CITY OF HARTFORD
PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING
THE REMOVAL OF TREES AT BUSHNELL PARK
MINUTES
January 27, 2023

A Public Hearing was held at 50 Jennings Road, 2nd Floor in the KC Conference Room, at 4:00 pm on Friday, January 27, 2023

Attendance:

City of Hartford Officials:
Mr. Christopher Hayes, Tree Warden; Mr. Michael Looney, Director of DPW, Ms. Petrel Maylor, Deputy Director of DPW; Attorney Richard Vassallo, Corporation Counsel;

Members of the Tree Advisory Commission:
Chair Jack Hale, Ms. Mary Zeman, Ms. Charmaine Craig, Mr. Greg Secord

CALL TO ORDER
Mr. Hayes called the meeting to order at 4:05 pm and stated that he was here to conduct a hearing in the absence of Ms. Heather Dionne, City Forester. He then advised of the rules of conduct for those who wished to give a testimony and stated that each person would be heard in the order in which they are on the list.

NOTICE OF HEARING
The Public Hearing Notice was read into the record by Mr. Michael Looney, Director of the Department of Public Works:

Public Hearing Notice

We are in accordance with Section 23-59 of the Connecticut General Statutes

Notice is hereby given that the City of Hartford Tree Warden shall hold a public hearing on the intended removal of a 46" diameter Curquois Alba White Oak, A 35" diameter Acer Sacorum Sugar Maple and a 39" diameter Curquois Rubra Northern Red Oak; all located in Bushnell Park as a result of the Appeal by Elizabeth Robins, Zachery Ortiz and Olivia Ortiz, which is dated January 15, 2023. Removal of the trees is intended due to poor tree conditions.

TESTIMONY

Director Looney then read into the record written testimony received from Ms. Susan Masuno, Ph.D., which included an attachment on Roadside Trees from Histead. Her testimony was in opposition of the removal of the trees and is attached hereto.

There were no further written testimony to be read and the public hearing was open to receive verbal testimony from the following:

Ms. Molly Deegan, 56 Whitney Street, Hartford, CT. She read comments from her 10-year-old students who all opposed the removal of the trees.

Ms. Edith Pestana- 61 North Beacon Street, Hartford- Feels that the trees in question are significant and that they are historic. She further asked the following questions:

- Are there any seedlings left?
- What plans are there to replace it with any of the seedlings?

She further stated that a second opinion regarding the health of the trees should be taken into consideration. However, should the trees have to be removed, she suggested and requested that the wood be used for something significant and that the item be displayed in City Hall or something of that nature, given the historic value.

Ms. Mary Pelletier – 80 Elizabeth Street, Hartford, CT - She agreed with all the points made by Edith Pestana and stated that we should listen to the children. Her testimony was in opposition of the removal of the trees

Mary Zeman, Manager of Bushnell Park Conservancy- 43 Iroquois Road, W. Hartford, CT – She spoke of the 2014 assessment of the trees at Bushnell Park and their ongoing efforts to care for an protect the health of them. Some of the care includes the planting and taking down of trees from time to time. She further stated that unfortunately, all trees have a lifespan.

Mr. Hayes her asked about the latest health assessments conducted by Save A Tree, at which she answered that the 1st round was in May and June, 2022, which were the Level 1 Assessments and that the High Priority Assessments, Level 2, was done in December 2022.

Ms. Barbara Robins, 174 Sigourney Street, Hartford CT – Stated that she is assessing the tree canopy in the City of Hartford and is working to boost it from 20% to 30-35%. She further stated that every tree that comes down makes it more difficult to increase Hartford's canopy.

Mr. Hayes announced that the time was 4:33 pm and that he would continue to keep the Public Hearing Open until 5:00 pm. to allow additional testimony.

At that time, Ms. Charmaine Craig asked if the comments effect the decision. Attorney Richard Vassallo, Corporation Counsel for City of Hartford answered and stated that the hearing allows input for the decision maker. He further stated that this is merely a public hearing that allows input from the community in regards to the trees that have been posted. The Hearing Officer will take in the comments and render a decision within three days. The Hearing Officer in this case is Mr. Hayes, (volunteering) who is standing in for Ms. Heather Dionne, City Forester in her absence.

