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Newly appointed Public Shade Tree Commission to distribute free whips in time for Arbor Day

Northampton's new Public Shade Tree Commission is launching its work by preparing for Arbor Day on Friday April 24 when the City will give away 400 tree seedlings to eager planters. In collaboration with Mayor David Narkewicz, Tree Warden Richard C. Parasiliti, Jr., the Tree Crew from the Department of Public Works, the new Public Shade Tree Commission will distribute free whips in front of City Hall between 9am-3pm on Friday, April 24th, and 9am-noon on Saturday, April 25th. Northampton citizens may choose among four tree species: Hackberry, River Birch, Common Lilac and Norway Spruce.

In speaking on the appointment of the Public Shade Tree Commission Mayor Narkewicz said, "Our community is very fortunate to have such highly qualified and passionate citizens interested in serving on a volunteer Public Shade Tree Commission; this speaks to how much our city cares about our public shade trees. I'm eager to see the Commission begin its important work."

The seven members of the new Public Shade Tree Commission are:

Marilyn Castriotta, a recent master-level graduate of environmental studies/conservation biology, works as a project manager for Antioch University's Center for Climate Preparedness and Community Resilience.

Todd Ford, executive director of the Hampshire Council of Governments, is an urban planner specializing in sustainable design.

Jay Girard, landscape manager for the Botanic Garden at Smith College, has been a practicing arborist for 40 years.

Lilly Lombard, founder of Grow Food Northampton, has led the recent citizen advocacy effort to adopt a comprehensive shade tree program in Northampton.

Rob Postel, amateur tree enthusiast, works with citizen volunteers to plant shade trees in Northampton.

Andrew Smith is an environmental planner who recently oversaw the Greening the Gateway Cities program which coordinated the planting of 1,500 trees in the city of Holyoke.

Jen Werner, a professional horticulturalist for over 30 years, is a professor of landscape design and management at Springfield Technical Community College.

"Having new Public Shade Tree Commission and a Tree Warden are the first steps toward developing a comprehensive Urban Forest Management plan for Northampton", said Richard Parasiliti, Jr., who was appointed last fall as the City's Tree Warden and also serves as the Department of Public Works Highway Superintendent, "I am excited to be part of this new chapter in Northampton's efforts to restore its public shade tree canopy, and I am pleased to be working with the Public Shade Tree Commission."

The recent tree inventory—a sampling of 5% of Northampton’s existing public shade trees using USDA’s iTree software—revealed that Northampton’s current public shade tree canopy is valued at approximately \$50 million, delivers over \$1 million in annual benefits, and has intercepted 15.3 million gallons of rainwater annually. The inventory also showed that Northampton’s canopy is vulnerable. Tree diversity is limited, with maple trees—especially Norway Maples—constituting nearly 30% of all public shade trees. Furthermore, 11% of the current canopy consists of Ash trees, which are highly susceptible to the Emerald Ash Borer, a parasitic insect that is spreading nationally and kills all trees it infests.

New Public Shade Tree Commissioner Lilly Lombard, who organized Northampton’s first public shade tree inventory last September that was carried out by over 40 volunteers, stated, “There’s a lot of work ahead of us. The climate is rapidly changing, bringing new pests, harsher storms, and extreme heat,” remarked Lombard. “Trees are essential to us weathering and enjoying the decades ahead, so we’ve no time to lose. Where do we want our tree canopy to be in 10 years? What’s our roadmap for getting there, and what resources are do we commit to that vision? All of us on the new Public Shade Tree Commission are eager to tackle these questions.”

For Questions about the Public Shade Tree Commission or the distribution of tree whips please contact:
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