

Tree Preservation Planning Committee Listening Session – Large Group Discussion

June 4, 2025

Report Outs from Small Group Discussions

- Speaker 1 – Concern regarding lack of shade in backyards with climate change
 - Catching up to other communities with bylaws, like Wellesley
 - Concern regarding how expensive the process is, maintenance, planting etc.
- Speaker 2 – Major concerns with teardowns and change of landscape
 - How Needham used to look versus now, concern regarding lack of screening for privacy
 - Valuable to protect rights of private landowners, focus more on developers
- Speaker 3 – Concern that we are not planting enough trees relative to the amount being cut down
 - Concern regarding education for the town for how bad the problem is and causes and effects of trees being cut down
 - Housing development, droughts, and lack of precipitation having impacts as well
- Speaker 4 – Town needs to inform and educate people about trees including which trees to plant and where to plant them
 - Plaque for newly planted trees on resident property
 - People can donate towards trees, indicate which type of tree they want planted
 - Make rules to prevent clearcutting of lots, leave trees with tear downs
 - Work on preserving tree canopy, understand implications with climate change too
- Speaker 5 - People concerned about the amount of trees being lost and with that a loss of personality in the community
 - Quality of life concerns and value with older trees and legacy trees
 - Concern with climate change, rainfall, and CO2 levels
 - More education on why trees are being cut down
 - Education on which trees to plant and where to plant them
- Speaker 6 – Transparency about process and education for people in the town including guidance on what to plant and where to plant
 - Bylaws are difficult to read, summarize information for residents
 - Hiring arborists
 - Costly to homeowners and developers
 - Improve communication, add to News You Needham, electronic signs, Observer etc.
 - Provide information for tree pruning
- Speaker 7 – Agreement that what we’re doing now isn’t working
 - Concern about loss of large trees, in particular; clear cutting for developments

- Appreciation and support for the Tree Committee
- Interest in incentives for protecting trees (developers and homeowners)
- Find a happy medium with a tree bylaw
- Interest in education for maintenance, cost of trees for public
- Speaker 8 – Concern with clearcutting with new construction projects
 - Concern with flooding impacts on neighboring property, proposal to make a condition of the demolition project that tree warden signs off on the tree plan
 - Replacement trees are smaller and offer less shade and carbon, understanding ways to increase replacement
 - Education about why trees may have to come down and what is an invasive tree
 - Incentives – keeping trees that offer benefits for community

Large Group Discussion – Open Comments

- Funding to compliment what the Town can do to plant trees (example from Newton, private donations and fundraising)
- Study what other towns are doing and use that to inform decision making
- Agreement about loss of canopy, hard to quantify, development of dashboard so people can see town loss of tree canopy
- Town has other properties under their control, Conservation Commission and Select Board for example, and if a private homeowner has to take down a tree they could sponsor a tree for planting on a Town owned parcel
- For implementation, model this similar to the Conservation Commission and level of review and assessment for trees being cut down
- Concern regarding excessive tree removal on streets, particularly for large house development, and trees not being replaced
- Concern regarding development with paving and trees being lost because of development practices (not removal but died because of impacts to roots)
- Cannot create new rules from when permitting was completed for a project, but it feels like identity of town has changed to an urban setting
- Concern regarding loss of large trees, including trees that have a significant aesthetic impact in the community
- Take time to develop bylaws, but could collect signatures from the town to prevent these tree removals happening or other things to do in the meantime before a new bylaw is implemented
- Toolbox needs a new Town bylaw that has teeth and need something for zoning as well so that a developer has to consider existing trees as part of their plan
- Projects should not be able to get demolition permit until the developer has met with Tree Warden and there should be a requirement to pause for three years otherwise

- Bylaw development needs to think about whiplash and the bylaw needs teeth to discourage those developers that are only interested in money and hold responsible developers who are flooding other properties
- Bylaw issue has come up for a long time, 10 years ago there was a proposal
- MBTA Communities example for context, landscaping needs to be included with every project
- Concern regarding large amount of trees being taken down and runoff problems for neighbors
- Education for people planting native trees and the Town should plant only native trees as there are a variety of species available and those trees developed in New England and are more resilient
- More notices and tree education are needed where people go regularly (e.g., electronic signs, library)
- The Town should plant lower understory trees where power lines are located (think about native species)
- Appreciation for trees and purchased home because of large tree canopy on the lot, but requires a lot of maintenance in the fall and spring and would encourage Committee to think about how to make sure private homeowners are not punished with the new bylaw process with additional costs/ legislative process as would have concern for eminent domain and devaluing property
- Committee should come up with data about what other communities are doing as some like Wellesley have a tree permitting process, but what about the success rate of protecting trees (or is this just filling out paperwork)
- Town should capture how tree canopy in Needham has changed over the last decade
- Concern for future of younger kids in Needham and how bad tree canopy loss will be from some properties
- Need to assess how successful other towns are with implementing bylaws and the cost for an arborist to come out to homeowners
- Concern with tree loss over the last thirty years and personal impact recently with ½ acre lot with large tree canopy and almost every tree came down and the single house was replaced with two large houses that are very expensive
- Need for bylaw to constrain the level of tree removal activity which is money driven and there is a Town interest in this issue as well that needs to be a part of collective strategy
- Capture information from Ed and share with homeowners about right trees to plant and where to plant them