Jack Hale, Chair of the Tree Advisory Commission, raised a question regarding the appeals timeline. He stated that the Tree Ordinance says that once a judgement is made following a hearing, that there is a period of time in which it can be appealed? Mr. Hayes answered that this is correct. Attorney Vassello added that according to CGS Section 23-59, the tree warden shall render a decision and the party aggrieved by such decision may, within ten days, appeal to the superior court for the judicial district within such town or borough is located.

The Floor was opened for questions and comments from the attendees.

There was no additional testimony from the public and the Public Hearing was closed.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 pm.

January 27, 2023

Dear Mr. Looney,

I am writing with respect to the proposed tree removal in Bushnell Park.

Given the many irreplaceable values of large old trees, I applaud citizens for speaking up and asking questions. Obviously once a tree is gone, it's gone. People of all ages love and count on these unique, historic living touchstones in our public spaces.

The biodiversity above and below ground (which we are just starting to appreciate) cannot be replaced for 100 years or more. To replace the carbon of just one big tree we need many thousands of replacement trees. The benefits to our physical and mental health are similarly irreplaceable. Please see attached information sheet on Roadside Trees from Highstead for more details. Replanting simply cannot replace the value of big old trees – we need to prioritize caring for trees and understanding the unique needs of older trees.

Regarding the ratings of their condition: I'm not sure how the vigor of these trees could be assessed fully in the winter. *Were they also assessed in the summer?* These trees are definitely alive, and almost all older trees have some hollow areas. This is normal and does not indicate a hazard – hollow trees can be incredibly strong and live for hundreds of years. Similarly of trees with some minor defects and some dead branches.

We had similar situation come up at Trinity College and called in an expert whose specialty is assessing and saving large old trees. I can attest personally that speaking up, and then having the removals confirmed by a completely independent expert (who is a specialist in stewarding and saving old and big trees, and who had nothing to gain by either keeping or removing the trees) made everyone in the community more comfortable. I hope this can be part of the process in the future for large public trees. This is not against anyone or any company – it is simply best practice for an expensive and irreversible decision that has such a large impact on the public.

Also, I applaud the citizens who asked questions, and we should celebrate that people care. That is what community is about. Whether people speak up or not, we know that people are very attached to iconic and legacy trees and natural areas in the city. I request that future meetings be held hybrid – we need to give people a chance to care, no matter the outcome.

I hope before this moves forward we can get a second opinion from an independent and highly experienced expert in this field. Perhaps the hearing can be continued to enable that. This protects the public trust, because these trees belong to everyone. The cost of that second independent opinion is a fraction of cost of the removal, and a crumb compared to the value of the trees we are losing. It would help everyone feel comfortable that it is the right decision. We almost lost a champion tree two years ago at Trinity College, and were planning on the future of our quad without it. However, root treatments and additional watering has brought it back to full vigor two years later and it may last for many, many more decades.

In short, I hope the public hearing can be continued to allow time for a second opinion to come in, and/or that this can be delayed until after summer when the full vigor of the trees can be assessed. If neither is possible in this case, I hope both will be part of the process in the future. Also, the public should know what is happening to the wood – where it is going, what is it being used for, (if anything) etc. There are artisans and others who may be interested in it if the city has no use for it. If there is interest in making special pieces, Trinity College has sent some projects to City Bench in New Haven.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Masino

Susan A. Masino, Ph.D.

