



Marblehead’s tree enthusiasts help warden build out canopy

March 15, 2023

Several initiatives to further cultivate and grow Marblehead’s “urban forestry and tree canopy” are afoot.

As the springtime approaches, Sustainable Marblehead is raising awareness about Marblehead’s tree fund and urging members of the public to send in donations.

“Every spring in April, Sustainable Marblehead’s tree group collaborates with the tree warden to do tree planting,” the nonprofit organization’s executive director, Louise Yarmoff, told the Marblehead *Current*. “So, the more people know about this tree donation fund, the more money he will have to buy trees to replace all the trees that do die and have to be taken down.”

Jon Fobert, Marblehead’s tree warden, said the town established the tree-donation fund in the mid-1970s after disease decimated the Dutch elm tree population in town. Many trees that were planted in the aftermath need to be replaced today.

Palma Bickford, chair of Sustainable Marblehead’s Tree and Urban Forestry Committee, said the town has some catching up to do in order to create a thriving tree canopy.

“We’re getting there, but we’re way behind if you look at what Somerville and Cambridge have done,” Bickford said. “They’ve invested in new trees over the last 15 years. They’re starting to really make a huge difference.”

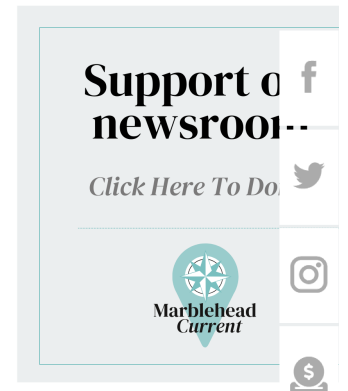
Fobert said his department is responsible for approximately 9,000 shade trees that can be found on the 72 miles of Marblehead public ways as well as public lands. Bickford said she has a corps of devoted volunteers that help Fobert’s three-man department plant trees.

“We sort of fan out on streets where the tree warden has determined they need more street trees,” said Bickford. “However, we can only plant as many trees as he has money to buy.”

To donate to the tree fund, mail or drop off a check made payable to the town of Marblehead: Marblehead Tree Department, Attn: Tree Donation Fund, 3 Tower Way, Marblehead, MA 01945. Fobert uses money from the fund to purchase what are called bare-root trees.

“All of the money goes to buying trees,” said Fobert. “It’s cheaper to get a bare-root tree, which goes for about \$119, than the other kinds, which can cost \$300 to \$400.”

The tree department and Sustainable Marblehead have also teamed up to take a comprehensive inventory of the condition of Marblehead’s public trees, including their locations, species, sizes and health.



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Fobert said he landed an \$8,000 matching grant from the Department of Conservation and Recreation to purchase three iPads and software. Sustainable Marblehead uses the devices to upload tree data into a geographic information system.

“Our group has been working with John on the street-tree inventory since last spring,” Bickford said, adding that the work includes measuring, photographing and identifying every public-tree species. “We did a good-sized portion of the town last year, but not as much as I would have liked — but we got some decent neighborhoods done.”

Their work is restricted to a window of six months.

“We can only do it from May through October when the leaves are out,” said Bickford of the work. “We will begin our work again in May.”

The culled information will be utilized by the tree department to budget and plan for the maintenance of existing trees and help prioritize future tree plantings, according to Fobert.

“Obviously, the more time and effort we spend collecting data, the better prepared we are to manage our tree population effectively,” the town’s website reads. “We may be on a small peninsula, but there are many streets in Marblehead.”

Bickford spoke about the benefits of shade trees.

“We have a lot of wind in Marblehead, and without having greenery, you’ll have a lot more wind events,” said Bickford, pointing to the microbursts over the past couple of years. “Now our trees are getting older. Some of them have blown down, and that’s primarily because the wind changes direction so quickly.”

Having a robust shade tree canopy also regulates temperature, according to Bickford.

“Having to shade trees allows you to maintain heat in the winter and maintain coolness in the summer and reduce the amount of utility usage,” she said.

Fobert said he is developing a strategic plan for tree replacements and maintenance.

Meanwhile, the 2023 town warrant includes two tree-related articles.

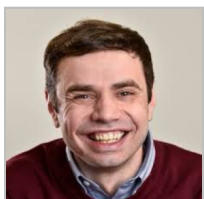
Article 41 seeks to formally place the Tree Department under the Marblehead Department of Public Works.

Article 42 would permit the town to plant trees on private property “within 20 feet of the public right of way, provided that written permission from the adjoining property owner is obtained first.”

“We are not forcing trees on people,” Fobert stressed. “This would be a totally volunteer program.”

The article comes as Marblehead invests millions of dollars into creating and improving sidewalks around town. Officials do not want tree-root growth to damage them.

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