



Shade Tree Advisory Committee (STAC) *Annual Report 2003*

Community Forestry Program Administration

In Highland Park, the Shade Tree Advisory Committee (STAC) is renewed annually by Borough Council authorization resolution. This was passed in January 2004, authorizing up to 15 members. Two additional ordinances affirmed roles for STAC in reviewing tree plantings and reports on tree issues by borough officials.

STAC continues its role as an advisor to Borough administration on planting matters and on the goals of the Community Forestry Management Plan. STAC continues to pursue grant applications.

Training and Professional Development

An important milestone from our Community Forestry Management Plan was met this year when a *second* DPW employee received core training and CEU's. This gives our regular DPW "tree person" a trained assistant (one of the requests in our Management Plan).

Highland Park continues to qualify as keeping up its core-training and CEU acquisition during 2003. In addition to the two DPW employees attending the Shade Tree Federation conference, two STAC volunteers (who are landscape or planning professionals) attended various workshops and courses offered by other organizations.

Public Education/Awareness/Outreach

Highland Park Environmental Web Site (www.leoraw.com/hpenv/). The site (joint with the Environmental Commission) grew as we found additional contributors of photographs and bird sightings and posted a stream of news, photos, and discussion. This site won a 2002 award from ANJEC.

Street Fair. STAC made an important new effort, a plant sale, in connection with Highland Park's annual Street Fair in April. Plants brought on consignment from several nurseries were sold, raising over \$2000 for our Tree Fund. Birdhouses made by local children were also sold. As important as the money raised was the extra visibility our Street Fair table gained by having this massive green presence behind us as we distributed literature, answered citizen inquiries, and signed up potential volunteers.

Public Library Information File. In conjunction with the Environmental Commission, STAC continues to place handouts similar to those distributed at the street fair in the "Environmental Information" drawer at the library's Reference Department. This makes them permanently available for citizens to consult on such topics as environmentally safe landscape management, methods of tree planting, native plants, etc.

Statement of Tree Budget

Despite recent cuts in state aid to municipalities, our tree share of the budget continues to meet Tree City USA standards.

Plan Implementation

Major activities of 2003 included tree planting and maintenance as envisioned in the plan, but also a leading role in a new project since the Management Plan was written. This is the borough's Environmental Education Centers project, a boroughwide natural-area rehabilitation at certain points along the Raritan River led jointly by officers of STAC and the Environmental Commission. This new extension of STAC's community role adds new goals to the Management Plan, while some of the old goals will proceed somewhat slower than originally hoped. The following list shows these new activities, followed by original goals for specific years as stated in the plan:

- *2003-4: Environmental Education Center*. In 2003 we finally settled on design of a building and natural-area rehabilitation at the 3-acre expanded Native Plant Reserve between River Road and the Raritan. Some grant support is still needed, but construction is expected to begin Summer 2005. A formal groundbreaking (tree planting ceremony) was held April 22, 2003, with representatives of DEP, the State Assembly, and County Freeholders present.
- *2003-4: Trail to Donaldson Park*. This is a smaller site (on the opposite end of town from the Environmental Center) in the same boroughwide Environmental Education Centers project. The reconstructed trail is now half completed (end of 2003) and will be finished spring 2004 under a Recreational Trails Grant. This universal-

access trail and signed nature trail with native plantings runs from the Southside Bikeway (where STAC previously designed native plantings) to Donaldson Park.

- *2001-2003 Special Street Tree Pruning.* The Management Plan goal of greatest urgency is pruning. This is in addition to those actual hazard trees identified during the original inventory of the mid-1990s, which were already removed as the inventory progressed. The stated pruning goal, then, was to prune by 2003 the 289 trees identified as likely to need such care in the next few years, that is, now. In 2003 we were able (in addition to regular pruning from the borough budget) to seek out many such trees and prune them through a 2002 CSIP Tree Maintenance grant and other funding. The number of trees pruned was 49 under CSIP grant, 83 by DPW staff; and 63 by borough contract with CMF Inc. (certified tree expert Gary Lovallo).
- *2004 Planting Grant.* In 2003, STAC obtained a Middlesex County Urban Forestry Streetscape Planting Grant of just under \$10,000 for planting during 2004.
- *2001-2003 Centralization of Tree Work and Use of Inventory.* The borough is step-by-step centering all tree operations in DPW (with advice from STAC) as stated in the goal for this period. For 2003 the major improvement is assignment of a core-trained DPW employee as project supervisor for contracted plantings and prunings, inspecting work as it progresses. Routine work is performed directly by the DPW arborist (and now with a core-trained assistant); work requiring specialized equipment or training is contracted out. The related goal of training DPW staff in inventory use (originally for 2001) may wait until the inventory is next updated (on the principle that it is best to learn on fresh data). One STAC volunteer can, however, run inventory queries as needed, and did so in 2003 for identifying older trees for pruning.
- *2001-2003: Recommended Ordinance Changes.* Two new tree-related ordinances were passed by Borough Council in 2003. One regulates plantings and tree work citizens undertake in right of way at their homes, and the other gives STAC a review of tree-related reports by the borough engineer or hired tree expert. STAC is still looking at specific changes for other ordinances, which are likely to come over the next two years as part of the borough's revision of zoning and land use ordinances following on the Master Plan adopted in 2003.
- *Annual: Native Plant Reserve.* STAC continues to tend the Reserve on River Road while awaiting the 2004 replantings that will occur during construction of the new Environmental/Outdoor Learning Center in the south part of the Reserve. Invasives remain a problem, but we have a new chance for greater removals. We arranged for the first time with the Middlesex County Parks and Roads departments for help spring 2004 removing invasive Japanese knotweed before construction of the new environmental center.
- *Annual: Site Plan Reviews.* STAC was asked to review planting plans for the Parker Homes and other projects and suggested alternative species to avoid planting invasives.
- *Annual: Tree City.* A Tree City application was again filed in 2003. A tree planting around Arbor Day was part of the April 22 groundbreaking for the Environmental Education Center at the Native Plant Reserve.

Community Stewardship Incentive Program

The following CSIP grants have been awarded:

- 2000 Street Tree Planting Grant. Planting was completed in Spring 2002 of 101 street trees.
- 2002 Tree Maintenance Grant (Award letter dated December 18, 2001). Pruning was completed in 2003 of 49 trees under this grant (plus others during the year, using borough funds).

An additional CSIP grant application was submitted in 2002 to continue tree maintenance work, under the title "Street Tree Pruning of Mature Trees on Inventory (Stage Two). We understand that state funding was not available during 2003. The Borough continued as much of the work as possible under the local budget.