

Nature in the Neighborhood – November 2021

Have you hugged a tree today? Perhaps you should, given all they do for us:

- They clean the air by absorbing pollutants (not to mention creating the oxygen we breath)
- They slow water runoff to help prevent flooding
- They prevent soil erosion
- They buffer noise pollution
- They provide food and a home for wildlife, and
- They provide shade in the summer to cool our communities, which are just getting hotter every year because of climate change.

Trees are good for you. Did you know that people who live on tree-lined streets are less likely to report conditions such as high blood pressure, obesity, heart disease or diabetes? Numerous studies are touting the health benefits of trees including a 2015 study conducted in Toronto as reported in Scientific Reports. The study found that “people who live in neighborhoods with a higher density of trees on their street report significantly higher health perception and significantly less cardio-metabolic conditions.”*

Trees are attractive. If you live on or near a tree-lined neighborhood, consider for a moment what that street would look like if all the trees were gone. It’s hard to find anyone who doesn’t enjoy looking at trees. That’s why landscaping with trees can increase property values. In some cases, as much as 20%.

Can you put a price tag on all the many benefits of trees? A 2016 report found that the trees that line California’s streets are worth an estimated \$1 billion a year for the work they do in removing air pollution, storing CO₂, cooling homes, and reducing rain runoff, among other services. The report calculated that, for every \$1 spent on planting or maintaining a street tree, that tree returns, on average, \$5.82 in benefits.** Not a bad investment. In a creative move, Portland, Oregon calculated the benefits of the city’s street trees and then hung price tags on them.***

An Act Establishing the Municipal Reforestation Program.

As noted, trees have many benefits, not least of which is that they can mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, including increased rainfall, excessive heat, and air pollution. A bill introduced in the Massachusetts legislature by Representative Lori A. Ehrlich and Senator Cynthia Stone Creem would require communities to have municipal reforestation plans that the Commonwealth will finance and support with technical assistance.**** This is a much needed bill because the Commonwealth’s tree canopy cover on public and private land is decreasing. Trees have been dying for

many reasons - gas leaks, air pollution, road salt, drought, soil compaction, and development. Just this month, the Nor'easter brought down a number of large trees in Swampscott. We hope you'll take time to learn about this bill and to support it because there's no doubt that healthy tree canopies foster healthy communities.

A Look at Tree Equity.

Communities with the sparsest tree canopy cover are often low-income communities so that residents from these communities are disproportionately affected by excessive heat and poor air quality. October 26, the Swampscott Conservancy hosted a talk by David Meshoulam, from Speak for the Trees, a Boston based nonprofit. If you missed the talk, it can be viewed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mY9Nq6iquQQ The mission of Speak for the Trees is to improve the size and health of the urban tree canopy in Boston, with a focus on under-resourced and under-canopied neighborhoods.

Believing that change happens when residents have ownership over their spaces, the organization develops and sponsors projects at the community level and views tree planting, care, and stewardship as a way to connect residents to themselves, their neighborhood, and the global environment. If you're interested in seeing how Swampscott scores on tree canopy in relation to other Northshore communities go to American Forests' Tree Equity Score and type in Swampscott: treeequityscore.org

What you can do. As a community, we hope that Swampscott will continue to take steps to care for the tree canopy in our town. But you too can play a role. Check out the Forestry Division page on the town website for how you can request the planting of a street shade in front of your house, report public trees that are in need of maintenance, and/or donate the town's Tree Gift Fund: swampscottma.gov/forestry-division. We can all get involved in the planting, nurturing, and celebrating of trees in our neighborhood ... and perhaps we can start by giving them a hug.

*<https://www.nature.com/articles/srep11610>

** fs.fed.us/psw/news/2016/20160614_streettrees.shtml

*** earthshare.org/treebenefits/

**** loriehrlich.org/municipal-reforestation-program

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