

Tree Preservation Planning Committee Listening Session – QR Code Responses

June 4, 2025

Prompt 1: What brought you here tonight? What are your hopes and fears about trees in Needham?

- Curious about this subject matter as my neighborhood has not had a lot of trees removed by developers
- That there will be no trees here. Will create drainage problems and very large houses monopolizing lots.
- I wanted to know what was in the works. I believe the town could be much more pro-active in encouraging tree planting and conservation. As always when considering regulations, it's going to be tricky to balance the needs and desires of all homeowners with overall town goals.
- Thank you for your committee. I'm here representing residents in my precinct who have growing concerns about trust in local government. Many feel that committee agendas are too often driven toward predetermined outcomes that are not openly stated. These predetermined outcomes are not universally understood or supported and may lead to overregulation and lead to increased costs for residents at a time when many are facing increased costs and increased taxes. We've also heard a recurring concern: that Needham should research 'cost effective' successful programs in other towns and share those models with residents and committee members—instead of reinventing the wheel with new, untested policies. While residents recognize the valuable role committees can play, there's a noticeable decline in trust—particularly when the same individuals are appointed to multiple boards and committees, often by the same appointing authorities.

Prompt 2: What do you want the Committee to know or keep in mind as we begin our work?

- That we need to keep an open mind as to why trees are being removed.
- How to maintain trees, but not force replacement that will create unforeseen problems
- I have several points to make. It looks like this form is going to kill any formatting of this message, but I'll give it a try. Point 1: The town could be more aggressive in encouraging property owners to take advantage of the town's tree planting program. People could be approached and encouraged to fill spaces on their property with new trees. It's likely that many property owners do not even know about the tree planting program. Point 2: The town could also be more aggressive in encouraging the removal of invasive species trees, such as the Norway maples, which spread like crazy and don't support the local ecosystem. These could be replaced by native trees. Point 3: On the subject of regulating property owners' rights to take down trees, here's a cautionary tale. Friends of mine in Newton have a 30" oak tree about 15 feet off the back of their house. It's not a big house, and they were thinking of expanding, which would mean removing that tree. As of the enactment of a new tree law in Newton, if they remove that tree, they would have to either pay \$30,000 to the

town, or replace the tree with new trees of sizes that add up to a 30" inch tree, i.e. 3 10" trees. Their lot is lined with trees already. Whatever we do, I think we want to avoid forcing homeowners who want to make changes on their lots to bear a financial burden that is disproportionate to that of their neighbors, who may or may not have any trees at all. Point 4: In my own case, I'm watching a very tall, aging ash tree (which does not have ash blight) that is slowly dying. About 1/5 of the branches did not leaf out this year. If it falls, it will take out a native plant garden comprised of a large native redbud tree and lots of large native shrubs. If I was in a situation where I had to apply to be allowed to remove this tree, would the value of the other plantings be taken into account in that decision?

- From personal experience as someone who owns multiple properties, I've learned from arborists that maintaining existing native trees is essential. It's a classic case of "pay now or pay later"—invest in pruning, fertilizing, and care today, or face much higher costs for removal after storm or insect damage. A good starting point would be for the Town to create a simple educational webpage and host seminars to help homeowners protect and maintain their existing trees. When it comes to new development, the town can immediately advocate to preserve mature trees where feasible, and replant after regrading. The Town already has a tree planting program, but I believe it's not widely known. A more effective approach would be to develop an incentive-based model—where, for a modest fee, builders could partner with the Town to share in the cost of replanting. This promotes sustainability and community benefit without the burden of heavy-handed regulation. If bylaws are needed, then let's start with a basic easy to understand bylaw.