

MEMORANDUM

To: Arlington Board of Selectmen

From: Susan Stamps, Arlington Tree committee

Date: August 17, 2015

Re: Tree Committee appearance at 8/17/15 Board of Selectmen meeting to discuss the urgent need for a bylaw regulating removal of trees on private property

It has come to the Tree committee's attention that residents throughout the town of Arlington are concerned about removal of trees on private property in their neighborhoods. Increasing unchecked elimination of trees during development has dramatically changed neighborhoods to their detriment and left residents wondering how the town could allow this to happen. Other towns, nearby and across the country, have restrictions and oversight of tree removals on private property during development, but Arlington has none.¹ The Tree Committee feels regulation is urgently needed as soon as possible and asks that the Board of Selectmen work with the Tree Committee to prepare a bylaw to be presented to the 2015 fall special Town Meeting (if there is one) or 2016 annual Town Meeting. If there are interim rules that the Town can adopt, we urge that the Board do that, too.

We have done some research as to area towns and find that Lexington, Cambridge, Brookline, Newton, Wellesley and other towns regulate the removal of trees on private property. These towns' regulations do not apply to a homeowner's removal of a tree or two, but, rather to major construction projects, such as a new house or a large addition, and only to trees of a certain size within a defined setback. I attach the tree bylaws of several towns with this memorandum as examples of what we feel is critically needed in Arlington.

The newly adopted Arlington Master Plan recognizes the importance of trees to the quality of life in Arlington and thus the need to protect them - whether on public or private property.

¹ Removal of trees on public property (owned by the town) is governed by the Public Shade Tree law, MGL c. 87

Arlington Master Plan, page iii, Town Goals, Article 4 “The Environment”: “... Recognizing the fragility of our natural resources, we must ensure that Arlington’s residential areas, commercial centers, and infrastructure are developed in harmony with environmental concerns.....” [emphasis added].

Arlington Master Plan, page 29, Section 3, Land Use - sidebar Master Plan goals for land use: “Encourage development that enhances the quality of Arlington’s natural resources and built environment.”

Arlington Master Plan, page 131, Section 8, Natural Resources and Open Space - sidebar Master Plan goals for natural resources & open space: “Ensure that Arlington’s neighborhoods, commercial areas, and infrastructure are developed in harmony with natural resource concerns.” [emphasis added] and “Value, protect, and enhance the physical beauty and natural resources of Arlington.”

Arlington Master Plan, page 188, Implementation Program: Summary, #42: “Study methods of regulating the removal of mature trees on private property; research and consider methods used in other communities.

Arlington Master Plan, page 188, Implementation Program: Summary, #43: “Consider establishing Neighborhood Conservation Districts with design review standards for architecture, mature trees and landscaping, open space, walkways, and other features.”

In closing, the Tree Committee appreciates that the Master Plan supports regulating removal of trees on private property, but the urgency of the need for regulation is not highlighted (it states a “mid-term” goal, and is about “studying” and “considering” regulations). On the contrary, the Tree committee, echoing the concerns of residents, feels the need for regulation is immediate and urgent and should be a top priority for the town. We hope the Board of Selectmen will agree and work with us to protect our beautiful, leafy Arlington neighborhoods by having an appropriate tree bylaw passed at the fall 2015 special Town Meeting or, at the latest, the 2016 annual town meeting.

See next page for reasons why trees are critical to the quality of life in Arlington.

Why should the Town protect Arlington's trees?

Mature trees are key to the livability of the Town of Arlington. They:

Have aesthetic appeal

Contribute to the distinct character of neighborhoods

Improve air quality

Provide glare and heat protection

Reduce noise

Aid in the stabilization of soil

Provide natural flood and climate control

Create habitats for wildlife

Enhance property values

Provide natural privacy to neighbors.