

Bowdoinham Municipal Tree Plan Sub-Committee Update to Select Board, July 2026

Overview:

- The Bowdoinham Municipal Tree Planning Sub-Committee (MTPSC) was established in response to a three-part speaker series about trees organized by the Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC) for citizens in January of 2025, as well as in response to citizens' concerns over the removal of "community trees" on town properties.

- A presentation was made by the CPC to the Select Board in March of 2025 to request the creation of a committee to develop a plan for Municipal Trees that would oversee the long-term care and management of Bowdoinham's municipal trees. The request for a planning committee was approved by the Select Board as a sub-committee of the Comprehensive Planning Committee.

- A group of seven citizens volunteered to be members of a Municipal Tree Planning Sub-Committee and began meeting in May of 2025, once a month, with a year-long commitment. MTPSC was not staffed.

- The MTPSC has provided updates to the CPC, and presented two versions of a tree care plan to the CPC in the winter/spring of 2026, including a proposal to include the Tree Care Plan in the CPC's Open Space Plan (a proposal rejected by the CPC). The attached document is a third version of our proposed plan.

- The MTPSC missed the deadline to place a Municipal Tree Plan at the 2026 Town Meeting, although the MTPSC has conducted a limited amount of community education to vet the plan and build interest and support. There are plans in the works to do more community outreach.

Going Forward:

- The Municipal Tree Plan Sub-Committee intends to finalize a Tree Plan proposal to be ready for citizens' approval at the 2027 Town Meeting.

- If the Select Board approves this current document, the MTPSC will begin the process of reaching out to citizens to share information and gather feedback about the formation of a Municipal Tree Committee.

- Preliminary plans for Outreach include notifications in the Town Newsletter, the Bowdoinhammer, Facebook, and the Town website; a table at Celebrate Bowdoinham; a survey to gather community concerns and interests; and a public hearing or other public input session as appropriate.

- A final plan, based on public and Select Board feedback, will be submitted to the Select Board in time for inclusion on the 2027 town warrant

Bowdoinham Tree Planning Sub-Committee Plan Focus on Village District I

Introduction:

- This initial Bowdoinham Tree Plan provides general guidance for care and maintenance of trees for Bowdoinham's municipal-owned and managed properties and rights-of-way, the majority of which are found within Village District I, as well as the cemeteries within town boundaries.

- This Plan relies on current best practice strategies for tree care and management, with the understanding that best practice may change over time. To be in line with best practice as it may evolve, the plan recommends several state, federal and professional tree-care sites for reference, found at the end of this document.

- This initial planning process and report provide the steps needed to create a fully functioning Tree Care and Maintenance Plan. During the year-long planning, basic definitions, directions, and intentions were identified. A fully articulated Tree Care and Maintenance Plan will require additional resources and input (for example, a tree survey).

Recommendation:

- The Tree Plan Committee strongly recommends the development of a standing, staffed, Tree Advisory Committee to adopt and implement the essential purposes and activities of this Plan, or the assignment of the Tree Plan to a related, currently active, staffed municipal committee.
- The goal is to act as a resource, and as an advisory committee for the town's municipal trees.

Plan Elements:

1. Assessment
2. Create Implementable Plan: Care, Removal, Replacement, and Planting, including cemeteries
3. Resources Needed
4. Communications
5. Thoughts on Committee Structure and Scope
6. Definitions
7. Resources

1 - Assessment:

- A. Identify, Assess, Document Municipal Trees in Village District I
 - i. Conduct a survey to assess and document the town's municipal trees in Village District 1; Maily Park; Riverfront Park; and in town-owned cemeteries.
- B. Identify Heritage and Community Trees
- C. Identify trees that may be safety risks
- D. Identify trees that may be diseased and/or infested

- E. Surveying and assessing methodology will be extrapolated to outlying municipal properties and rights-of-way after completion of Phase One.
- F. Assessment may involve student/intern volunteers, committee members, Public Works, and professionals (in particular, as related to health, disease, and insect infestations).