Vernon Roosa Professor of Applied Science

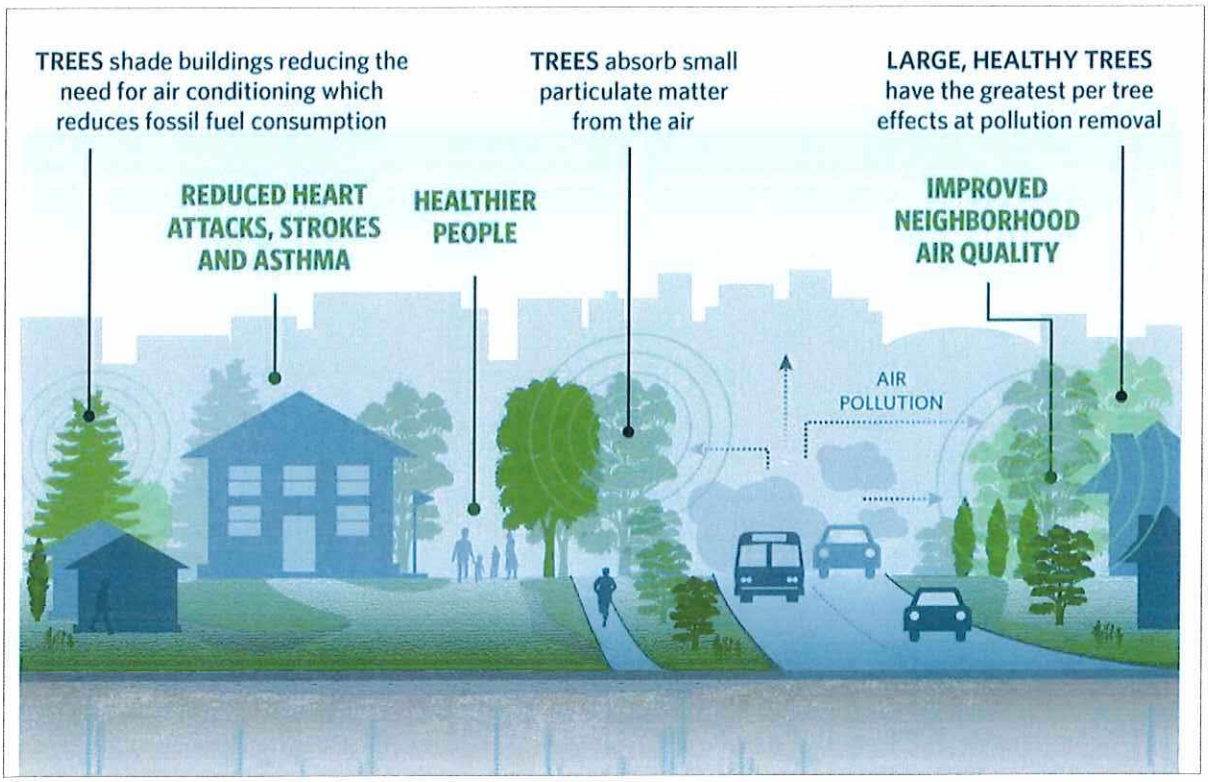
Trinity College

Roadside Trees:

Ecological Value and Impact on Atmospheric Carbon

Highstead

- Roadside trees are typically the fastest growing and largest trees in the landscape because of increased light and reduced competition along the forest edge. Thus, a tree 36 inches in diameter is not unusual along a roadside, but a tree this size represents a tiny 0.03% of trees growing in Connecticut's forest.
- Roadside trees also provide critical human health benefits by filtering pollutants from roadways. Large trees filter far more pollutants than small trees. For instance, a 30-inch diameter tree filters 60-70 times the pollutants as a small tree 3 inches in diameter in the same place.
- Large trees reduce home energy use and carbon emissions by cooling a house in summer and insulating it from cold winds in winter. Large trees (30 inches diameter) provide up to 6-7 times more avoided CO^2 emissions than small trees (3 inches diam.) of the same species.



Source: BBC

Roadside Trees:

Ecological Value and Impact on Atmospheric Carbon

Highstead

- More generally, tree cover in developed settings provides critical cooling services for people, a service that will only become more important with warming temperatures. For instance, within a single urban landscape of the Northeast, areas with 30% less tree cover can be 7 degrees F hotter!
- Large trees are considered 'keystone structures' because of their significant contribution to a broad array of ecological processes and their critical value for biodiversity. They also have large impacts on local microclimate, soil moisture, and soil nutrient levels.
- Regarding biodiversity more specifically, large trees in more developed settings function as biodiversity "hotspots." For instance, a handful of large trees in a developed setting can have up to 2.5 times the diversity of bird species as an equivalent number of smaller trees.
- Large roadside trees are not only rare natural features on the landscape, they absorb carbon much faster and store more carbon than the average tree in the forest. A red oak tree 36 inches in diameter stores about 4.5 metric tons of carbon in its wood, which is equivalent to the annual CO2 emissions of 3.5 passenger cars. That tree stores over 6000 times more carbon than a replacement tree 1 inch in diameter. A 1-inch diameter tree also absorbs 135 times less carbon dioxide each year than a 36-inch tree of the same species.
- When roadside trees are cut and turned into wood chips, most of the stored carbon in the wood is rapidly converted to CO2 and released into the atmosphere, exacerbating the climate problem.
- Large street trees provide unparalleled scenic beauty and natural character in a town. They are town-wide treasures that cannot be replaced for at least a century.

References

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