

The meeting of the Public Health Safety and Public Works Committee focused on the complex issue of sidewalk safety and tree preservation in Winthrop. The committee discussed the historical context of street trees, current challenges such as tree roots affecting sewer laterals and trees obstructing sidewalks, and the need for a balanced policy that considers both tree preservation and property development. Members shared experiences and concerns about the difficulties in governing and paying for tree removal, the importance of trees that are needed to create a healthy infrastructure, and the importance of maintaining accessibility for pedestrians, especially regarding ADA compliance. Comparisons were made with ordinances from other towns like Newton and Somerville, highlighting different approaches to tree removal, replacement, and mitigation fees. The costs associated with tree removal and replacement were discussed, as well as the challenges of relocating trees. The committee also touched on the need for a comprehensive tree policy including private trees, the role of the tree warden, and the importance of integrating tree management into broader sidewalk, infrastructure and development planning. The financial constraints and the need for prioritizing projects within the capital budget were acknowledged as significant factors in addressing these issues. Draft ordinance (Tree Preservation and Sidewalk Policy) has been sent to Cipelletta for his input. Once Cipelletta reviews and returns it, the Committee will meet again, review and determine whether they endorse it, before sending it to Council. The court decision regarding the Somerset tree was briefly discussed, noting that DPW needs to rectify the sidewalk issue by the end of the year, but tree removal was not required.