 2024 was a successful year for shade trees in the borough.

The STC Year in Review

Management:

The total tree management cost for 2024 was \$29,482.03.

Planting:

The total cost of new trees was \$21,467

In the spring, the Commission oversaw the planting of 57 trees, mostly on Burnet, Oakwood, Yantacaw, Oxford, and Sherman. Unfortunately, the planting stock we received, though seemingly adequate, was not up to usual standards. However, it's hard to determine whether it was the deficiencies in the tree stock or the relentless rain that caused the death of 8 of those trees – an unprecedented number.

Our fall planting order went to a different nursery, one that was highly recommended. It was for 52 trees. But 11 of those were replacements for saplings from previous plantings

that hadn't survived. In other words, we added 98 trees to our inventory, not 109, as the numbers might otherwise suggest.

The focus of the fall planting was on Chestnut Hill Place, Spencer, and Ferncliff Terrace. (It should be noted that we worked cooperatively with Montclair to replant the latter, a street in dire need of trees.) However, for several weeks it appeared that the prolonged drought would derail the planting entirely. Fortunately, some timely rain allowed for it to take place in December. Obviously, we won't know if any of these trees fail to survive until late spring. But we do know that this tree stock appeared to be exceptional.

As in 2023, all the planting was done by our highly efficient and capable DPW tree crew, led by Adam Dentato. Not only did these men plant the trees, but they cared for them afterward. In the process, the borough easily saved \$15,000. And the trees received consistent and expert care.

Tree Removals:

The total cost of contractor removals was \$50,275.

In 2024, there were 42 contractor removals, 28 of which were maples. The DPW removed 19 trees, 8 of which were maples. Last year, we removed 4 more trees than we planted. Happily, this year we added 37.

Pruning:

The total cost of contractor pruning was \$66,065.

- \$36,780 for zone maintenance pruning.
- \$14,985 for structural and elevation pruning of saplings.
- \$14,300 for emergency pruning.

In 2024, the zone designated for maintenance pruning ran all the way from Baldwin north, encompassing some 520 trees. When zone maintenance pruning was begun in 2018, the town was preliminarily divided into 5 zones. The plan was to cycle from zone to zone, year by year, so every tree was maintenance pruned every 5 years. However, because this was the first time around, the trees on certain streets were in particularly dire condition, making it impossible to stick to a single zone. In addition, zone pruning was postponed for one year because of the cost of storm cleanups. However, we can report that the first cycle through the borough has now been completed and the next will begin in 2025. We can also confirm that maintenance pruning has significantly reduced storm damage to our trees, reducing public risk and saving money in the process.



Structural pruning and elevating young trees continue to be a major endeavor as well. When trees grow in a forest, they compete to reach the sunshine. Carrying lots of shaded and/or compromised lower branches becomes a major liability. Of course, such self-pruning doesn't happen to the trees growing along our streets. Instead, those lower branches merely thicken, oftentimes jeopardizing the structural health of the tree, while obstructing sidewalks and streets.

Software:

The total cost of the software update of our online tree inventory was \$4,500.

Community Outreach:

In May, the Commission had a table at the Eco-Fair. We had several handouts, demonstrated the accessibility of the tree inventory online, and gave away river birch seedlings.

However, the Tree Service Request form on the town's website and our e-newsletter, *GReen Flash*, continue to be our most successful means of community outreach. We receive between 12 and 15 "requests" each month from residents who have an immediate concern about a tree. So, it really impresses them when they have a response from the Commission within hours, legitimizing their concern and offering the promise of a resolution.

Meanwhile, we use *GReen Flash* to educate residents about trees. The email list includes 1,869 addresses and each issue has at least a 60% opening rate. In addition, the newsletter generates a lot of positive and complementary feedback as well as important social media discussion.

Looking Forward:

February 2025 marks the 15th anniversary of the Shade Tree Commission. A great deal has been learned in that time. At this point, the procedures in place, honed over the years, seem to be working very successfully. Of course, there will inevitably be new challenges, due to the vagaries of climate change as well as threats from new lethal diseases and pests. Nonetheless, the Commissioners feel comfortable those challenges will be met – especially since we enjoy the full support of the Mayor and Council. For that support, we are truly grateful.