

Article 18 A.

Capital Program – Dept Authorization

\$612,000 Three Year Urban Forest Restoration Plan (an investment in Amherst's...green infrastructure)

Trees are big news. Trees – the people who care for them and those who love them have always felt they deserve a lot more attention. But last week, trees made the New York Times opinion page with a column called “Why Trees Matter.”



As Jim Robbins wrote, “We have underestimated the importance of trees. They are not merely pleasant sources of shade but a potentially major answer to some of our most pressing environmental problems. We take them for granted, but they are a near miracle.”

During my four years as a volunteer tree warden, I spent the majority of my time responding to requests from homeowners who wanted an assessment of the trees along the streets in their front yard. Many of the trees were in advanced states of decay or decline. Many had been cut back so many times to removed dead parts or pruned to avoid growing into overhead utility lines that they hardly looked like trees anymore. The backlog of requests for these risk assessments and the even longer list of work orders for the town tree crew to fix the problems was discouraging at times. The request for \$612,000 will support a 3-year urban forest restoration plan which if approved will see 2,000 new trees planted along Amherst’s roads, parks, commons and schools over the next three years.

The \$612,000 budget will enable the town's two person tree crew to continue the important task of caring for the towns aging street trees population and too continue to work through an almost three year backlog of tree work-requests. The funding would augment the tree crew for five months a year with two paid summer interns from The Stockbridge School of Agriculture at UMass. These young people would carry out some of the important work that the tree crew hasn't had the staffing or resources to perform in our parks and commons. Basic tasks like thorough pruning (which reduce the chance of a tree becoming a hazard or suffering from storm damage) and the important task of planting trees to replace trees lost to old age or development.

Pruning and planting...two fundamental components of maintaining a healthy street tree population that have fallen to the budget axe over the past 30 years. Planting the right tree in the right place takes time and planning, DigSafe must be performed to be sure that trees aren't planted on or near a water main, gas line or underground utility. New trees require structural pruning to promote strong healthy branch and stem characteristics, watering, mulching and inventorying so the trees health and maintenance can be tracked.