

City of Ellsworth  
1 City Hall Plaza, Ellsworth, ME 04605  
**ARBOR COMMISSION**  
Special Meeting  
Monday, January 22, 2024, 8:15-10:15 AM

**AGENDA**

1. Call to Order (timeline for completion of agenda topics)
2. Adoption of Minutes of December 15, 2023 (8:20AM)
3. Staff Comments or Clarifications (8:40AM). (T. Dyer, M. Condon)
  - a. Previous/current Public Works tree-related budget (T. White with input from A. Wilson)
  - b. Street trees the City is responsible for maintaining (T. Dyer and T. White)
  - c. City Council 2018 decision to contract exclusively organic lawn and landscaping care (T. Dyer and clarification by C. Hanson)
  - d. Other
4. Citizen Comments (8:50AM)
5. Report from City Council (C. Hanson) (10:00AM)
6. Review presentation/written submission to Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee—January 22, 2024, 5:30PM (see attached draft). (10:30AM)
7. Committee Reports (and identification of further participants/conveners)
  - a. Tree Ordinance/Tree Warden Job Description (I. Drummond, J. Lambert, T. White) (10:50AM)
  - b. Forest Management Plan (M. Blackstone, T. Davis, S. Walczyk, J. Barnes, T. White) (10:55AM)
  - c. Project Canopy Application (M. Blackstone, C. Hanson, T. White) (11:05AM)
8. Establish Work Schedule, Timelines, Deadlines. (11:10AM)
  - a. Budget Proposal for 2024-2025
    - i. Meeting with Recreation Commission
  - b. Revised Tree Ordinance
    - i. Tree Warden Job Description
  - c. Submission of Arbor Day Proclamation to Mayor
  - d. Submission of Tree City USA 2024 application (deadline Dec. 31?)
  - e. Finalize Project Canopy Grant Application (deadline Feb 15, 2024)
  - f. Community Tree Nursery Input on Ordering & Planting for 2024
  - g. Finalize City of Ellsworth Forestry Management Plan
  - h. Plan Public Education Programming for 2024
  - i. Other
9. Member Comments/Other Business (11:15AM)
10. Next Meeting: February 5, 2024, 8:15-10:15AM
11. Adjournment.

## **Arbor Commission Submission to the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee**

### **Who are we?**

The Arbor Commission was set up by the City's Tree Ordinance (Chapter 43) when it was approved in 1991. In response to a Green Plan recommendation the Commission was finally constituted, apparently for the first time, in August of 2023. The Commission consists of 9 members including professional and accredited arborists and foresters, a land trust representative, Green Ellsworth and Ellsworth Garden Club members and Master Gardener Volunteers with experience in public landscaping (including development of the Community Tree Nursery) and individuals involved in local businesses.

### **What do we do?**

As a newly appointed commission we are involved in a lot of initiatives which should both inform the Comprehensive Planning process and benefit from the data and recommendations included in the new Comprehensive Plan. Some of our current initiatives include:

- revision of Chapter 43 (including the development of a new job description for the City's tree warden, a position which will be separated from the City Manager position in 2024)
- development of a Forestry Management Plan for Ellsworth as mandated in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan and Chapter 43
- ongoing applications for the City's continued designation as a Tree City USA
- 2024 application to the Project Canopy program for grant funds to support Arbor Commission initiatives
- proposal of the City's annual Arbor Day Proclamation
- propose Arbor Commission and City tree-related budget for 2024-2025

### **Where Our Tree City is now**

Ellsworth exists because of the trees that grew here and recent efforts to retree the City and secure Tree City USA status reflect public interest in honoring that point of origin and cultural heritage.

However, our Commission has so far discovered that data necessary for strengthening Ellsworth's canopy is not readily available or is only partially available. For instance,

- What street trees currently exist in Ellsworth (what species and age, to what extent are they threatened by disease or pests, etc) ?
- What trees and how many trees is the City of Ellsworth responsible for managing (determined in part by the right of way on specific City streets which is not consistent or even existent in some cases)?
- What forested or open space properties does the City of Ellsworth own and/or maintain (how many acres in what parts of the city)?

- What forested area in the City is in tree growth, open space, formally protected conservation easements?
- What is the City's budget for tree-related maintenance and planting (a figure that is needed annually to apply for Tree City USA status)?
- What is the current state of the tree canopy in Ellsworth relative to its canopy 10, 20 or 30 years ago, etc.?

