

The Garden City's tree doc

By **Eric Olson**/ Special To The Tab
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Urban trees have it rough, especially those growing in that no-mans-land between the sidewalk and the street. Yet by the reckoning of Marc Welch, Newton's new Tree Warden, regionally only Boston tops Newton in sheer number of trees to plant, tend, and ultimately remove and replace. Our thousands of curb-side trees and the narrow plot of grass and soil (the berm) they grow in are all City property. Most homeowners mow the berm and some even keep it bright with flowers, but what about those trees, who cares for them?

Officially that is the City's job. "The trouble is, we simply do not have the resources to routinely patrol the town spotting and removing problem trees" says Welch, a former City of Boston Arborist and President of the Mass Tree Wardens and Foresters Association. Still, as anyone who appreciates trees knows, there are some seriously ailing trees in Newton. If the City had sufficient resources, many of them would probably come down tomorrow, in time to be replaced during the fall tree planting season. Inspecting, cutting, and hauling off a dying tree, and then buying and planting a new one, cost a lot of money. So just how does the City prioritize within its limited tree budget?

The answer may come as a surprise - the City depends on residents to sound the alarm for a given tree. When a call comes in, Welch makes a visit to decide if the situation warrants immediate action. If he agrees its a goner - due to wounding, senescence or other cause - he alerts the private companies that the City works with for its tree care. Some 20 years ago the City maintained its own arborist crews, but those days are long-gone.

Since the City depends on resident calls, action on trees that need prompt removal is taken largely on a first-come first-served basis. A tree census might bring more order to this process, but Newton's trees were last surveyed in the early 1990's, and the results are long out-of-date. Welch hopes to organize a new census sometime in the next few years, for which he says college students will be trained and employed for a summer to survey the 300 miles of roads in Newton. That's a lot of trees to classify to species and health status. For sake of comparison, its about 260 miles from Newton to Philadelphia, Penn.



The author with a doomed Maple tree

Meanwhile healthy trees can be better kept that way by judicious pruning – for example, by trimming limbs that are growing towards the street and might be torn off someday by a passing truck. In addition to his inspector role, Welch organizes courses in tree care, and then oversees his graduates in weekend volunteer pruning fests. For information on courses, or to report a street tree doomed to die, call the City Parks and Recreation Department at 617-796-1500.

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