

Mr. Josh Krintzman

January 10, 2023

Program and Services Committee

Newton City Council

Dear Mr. Krintzman

I am writing to you as your committee is currently considering new regulations concerning the removal of trees from private property. As a Professor of Plant Ecology at Boston University and as a life-long Newton resident, I believe I can provide some insight into this discussion.

Your committee is already aware that trees provide many benefits to the people of Newton, including cooling shade in the summer, wind protection in the winter, cleaner air throughout the year, reduction in noise pollution, and a visually attractive setting for our city. Trees also provide habitat and food for birds and other wildlife.

A change in regulations that will require homeowners and other landowners to apply to the city before cutting down trees is a good idea. Trees take decades to grow, and the largest and oldest trees in Newton are well over a century old and perhaps even several centuries old. So while landowners can plant new trees to replace trees being cut down, it might take decades or even a century for the new trees to contribute the same benefits to the Newton environment as the trees that were cut down.

The importance of requiring landowners to apply to the city before cutting down trees also allows neighbors to become aware of the intention of the landowner and allows an opportunity for discussion among neighbors which might lead to some compromise solution. This waiting period is important as often the property boundaries are not clear, and the waiting period allows time for the position of a tree to be accurately determined. The waiting period prevents trees from being cut down without warning or permission that are growing on property boundaries or even on adjoining property. And such things do happen.

While a tree belongs to the landowner on whose property the trunk is growing, the effects of a tree can affect many properties around it. When a tree is cut down, it can cause the nearby properties to be hotter in summer and more exposed to wind in winter. So Newton residents do have a valid interest in the trees on their neighbor's property.

City regulations should be adapted that prevent the sudden and unexpected cutting down of trees, that slow down the process, and that allow discussion among neighbors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Robert B. Primack".

Richard Primack, 16 Stiles Terrace, Newton Centre

