



Newton Cemetery & Arboretum

A Beautiful Garden Cemetery Serving Greater Boston

October 14, 2022

VIA EMAIL

City of Newton, Programs & Services Committee
Attn: Councilor Jonathan Krintzman, Chair
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton Centre, MA 02459

RE: Proposed Tree Preservation Ordinance Revisions
Docket Items #411-22 & #412-22

Dear Councilor Krintzman,

We have reviewed the language in the Tree Preservation Ordinance proposals and offer the following comments, concerns, and our request for an exemption.

Since 1855, Newton Cemetery & Arboretum has been a crucial community organization, partnering with and contributing value to the City of Newton. We have been granted the right to function as a burial ground, with the primary purpose to provide grave space that meets the diverse needs of our multi-cultural, multi-faith community. As a private, non-profit organization, we also serve to meet Newton's obligations under [state law](#) requiring the city "to provide one or more suitable places for the interment of persons dying within its limits". In addition to cemetery services, we provide other significant benefits to the City as an historic site that is also a public park, one that is enjoyed by hundreds of visitors every day at no charge.

We are land-constrained but have an obligation to Newton and its residents who depend on us to provide a peaceful place of final repose that is well-maintained as an environmental jewel. As an active garden-style cemetery, we strive to ensure that our ongoing operations and horticultural best practices are upheld.

While the goals of the Ordinance are invaluable in an era of climate change, the current and proposed regulations do not account for our unique situation. We strive to maintain the health of our trees to an extent few others do. This is shown by our listing as a Level II Arboretum with the International [ArbNet](#) Arboretum Accreditation Program, a distinction granted by meeting rigorous criteria such as employing a staff of professional arborists, offering public educational programs, and maintaining an arboretum plan to ensure appropriate care of the tree canopy.

All the responsible practices that we follow are not accounted for under the Ordinance and our holistic, long-term approach to land stewardship should be recognized. The current and proposed Ordinance presents a hardship in creating the burial space required to strengthen our perpetual care endowment for long-term financial stability while maintaining an appropriate density of tree plantings. Finding the right balance of land for both grave plots and trees is not easily achieved, but with careful planning both can be accomplished.

Our success since 1855 substantiates our accomplishment. For more than 165 years across our diverse landscape we have implemented our responsible practices and will continue doing so indefinitely. Our Horticultural Master Plan (HMP) provides the framework for this achievement. As part of our plan to maintain the grounds with prudent horticultural practices, the HMP includes the objectives of increasing our tree canopy, improving species diversity, and expanding native plantings to ensure ongoing tree health and protection. Trees are but one aspect of a healthy natural environment. Shrubs, perennials, annuals, and grasses are continually planted and maintained on the grounds yet are not considered under the Ordinance. The diverse collection of *all* plants attracts a variety of pollinators, beneficial predators, birds, and other wildlife creating an active, balanced ecosystem.

While our HMP includes a sensible tree planting plan, the Ordinance discourages us from doing any plantings at any time unless they count towards the replacement requirements for tree removals. This disincentivizes us from following a responsible, tree planting program. Since the Ordinance is triggered only by removals, it compels us to do plantings in bulk, creating a less age-diverse canopy that is inconsistent with prudent arboretum management.

The business and mission of a non-profit cemetery also functioning as a public park and arboretum is complex. We welcome the opportunity to provide perspective and more detail on how the Newton Tree Preservation Ordinance negatively impacts our commitment to the prosperity of Newton's natural environment, so it is more clearly understood. We invite you to visit with us to discuss further.

Newton's only arboretum should be allowed to manage its canopy without being bound to a rigid Ordinance that does not consider the long-term plan for sensibly managing a living collection into perpetuity.

Therefore, we request that Newton Cemetery & Arboretum be exempt from the Tree Preservation Ordinance.

Respectfully submitted,

Newton Cemetery & Arboretum
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