2 - Create Plan: Care, Removal, Replacement, Planting:

- A. Collaborate with Public Works and Cemetery Advisory Committee to create a specific plan with a focus on Best Practices, that includes -
- B. Tree Care: pruning, watering, mulching, fertilizing, disease and insect identification and treatment.
- C. Removal: based on tree health and public safety considerations
- D. Replacement/replanting/new planting of trees informed by available native species and the specific characteristics identified that best fit the location and purpose and serve the town and its people.
- E. Annual or Bi-Annual Maintenance Plan implementation goals will be identified and updated with input from Public Works, the Cemetery Advisory Committee, professionals (as needed), and the Tree Committee.
- F. Cemetery Guidelines:
 - i. Planting Trees:

Trees should not be planted within a 50 foot distance of any current or foreseeable cemetery stone placements. At best trees and shrubs may be contemplated as peripheral decorative elements following the 50 foot rule. Trees have far reaching root systems and pose the danger of falling branches harming stones. They also spread leaf litter debris, and their shade may cause moss/lichen growth on stones which the tree overhangs.
 - ii. Assessing Trees for Overall Health:

Existing trees should be evaluated for longevity anticipation and overall health. Overhanging branches may be pruned and life-prolonging measures may be taken if overall tree health warrants preservation and there are resources to support these activities. Assessment of disease and/or insect infestation and related actions should align with town-wide policies and actions.
 - iii. Tree Removal:

The Bowdoinham Cemetery Advisory Committee (BCAC) should review and approve the removal of any tree in advance of action.

3. Resources Needed:

- A. Arborist Services: The Committee should work to identify funding for occasional arborist services for professional assessment, best practice guidance, and/or professional tree work.
- B. Thoughts on funding/resources: Cemetery budget, public works budget, grants
- C. Tasks/expenses not currently included in the Public Works or Cemetery Budgets, such as periodic assessment updates, maintenance efforts, and insect and disease remediation, may require external or additional funding sources.

4. Communication Protocols established and implemented by the Tree Committee:

- A.. Establish consistent and two-way communication protocols between the Tree Committee and the Town Manager, Select Board, Public Works, the Cemetery Advisory Committee, community members, and other relevant stakeholders concerning tree maintenance and management.
- B. Research, communicate and implement Best Practice and cost-effective strategies for pruning, removing, replanting, purchasing, and planting new trees.
- C. Provide opportunities for community members to report and/or address tree questions and concerns.
- D. Communicate with the Maine Forest Service and other relevant groups to gather and share information regarding prevalent tree pests and diseases and report those findings back to the town.
- E. Maintain and share an up-to-date list of tree care resources easily available to citizens and relevant town departments.
- F. Periodically present tree care information and/or educational programs through workshops and/or other public events.

5. Thoughts on Committee Structure:

- A. Membership term to be 3 years, initially staggered by 1, 2, 3 years
- B. Leaders: committee elects a chair person, vice chair, and secretary with usual duties
- C. Meetings: Committee shall meet on such a schedule and at such dates as it shall deem necessary and expedient, but not less frequently than quarterly.

6. Key Definitions:

Municipal Tree: Any tree that stands on municipal property or rights-of-way, or within a cemetery.

Heritage Tree and/or Community Tree: Any tree, which because of age, size, species, historical significance, community significance, or prominent location warrants increased attention and care. Heritage and Community trees are generally defined by members of a community and need identification and periodic review.

Best Practice:

- Timely monitoring of municipal trees for structural health, longevity, and evidence of disease or insect infestation.
- Consultation with an arborist or other tree specialist as needed.
- Tree removal based on the health of the tree, or to protect public safety.
- Replanting and/or new planting emphasizing native trees that fit the natural conditions for planting, growth and health; the public location and its use; related considerations for size, maintenance, and overall sustainability.
- Attention to pruning, watering, mulching, fertilizing, disease and insect identification and treatment as needed.

7. Resources:

- Maine Forest Service (part of Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry): 207 287 2431 and 207 287 2791; www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs; foresthealth@maine.gov
- Project Canopy (Maine Urban and Community Forestry Program):
https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/policy_management/project_canopy/index.html
- USDA Forest Service: 800-832-1355; sm.fs.webmaster@usda.gov; www.fs.usda.gov
- Urban Forestry Roadmap - Vibrant Cities Lab:
www.vibrantcitieslab.org/urban-forestry-roadmap
- Arbor Day Foundation: 211 N. 12th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508; 888-448-7337;
www.arborday.org