

**FROM:**

Arbor Resources Committee

**TO:**

Bopha Malone, Chair, Bedford Select Board

Chris Gittens, Chair, Planning Board

Anthony Fields, Bedford Planning Director

RKG Associates Leadership Team:

Kyle Talente,

Russell Archambault,

Eric Halvorsen, AICP,

Eric Woyciesjes

**SUBJECT: Setbacks to accommodate Public Shade Trees**

As the Planning Board continues to work with RKG Associates to hone the details of the Town's MBTA zoning plan, BARC urges the Town to take two measures. First, in up front planning, maintain existing curb setbacks to protect and preserve Bedford's Publicly-owned Shade Trees. Second, we urge that Planning stand by its goals from 1990[1] that emphasize preserving existing trees, as well as robust planting of new trees to increase Town canopy.

Trees are crucial to the fight against global warming, and contribute to resilience in the face of climate change. A large body of research attests to the environmental, economic, social, and health benefits of trees. Mature trees deliver exponentially more benefits than young trees. For this reason, it is superior to preserve mature trees than to remove them and replant with saplings. At best, builder-planted saplings take 30 or 40 years before the community regains these benefits and the street looks like it already does today

For a primer on the research and data supporting tree benefits, please visit BARC's "Value of Trees FAQ."

[https://www.bedfordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2602/Value-of-Trees-FAQ\\_05182023](https://www.bedfordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2602/Value-of-Trees-FAQ_05182023)

One of the goals of the new zoning is to provide housing for people who ordinarily couldn't afford to live in Bedford. We should use care to avoid creating treeless heat islands in these new communities. Bedford should ensure that all new developments have the same level of environmental health as the rest of the town.

Zoning that encroaches on Public Shade Trees amounts to de facto pre-approval to remove them. There must still be a Public Shade Tree Hearing, where state law allows a single objector to halt the removal. Despite this, the conclusion on appeal to the Select Board will be foregone. Such zoning prioritizes developer concerns over preserving a healthy, environmentally important amenity for new neighbors.

The idea that we must remove trees to build dense housing is a false dilemma. Arlington, Cambridge, Somerville, and Concord all have stringent requirements to preserve trees. These

Towns complete important projects for housing, commercial space, and transportation, while developers work around trees.

Bedford can do the same, and our voters have shown ample political will for it. With the intention of tree preservation, Bedford voted overwhelmingly to make BARC a standing committee, to fund the Master Tree Plan, and to pass the Tree Preservation Bylaw.

Town voters have been clear: Protecting Public Shade trees and improving Bedford's tree canopy are priorities. They need to be included up front in all new zoning plans, including the MBTA zoning.

In closing, we encourage the Planning Board to include up front planning, now, to protect and preserve Public Shade Trees as you develop proposals for the MBTA zoning.

Voted unanimously by Arbor Resources, February 1, 2024.

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[1] <https://www.bedfordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1230/Subdivision-Rules-and-Regulations-PDF?bidId=>