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Street Trees for Winchester: A new green program begins to take root throughout town

By Mindy Arbo/Special to the Star

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Winchester, MA - One of the reasons many of us choose to live in Winchester is that it is such a green town. But we all know streets that are less green, on which buildings and signs, utility poles, mailboxes and fire hydrants stand out all too clearly, without the benefit of a visually softening canopy of green.

Well, a \$20,000 appropriation by the 2008 Winchester Town Meeting and the volunteer Street Trees for Winchester (STW) is hoping to change all that. The long process that will result in new trees was begun in 2008 as an outgrowth of the Master Plan, with a joint funding request made to the Capital Planning Committee from the Planning Board, The Conservation Commission and the Design Review Committee.

Street Trees for Winchester began its work with a thorough driving tour of the town, marking possible tree sites.

The streets were re-driven and siting details were noted (sidewalks, utility lines, fences, hydrants, signs, trees.) The resulting new tree locations are those in which a number of trees will make a significant impact in a currently treeless area.

Targeted are a few major byways and entryways into Winchester. These locations include Cross Street and Loring Avenue, South Main Street approaching the Medford line, and Johnson/Wildwood Road (west of Rt.3). Approximately 70 trees will be planted by the DPW in the next few weeks. But these locations are just the beginning of a continuing program.

STW looked at many other street tree programs and formed a list of desired tree varieties with multi-season interest and handsome overall shapes, foliage and/or flowers.

Trees were favored that both complemented the others on the street and offered variety. Where there were

broad expanses of heat reflective pavement, large shade trees were favored that would both soften the streetscape and provide pedestrians with shelter and filtered light. Near lawns and driveways, trees that were deemed too messy were avoided.

STW also considered the trees' resistance to pests, bad weather, and road salting, and the trees' ultimate root and canopy spread with regards to pavement, utility poles and wires. 2009 Winchester New Tree Hosts will receive letters from STW explaining the Town's planting and watering process and asking for their help in monitoring their new trees.

Street Trees for Winchester is made up of many members: Peter Van Aken, Winchester Planning Board; Julie Riemenschneider, Winchester Design Review Committee; Mindy Arbo, Winchester Design Review Committee; Betsy Ware, Winchester Town Planner; Jay Gill, Winchester Public Works Dept.; Jim Whitehead, Winchester Conservation Commission; and. Peter Wild, Boston Tree Preservation.

As the owners of the Cotton-Arbo return on Washington Street, which is open 24/7 to the public, it is obvious that my husband and I love trees. Beyond just their beauty, the shade from tree canopies provides shelter from sweltering heat to pedestrians, cars and lawns.

Street trees calm traffic and protect pedestrians. Tree roots give valuable water absorption from storm runoff and flooding, and tree leaves filter out pollution and, through photosynthesis, lower city temperatures.

Realtors will always tell you that houses on tree-lined streets are both more valuable and easier to sell. For many reasons — drought, storms, lack of care, disease — Winchester loses many trees every year. In this new program, if the DPW and the New Tree Hosts can work together, some of the future DPW budget for tree-removal can go into planting more trees instead.

Peter Van Aken, head of STW, is excited about the new venture.

“This is the first step of a continuing replacement and infill program,” he said. “If we can develop a successful program like Belmont's, where they have a 95 percent survival rate of trees planted, then we plan to seek larger plantings in the future.”

“But the 2009 Winchester New Tree Hosts are really key to the success of this project. Sapling trees are very fragile and susceptible to death from drought. Only if they are adequately watered throughout their first year, will they be able to survive and flourish. I am confident that the DPW and the Winchester New Tree Hosts can match Belmont for the watering care they give their new trees. With their teamwork, Winchester can really grow Greener and we can all grow in the pride and pleasure we have in living here.”

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