Historic and culturally significant shade trees

Historic trees in the right-of-way are distinctly older and usually larger than surrounding trees.

They may have been intentionally planted by a community or private landowner. Often consistently spaced along a roadside, historic trees can be surrounded by mowed grass, herbaceous cover, bare soil, or a forest of young trees, shrubs, and edge species. Young trees planted by a municipality in town centers or in other public places may also be considered culturally significant, one day growing into historic shade trees themselves.

Identifying the presence and health of historic trees along town roads tells us:

- where roads may have a culturally important history.
- where large trees may be in decline and pose a safety risk to road users.
- where people may already be accustomed to seeing tree canopy over the road and value its presence.

Recommendations

Note culturally important historic and shade trees on a map and explain their relevance. The tree warden, tree board, conservation commission, or other community members can identify these trees or landscapes.[1]

Evaluate the health of the historic trees during a yearly road survey conducted jointly by the tree warden and theroad foreman. Record observations on paper, with a GPS-enabled device, or by flagging trees that need maintenance or require removal. Create a reasonable plan to address pruning or removal of risk trees, understanding the budgetary and equipment constraints of the town.

If the historic tree is in the utility company right-of-way, **contact the utility company to learn more about the pruning and clearing rotation** along this road

Historic sugar maple trees line this rural road. The age and location of the trees are culturally and ecologically important, yet their declining condition may create risk for road users.

ABOVE LEFT *The next generation of historic and culturally important trees are already planted on this residential road. Like urban street trees, these trees should be protected from damage from mowers or weedwhackers, watered (particularly when young), and pruned to support vigorous and long-lasting canopy that does not interfere with the traveled road.*

ABOVE RIGHT *Locals know these ash trees as cultural markers in the landscape. Towns can identify any historic or culturally important roadside trees in need of pruning, treatment, or protection, and create a budget for their care.*

and advise them of any considerations from the town, such as the desire to cable, brace, or prune this tree or treat it with pesticides to ensure its longevity.

Review tree care best practices, including pruning.[2] Make sure that your road crew, contracted mowers, and contracted tree care specialists understand these best practices, too. Find out if neighboring landowners want any wood resulting from pruning or tree removal.

Consider thinning trees and shrubs around healthy young trees to promote regeneration and to select for the next generation of tree canopy. If trees are in decline, identify the best young tree species present that can grow into the future roadside canopy. Selectively thin competing trees or shrubs.

Plant[3] new trees between existing historic trees, particularly along roadsides without emerging forest. Sometimes called *interplanting*, this technique will grow a new generation of intentionally managed and culturally significant trees. Work with your tree warden to plan plantings in your community.

Resources

1. Vermont Forests, Parks & Recreation, *Stonewalls & Cellarholes: A Guide for Landowners on Historic Features and Landscapes in Vermont's Forests* (1994), **bit.ly/StonewallsAndCellarholes**.

2. "Pruning," Vermont Urban & Community Forestry, **bit.ly/VTUCF_Pruning**.

3. Vermont Urban & Community Forestry, *Protecting the Investment: Tree Planting and Establishment*, **bit.ly/VTUCF_TreePlanting**.