This is the kind of information is needed before the City can really understand where we are now with our canopy and assess a way forward in the context of a Forestry Management Plan—or address the topic of trees with some confidence in a Comprehensive Plan. We hope that the Comprehensive Planning team will share what data it has secured with us, and for the data it does not have make recommendations for the City to prioritize the building and maintenance of such a data base—including GIS layers.

#### **b. Where we want to be in 10 years**

Comprehensive Plan recommendations in support of maintaining and strengthening Ellsworth's tree canopy can be informed by those included in the Ellsworth Green Plan (see the "tree sections" in the Green Plan Land Chapter at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WII14CTbg84hpHpG4FDwQaKYEzR3NjysQhknYpgFBJE/edit> ) as many of those recommendations have not been fully addressed. With the formation of the Commission and initial work towards a Forestry Management Plan for the City, however, we are now in a better position to understand more clearly what actions and strategies will be most important for realizing Green Plan recommendations over the next ten years.

In particular, it will be important for the Comprehensive Plan to underscore the importance of the Commission developing and the City approving a Forestry Management Plan which addresses the implementation of Comprehensive Plan recommendations. This will also require communications between the Commission and the Comp Plan Steering Committee as the two plans will be evolving simultaneously. At this point we envision both plans needing to address the following issues:

- assessment of City-owned forested and open space properties for management needs and potential (from which firm management plans and schedules can flow)
- acquisition of past, current and ongoing canopy coverage data for the whole city leading to overall canopy coverage goals for the city as a whole and for specific areas (eg. High Street around Card Brook)
- assuring that a plan is in place for reducing the threat of forest fires and mitigating the impact of any forest fires that might occur
- introduction of ordinances governing the public use of City-owned conserved and other less formally designated green spaces (hours, allowable activities, drugs, overnight camping, fires, etc)
- budgeting for and creating signage relating to the above for all City owned properties

- clarification of approaches to managing pests, invasive plants, etc (organic, non-organic?, integrated pest management)
- the role of urban forestry and larger forested areas (both publicly and privately owned) in managing water quality/storm water runoff and the development of plans, initiatives, programming, regulations, enforcement, etc to protect and facilitate this role
- the need for City staff expertise in tree and landscape management including a Parks and Recreation Department and a contracted tree warden
- a clearly designated and appropriate budget for tree-related maintenance, planting, planning and programming—something that is needed in order to annually qualify as a Tree City USA (which designation we want to maintain)
- a review of Chapter 56 (the UDO) with an eye to protecting existing trees and forested areas, increasing expected standards for the planting of approved trees and green infrastructure (adopting approved tree and plant lists provided by the Commission)
- activating the Arbor Commission and/or tree warden in support of a broad range of activities across City departments and its Planning Board (eg. review of development applications requiring tree-related information, code enforcement review of tree-related landscaping, contracts for landscaping work with tree-related implications and review of snow removal practices that compromise the urban forest)
- the development of programming that can promote and support the planting and care of trees among private property owners and the education and/or engagement of volunteers in the planting and maintenance of the City's street trees, urban canopy and tree nursery.

As suggested by the range of topics addressed above, the discussion of trees and their importance should not be relegated to one or two sections of the Comprehensive Plan. Trees are more than a natural resource. They provide essential environmental services as green infrastructure that needs to be understood and integrated across multiple sections of the Comprehensive Plan and areas of concern that are addressed by a range of City departments.

**Please also see** the “tree sections” in the Green Plan Land Chapter at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WII14CTbg84hpHpG4FDwQaKYEzR3NjysQhknYpgFBJE/edit> )

## EXCERPT FROM ELLSWORTH GREEN PLAN

### Land Chapter, pp. 101-103

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WII14CTbg84hpHpG4FDwQaKYezR3NjysQhknYpgFBJE/edit>

#### D. Trees

The City of Ellsworth owes its location to the forested land on either side of the Union River—the remaining tracts of which are vital resources for our community. In recognition of that importance, the 2004 Comprehensive Plan recommended a rural forestry plan (p. II.35). Although that plan remains to be created, in 2010 the city partnered with Frenchman Bay Conservancy to establish Branch Lake Public Forest. That property currently makes important contributions to water-quality protection and recreational access. It could also provide a site for modeling low-impact forestry management in the context of a rural forestry plan.

**Recommendation L-21:** Develop a rural forestry plan that includes the promotion of low-impact forestry, the introduction of model low-impact forestry management at Branch Lake Public Forest, annual monitoring of timber harvests, and a review of current zoning and ordinances to ensure adequate protection of working woodlands as well as unmanaged forested natural areas and the habitats associated with them.

