

Village of Perry Tree Board Survey Summary

Each of us who were invited to be on the Village Tree Board received the appointment with enthusiasm. Our first meetings included excited conversations about trees we remember in the village, special trees we currently have on our street terraces and in our yards, and beautiful tree-lined streets we have seen in the area and on faraway travel. We also started our task with determination to face the tree issues of the village, such as key-holed trees for power lines, sidewalk damage, and vacant street-sides where trees used to be. But quickly we realized the job was more complex than just advocating to protect current trees. Should the village remove a huge deformed but healthy Y-shaped tree if it is providing much more shade, noise damping, and wildlife refuge than a small ornamental under the power line? Should we aim for that uniform tree-lined avenue look if it means a lot of cutting and replanting, or should we aim our efforts at filling gaps? Should the village take a more autocratic hand in managing the right-of-way, or primarily execute preferences expressed by individual property owners? Is our job primarily to implement regulations or to manage our "urban forest?" Will we be working with village tax money or grants?

Foreseeing potential controversies not only in the public arena as we navigate these complexities, but also experiencing our own mixed feelings as we explored our mandate, we decided to enlist the help of village residents in the form of a survey. We hoped it would give population-based affirmation for the direction we thought the Village Board had created us to take, and we hoped it would give us a sense of priorities in making complex choices for the benefit of village residents, businesses, and the environment itself. Our initial research gave us confidence that more trees would be better for business and make Perry a better, more beautiful place to live, but did our fellow citizens agree?

Compared to other surveys, we had a good response. Written surveys and a link to the web version went out with water bills, and 273 responses were returned. Results were quite consistent across age groups. We feel validated in our formation as a board since less than a quarter disagreed with our formation, and most would like a Tree Board to develop a replanting program for our gateway streets and vacant properties. A majority of residents strongly agree that the village should be responsible for replacing removed trees, and more than half would like homeowners to be able to request the variety of tree replanted in front of their property and would like to be provided information on tree planting and care.

Comments were the most fun to read. There are plenty of problems with street trees: walnuts fall on children's heads, roots interfere with water and gas lines, leaves blow all over and plug catch basins, power lines are threatened, crabapples make a mess, and sidewalks are eroded (but one contributor noted that trees are more important than sidewalks since no one uses the sidewalks). In spite of these, the survey still, on the whole, expressed our appreciation of trees as a community and our desire for more.

Which is the bigger perceived value of trees in our community: beauty or business? Three quarters of respondents strongly agree that an appearance of a community is enhanced by shade and street trees. Less than half strongly agree that trees in business areas help attract customers, so we see room for a public education effort.

How do we perceive our current village forest? It is not "too old," but "lacks variety" and is "poorly pruned." One curious result: a bare majority (51%) say "No, we don't have *too few* trees" but almost all (95%) say "No, we don't have *too many* trees." We think that means "More trees would be better." We wanted to know what kinds of trees people would prefer that we plant and got many specific variety suggestions. Flowering trees had many fans (including bees), but so did traditional large trees, evergreens, and trees with interesting bark or fall color. Most respondents think the village would be enhanced by both a *greater variety* of trees, as well as *more uniformity* in tree types. Hmm. We do hope to have some more uniformly planted streets, but there was a small preference for the increased variety option, which we have integrated into our plans. Another preference, though easier said than done, is that 85% think that a large deformed tree from power-line trimming should be replaced with a small tree rather than be preserved.

Tree events all garnered support, including a fall color or a spring flowering tree festival, but the strongest support was for tree planting during Clean Sweep (which we have already started this year), and also for public Christmas tree decoration. 71% support becoming a Tree City USA to help attract grants.

Thank you to all who returned their surveys. Knowing that we can't please everyone, can't afford all we'd like to do, can't deny that trees take care and cleanup, and can't fix everything at once, we are reassured to see the strong support of the village for investing in the future of our village forest.