

Fairfield Forestry Committee

Office of the Tree Warden
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February 22, 2016

Senator Ted Kennedy, Co-chair
Representative James Albis, Co-chair
Connecticut General Assembly
Environment Committee
Room 3200
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

In Support of H.B. No. 5150:

AN ACT CONCERNING TREE WARDENS' NOTICES ON TREES AND SHRUBS PRIOR TO REMOVAL, TREE REMOVAL ALONG STATE HIGHWAYS AND CLEAN-UP BY PUBLIC UTILITY CORPORATIONS FOLLOWING CERTAIN TREE REMOVAL

Dear Senator Kennedy and Representative Albis:

On behalf of the Fairfield Forestry Committee, I am writing in support of House Bill 5150 that would, among other things, strengthen the role of tree wardens in determining trees and shrubs with esthetic or environmental significance; require the Department of Transportation to evaluate the impacts of tree removal projects on the local ecosystem and aesthetics; and require utility companies to remove any debris from the pruning or removal of trees.

The Forestry Committee was established by the First Selectman in 2006 and consists of volunteer members appointed by the town's Tree Warden. Our mission is to promote stewardship of town-owned trees and assist the Tree Warden with implementation of the Town's Community Forest Management Program, which calls for a number of initiatives to increase public awareness of the benefits of trees in our community.

In Fairfield, we have over 270 miles of town roads. A more precise inventory is being conducted, but it's estimated there are 50,000 to 75,000 trees in the public rights-of-way and over-hanging them from the more than 20,000 abutting properties. An additional 100,000 to 300,000 trees grow on other town properties such as parks, schoolyards, and open space lands.

Since trees are a constant presence in our lives, it's easy to take them for granted. In Connecticut, we're always moved when leaves change color in the fall, but trees also give us many personal, neighborhood, and town-wide benefits throughout the year. In addition to their scenic quality, they provide habitat for songbirds and other wildlife, absorb pollution, and provide cooling shade. By holding soil in place, they reduce erosion and allow storm-water to filter into the ground. These are just a few of their natural values.

In addition, because trees increase the value of residential and commercial properties we cannot overlook their substantial economic impacts in developed areas. Trees have more subtle benefits too. Studies find they help reduce stress and increase the sense of well-being in everyday life. In commercial settings, tree-lined streets have higher sales.

Trees are also a big part of Fairfield's history and sense of community. Isaac Bronson, a surgeon during the American Revolution serving under George Washington, is credited with planting the first dogwoods in the Greenfield area of town. In 1938, after a weekend visit to Connecticut, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt wrote in her "My Day" column that there "is an avenue of pink and white dogwood on Greenfield Hill such as I have never seen anywhere else in this country." The annual spring Dogwood Festival captures the imagination and wonder of people from all over New England and the tri-state area.

Beyond our dogwoods are the beautiful old sugar maples, oaks, and beeches that line many of our streets. These trees are extremely important to all residents and the town's quality of life. We are grateful that our Tree Warden requires permits for all tree-trimming work by utility companies and posts all requested removals.

Please be aware that Fairfield has long recognized its responsibility as a steward of the public trees. The office of the Tree Warden, who is responsible for the care and control of all public trees, was established in the 1940's. The Representative Town Meeting passed the town's first tree ordinance in 1950. Also around that time, the Town Plan and Zoning Commission started to require developers to plant trees along their new streets. In 1983, Fairfield was the first town in Connecticut to be recognized by the National Arbor Day Foundation as a "Tree City USA." That recognition was given because of the town's commitment and success in managing its public trees and has now been received every year for the past 28 years. In 2014, the Board of Selectmen endorsed our town's Community Forest Management Plan establishing a guiding framework for preserving, enhancing, and maintaining public trees and the community forest.

In conclusion, we believe that tree wardens in all towns have a vital responsibility for preserving the aging urban forest of our state. Further, we believe that tree-trimming along our roads and utility corridors, needed to ensure public safety and utility reliability, must be highly selective and carefully designed to avoid adverse environmental and esthetic impacts on the local community. It is our opinion that H.B. No. 5150 supports these intents. We hope that you will fully support this bill.

Please contact me at (203) 256-9802 or maryhogue@optonline.net if you have any questions or require any additional information at this time.

Sincerely,

Mary Hogue, Chair
For the Fairfield Forestry Committee:
Jeffrey Minder (Tree Warden); Misty Beyer; Tom Corell; Joe File; Dave McMahon

cc:
Mr. Michael Tetreau, First Selectman
Representative Laura Devlin
Senator Tony Hwang
Representative Brenda Kupchick
Representative Cristin McCarthy Vahey
Mr. Chris Donnelly, State of Connecticut Urban Forester
Mr. Jeffrey Minder, Tree Warden