Our urban canopy has also had an important role in Ellsworth's past. From the early nineteenth century into the 1960s, the towering elms that lined our streets marked the character and public face of the community along access routes such as Bridge Hill, Upper Main Street, and High Street. In 1991 the city's Tree Ordinance was established in the wake of the prolonged decimation of these trees by Dutch elm disease. The ordinance called for the appointment of a nine-person Arbor Commission to support planting, maintaining, removing, and pruning city owned trees. The commission developed a planting plan, sought grant funding, and recruited citizen contributions toward the installation of 76 new trees.<sup>1</sup> However, there was no apparent plan for the trees' long-term care, and many did not survive. Furthermore, it appears that among the plantings were several Norway maples. People did not understand then that this species is extremely invasive, and the trees have now fostered a destructive infestation on Bridge Hill and elsewhere in the downtown core, as well as in natural areas farther away from the city streets.

It is unclear when the Arbor Commission ceased to be appointed, but the 2004 Comprehensive Plan called for "tree planting measures on High Street and urban forestry programs in other parts of the growth area" (p. II.35). Shortly after the plan was completed, a major upgrade of High Street—including the planting of street trees and landscaping—was undertaken. While on paper the intentions of this project were excellent—and something that today's citizens would strongly favor—the execution of the project and the lack of a strong maintenance plan resulted in failure. The choice of tree species, the poor quality of stock that was planted, the lack of adequate growing

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<sup>1</sup>Our thanks to the family of Helen Dudman, who chaired the commission, and to Ruth Foster for searching out relevant documents and details.

and maintenance space, and the absence of long-term tree care contributed to disappointing results and poor return on the investment of time and money. This and, more recently, a narrowly averted disaster with trees at Knowlton Park are good examples of why one of our earlier overarching recommendations (Recommendation L-4) addresses the need for the city to employ at least one staff member who has professional credentials and experience with respect to trees and landscaping.

Green planning participants expressed a strong desire for Ellsworth to have a serious urban forestry program that would provide for qualified care and attention for the existing canopy along streets and in public parks, as well as a program for further tree plantings along our streets and in public green spaces. They also noted that the loss of older, mature trees—whose impact on both water and air quality is exponentially greater than that of young, newly planted trees—seemed to count for nothing in the context of Planning Board review and contractor approaches to development. As noted in Section IV.D, we were fortunate to have university students, professional arborists, forestry experts, and tree enthusiasts come forward to contribute to this plan and to offer their volunteer services to help Ellsworth retrieve something of its treed past. Their support in creating surveys, recommended species lists, GIS-based plans, and lists of promising funding sources means that there is real potential to seriously address community concerns about the lack of street trees and the need for better care of the ones we do have.<sup>2</sup> Becoming a Tree City—as are several other towns and cities in our area—should be an objective for our community.<sup>3</sup>

**Recommendation L-22:** Revive the city’s nine-person Arbor Commission under the terms of the current Tree Ordinance (Chapter 43), and include certified arborists and licensed foresters qualified to develop and oversee substantial urban and rural forestry programs across the city.

**Recommendation L-23:** In order to inform an urban forestry program with canopy coverage goals and areas of focus, undertake a canopy coverage assessment and expand the street tree inventory to include all side streets and areas outside the downtown core.

**Recommendation L-24:** Develop and implement an urban forestry program that includes a regular schedule for improved maintenance of trees in all of Ellsworth’s existing green spaces; a street tree planting program, beginning with the failed plantings along High and Myrick Streets; and a plan to protect mature trees, regularly introduce new tree plantings in Ellsworth’s growth areas, and remove invasive species.

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<sup>2</sup>For the survey data, mapping, and projected visuals prepared as part of the College of the Atlantic study, see <https://drive.google.com/file/d/18-k2Sxyypa31AfWYayARmSUA9We5HpeXe/view>, pp. 130–153.

<sup>3</sup>The purpose of the Tree City USA program is “to celebrate the importance of an urban tree canopy and improve care of these vital city trees”; [www.arborday.org/programs/treecityusa/](http://www.arborday.org/programs/treecityusa/). Examples of Tree Cities recognized by this program in our area include Bangor, Camden, Castine, and Orono, as well as 16 other Maine cities. There is a similar Tree Cities of the World program: <https://treecitiesoftheworld.org/about.cfm>.

**Recommendation L-25:** In order to strengthen the urban tree planting program and reduce its cost, initiate a city tree farm on the Jordan Homestead property owned by Frenchman Bay Conservancy.