

Restoring Mamaroneck’s Tree Canopy

Trees are crucial to human survival and have a direct impact on our health and resilience as a community. The Nature Conservancy’s scientific studies show that trees are vital for oxygen production, carbon sequestration, air and water purification, storm water and flood risk mitigation, heat reduction on summer days, protection against erosion, and enhancement of our health and sense of well-being.

And yet the Town of Mamaroneck’s Tree Canopy is facing significant challenges. According to Town records, our tree canopy—the layer of leaves and branches that covers the ground when viewed from above—is shrinking. As a forward-thinking community seeking to secure a resilient future, we must recognize the value of what we are losing, reverse the decline in tree coverage and increase tree canopy wherever possible.

Understanding the Value of Trees

We all share in the benefits provided by trees, even as we marvel at their beauty. Trees are problem solvers. These dedicated custodians of our habitat constitute our first line of defense against many of the severe environmental challenges impacting us locally and globally.

- Trees lower summer energy usage by as much as 30%; their shade reduces outdoor air temperature in paved and built-up areas. The USDA Forest Service states that trees also reduce heating demand by buffering the force of cold winds on buildings.
- Trees stabilize soil and mitigate flooding and erosion by slowing down storm water drainage by up to 60%, compared to asphalt. A medium-sized tree can absorb up to 2,380 gallons of rainfall per year (USDA).
- Trees protect our watershed by filtering water and removing pollutants that drain into Long Island Sound—including nitrogen-laden lawn chemicals that cause the algal blooms that deplete oxygen and kill marine life.
- Trees reduce air pollution concentrations (US EPA). The larger the canopy, the more pollutants are captured, thus reducing asthma and heart disease, which are aggravated by even small amounts of pollutants (American Heart Association).
- Trees, the “lungs of the earth,” provide us with sustaining oxygen. Through photosynthesis, trees help reduce global warming by pulling CO₂ from the air. The carbon becomes part of the tree, and the oxygen is released to the atmosphere. When trees are cut down, the stored carbon is released back into the atmosphere, hastening climate change.

A Disappearing Tree Canopy in our Town

The Town recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of our Tree City designation by the Arbor Day Foundation. This designation, reconfirmed annually, signifies that the Town values our trees, holds annual Arbor Day Tree Planting programs, has a certified Arborist on staff, reports annually on tree plantings and removals, and follows sound practices in protecting and caring for trees. To truly value what trees do for our community, we need to do more: preserve and improve our tree canopy while raising public awareness of how critical trees are to maintaining our quality of life.

We are losing trees not only to aging and disease, but also to increasingly intense storms. Residents are removing trees out of fear of storm-related damage, even when trees are healthy. Trees are often removed, sometimes unnecessarily, for home re-construction or additions. *An old-growth tree takes an hour to cut down, but over one hundred years to replace.*

In recent years, on public property alone, the Town lost or removed almost twice as many trees as it planted:

- 2007: 70 trees planted; 62 trees removed;
- 2008: 85 trees planted; 84 trees removed;
- 2009: 33 trees planted; 80 trees removed;
- 2010: 76 trees planted; 80 trees removed;
- 2011: 47 trees planted; 112 trees removed;
- 2012: 26 trees planted; 37 trees removed;
- 2013: 26 trees planted; 86 trees removed;
- 2014: 40 trees planted; 50 trees removed;
- 2015: 57 trees planted; 64 trees removed;
- 2016: 43 trees planted; 81 trees removed;
- 2017: 14 trees planted; 41 trees removed;
- 2018: 18 trees planted; 73 trees removed;
- 2019: 24 trees planted; 75 trees removed.

In 2020, as a result of storm Isaias, the Town of Mamaroneck lost over 100 trees, but only one tree was planted.

The Town of Mamaroneck must act to reverse this decline.

Our tree canopy is as much a part of Town infrastructure as our roads. Preserving and expanding this public health resource requires public-sector leadership and partnership with our private sector: residents, Houses of Worship, clubs, retail and commercial areas. The Collaborative recommends the following actions, which have brought major improvements to other Westchester municipalities:

- **Promote the qualities and advantages of being a Tree City.**
Encourage homeowners, retailers, Houses of Worship and clubs to replace any trees that they wish to remove, and to expand their tree canopy wherever possible.
- **Increase tree planting on public lands, along street rights-of-way, and on private property.**
Implement a program to return the Town’s tree canopy to at least the 45% coverage estimated in 2011, or expand our tree cover beyond the 50% coverage maintained by the Village of Scarsdale through their municipal program, which plants over 100 trees per year.
- **Reduce tree removals through improved regulation.**
Improve regulations that discourage the clear-cutting of a property when a house is sold, and make current tree protections applicable across all properties in the Town, in line with provisions recently updated in Scarsdale.
- **Educate and inform the public through outreach.**
The Collaborative will assist the Town Board by undertaking a community outreach and education campaign to promote the value of trees, improving public awareness of the important advantages of being a Tree City.

Our Town Government, together with our residents, must restore and increase our Tree Canopy through a comprehensive, multi-year tree-planting program. With increased community awareness and support, this program will help the Town remain beautiful, healthy and resilient for generations to come.