

Know your partners and understand their goals

Partnerships between town officials, municipal staff, utility companies, and individual volunteers form the backbone of municipal rural road stewardship. Understanding the many groups involved in right-of-way tree care and vegetation management will maximize the expertise available to the town and encourage partnerships when problems arise.



Tree Warden

Each Vermont town is required by state law to designate a tree warden, who makes decisions regarding the care, protection, and removal of municipally owned and managed trees. Many tree wardens are trained arborists, foresters, or natural resource professionals who take on the role of the tree warden as a volunteer. Others are already municipal employees within public works departments, parks departments, or highway departments. Learn more about [Vermont's tree wardens](#)¹ or read the [Vermont Tree Warden Statutes](#),² which outline the position's duties in full.

Road Commissioner, Road Foreman, Road Crew

Road crews in Vermont are managed by a road foreman who oversees all municipal highway (road) operations. Additionally, some towns also employ an elected or appointed road commissioner who reports to the town selectboard on the progress,

needs, and requests of the road crew. Road commissioners and road foremen ultimately carry out the directives of the selectboard but are often asked to use their professional judgement to complete a job. Road crews are responsible for the safe passage of motorists on all municipal roads and bridges and some state roads; by default, road crews often take on tree or brush clearing or other tree care duties when no other tree care professional has been hired. Understand the expectations and expertise of your town's road crew as it pertains to tree care, brush hogging, mowing, and invasive plant mitigation.

Selectboard and Town Staff

The selectboard of a town has supervisory powers over town matters not carried out by officers. Included in these responsibilities is its authority to appoint a road foreman or road commissioner and approve expenditures that build, maintain, and discontinue municipal roads. Additionally, the selectboard must appoint a town tree warden, who is not a member of the selectboard itself. Learn more about the duties of selectboards with regards to town highways as outlined fully in [V.S.A. Title 19 §](#)

1. "Vermont Tree Wardens," Vermont Urban & Community Forestry, bit.ly/VTUCF_TreeWardens.

2. Vermont Tree Warden Statutes, V.S.A. Title 24 § 2502–§ 2512, bit.ly/VT_TreeWardenStatutes.

304³ and described in the [Handbook for Vermont Selectboards](#)⁴ published by the Vermont League of Cities & Towns. Other town staff, including the town manager or administrator, often play an active role in town highway goals and facilitating funding requirements.

Utility Companies

Many Vermont towns are serviced by multiple utility companies, some of which partner with communication companies. Review the vegetation management plans of your local utility companies and understand their approach to clearing rotations, desirable and undesirable tree species, control of invasive plants, and ash tree management in response to emerald ash borer. Additionally, note if your town has provided any guidance about the work of utility companies with regard to the scenic quality and land values outlined in the town plan. Legislation surrounding the responsibilities of utility companies as they pertain to public roads and publicly managed trees is outlined in [V.S.A. Title 30 § 2506](#).⁵

Conservation Commission

A conservation commission acts as an advisory council to the selectboard regarding natural resource planning and management. Tree care and vegetation management in public ways and places are often addressed by conservation commission members. They may also manage grant money that funds management of town lands that have environmental, cultural, or scenic importance.

Tree Board or Committee

Some towns choose to create a tree board that is separate from the conservation commission. Tree board missions vary by town but all generally strive to promote public health and welfare by preserving, planting, and maintaining healthy

community trees. The duties of a tree board are outlined specifically in a city or town's code of ordinances and more broadly in [V.S.A. Title 24 Chapter 67: Parks And Shade Trees](#).⁶

Regional Planning Commissions and Municipal Planning Commissions

Every Vermont town is served by one of 11 regional planning commissions (RPCs) that link local, state, and federal government programs. RPCs have federal and state statutory responsibilities in many areas of governance including in transportation issues, environmental regulations, land use planning, and economic development. Pertaining to road maintenance, RPCs aid towns with road erosion inventories, help secure funding through the Municipal Grant in Aid Program to implement best management practices that reduce erosion on roads, provide mapping expertise for natural resource inventories, and work in concert with municipal planning commissions to include language regarding public tree care and forest integrity in updated town plans. Contact the [Vermont Association of Planning & Development Agencies](#)⁷ to learn more about your town's RPC.

Citizen Scientists and Other Volunteers

Enthusiastic and knowledgeable town volunteers may inform a community's management of trees and other vegetation through donated time and expertise. Citizen scientists use digital platforms or paper maps to log the presence of native and non-native species, including their phenology (seasonal changes) and spread or disappearance in town. Other volunteers plant trees, pull invasive plants, clean up roadsides, and apply for grant funding to help a town further its mission to grow healthy trees and resilient roadside vegetation.

3. Town Highways, V.S.A. Title 19 § 301–§ 318, [bit.ly/Statutes_TownHighways](#).

4. Vermont League of Cities and Towns, *Handbook for Vermont Selectboards* (2011), [bit.ly/VLCT_SelectboardHandbook](#).

5. Telecommunications and Electric Wires And Poles Along Highways, Railroad Tracks, And Cemeteries; Transportation Board and Selectboard Role, V.S.A. Title 30 § 2501–§ 2530, [bit.ly/Statutes_UilitiesAndTrees](#).

6. Parks and Shade Trees, V.S.A. Title 24 § 2501–§ 2512, [bit.ly/Statutes_ParksAndShadeTrees](#).

7. "Resources," Vermont Association of Planning & Development Agencies (VAPDA), [vapda.org/resources](#).