

Tree Canopy Goal Township of Cranford, NJ

In 2005, the Township of Cranford issued a Community Forestry Management Plan covering the period ending December 31, 2011. The New Jersey Community Forestry Program approved this Plan on January 11, 2007. This was the second five-year Plan issued by the Township and approved by the Program.

In 2009, the Planning Board of the Township approved a new Master Plan. In the Introduction to the Conservation Plan Element of the Master Plan (“CE” or “Conservation Master Plan”), it notes that “Recognizing that Cranford Township is nearly fully developed with few remaining undeveloped parcels, the natural resource conditions have been altered to suit a community of 4.8 square miles with a population of 22,478 people. New development is anticipated in the form of scattered residential infill development and redevelopment of the Township’s Downtown and non-residential areas. Despite this level of suburbanization, Cranford’s conservation planning is critical to the long-term quality of life provided to its residents.”

One of the goals in the Conservation Goals section of the CE is to promote tree conservation. It states, “The established urban forest in Cranford is important to the Township’s identity and environmental health, in addition to providing habitat for local species. Trees protect water and air quality, control flooding, and reduce stormwater runoff and erosion. They absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen into the atmosphere. They reduce greenhouse gas emissions, especially carbon dioxide, and they help control global warming.

“Trees are important to urban and suburban areas... Planting or preserving trees in strategic locations can reduce energy demand in buildings and heating and cooling costs. Trees are beneficial for stormwater management, for controlling erosion, and for masking urban noise. Trees can mitigate the adverse impacts of the urban heat island effect. When planted in parking lots and streets, trees are effective in cooling and beautifying the urban and suburban environment.

“The clear cutting of sites to prepare a development site has substantially adverse environmental impacts. To conserve its forests and trees, this Conservation Master Plan recommends the enactment of development design standards and requirements to effectively conserve the Township’s tree resources and mitigate their loss to development. While the Township has a “tree save” ordinance in place, additional consideration should be given to protecting and retaining specimen trees or tree stands as part of a tree-save plan and limitations on clear-cutting. These recommendations should be implemented and coordinated with recommendations within the 2005 Community Forestry Management Plan.”

In light of the above, the Township Committee was in full agreement that trees are an important part of what makes Cranford an attractive community. Trees provide clean air, shade, wildlife habitat, beauty and enhance property values. While the town does have a

tree protection ordinance for residential and commercial development projects, there was no process to replace trees removed by homeowners. Based on a recommendation of the Cranford Environmental Commission, the Township Committee passed a resolution adopting a No Net Loss of Trees policy to address this gap in Cranford's tree protection efforts.

Under the policy, Cranford homeowners retain the right to remove a tree on their property for any reason, whether it be due to disease or a matter of personal preference. This policy does not require any permits, approvals, or fees and is completely voluntary. Homeowners wishing to see a tree replaced as a street tree or elsewhere in town can contact the Chairman of the Cranford Tree Advisory Board or the Cranford Recreation Department and arrangements will be made to replace the tree.

The purpose of the Tree Advisory Board is to provide advice and suggestions for regulations regarding the protection of trees and shrubbery upon public lands, easements, and rights-of-way in the Township of Cranford and, upon request of the private-property owner, the Board may provide advice regarding care, removal, trimming or other questions regarding trees on private property.

In connection with its efforts to obtain certification by the Sustainable Jersey program, the Cranford Green Team decided to develop a community Tree Canopy goal. The Green Team and the Environmental Commission asked Dr. Daniela Shebitz and Dr. John Dobosiewicz of Kean University to identify the Township's current canopy coverage. Using data based on 2002 Land Use/ Land Cover provided by NJ DEP GIS, Dr. Dobosiewicz determined that the forest canopy coverage is 8.7 percent of the total acreage of the Township.

In light of the fact noted above that the Township is nearly fully developed and based on the Township's commitment to trees as embodied in the Community Forestry Plan, the CE, and the No Net Loss of Trees policy and support by the Tree Advisory Board and the Township's Department of Public Works, it was decided that it is paramount to set a goal to maintain the current tree canopy coverage and to work to increase such coverage over time with plantings of tree streets and with riparian plantings along the Rahway River.