



Although trees abound throughout the downtown neighborhoods, Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury have the greatest tree canopy according to a recent report by the City of Boston. The two neighborhoods have 43% and 41% respectively, which is above the city average of 27%.

The areas with the least coverage are under 10%. They are South Boston and East Boston.

The tree canopy coverage of downtown neighborhoods ranks Back Bay and Beacon Hill at around 19% coverage, the South End at around 17% coverage and Fenway at around 16% coverage. To increase and preserve the amount of 'tree canopies' throughout the city, Mayor Michelle Wu announced the creation of a new Forestry Division.

Alongside the Forestry Division the administration published an Urban Forest Plan (UFP).

The creation of the Forestry Division will increase the number of city employees with tree preservation as their main work focus from five people to 16. In addition to an assessment of the city's trees, the UFP includes suggested improvements to the ways the trees are taken care of and how they are equitably spread throughout the city.

Prior to this initiative the city's focus on tree preservation and planting was severely lacking and mostly left up to the devices of locally established volunteer groups, such as the Garden Club of Back Bay, according to Margaret Pokorny, chair of the Commonwealth Avenue Mall Committee.

"It's really important to get these sorts of bare- naked neighborhoods with trees because the trees are not only aesthetically pleasing but they are also very important in controlling the heat island effects," Pokorny said.

In addition to mitigating intense heat in the urban setting, tree canopies also aid in overall air quality, help to reduce the severity of flooding and aid with biodiversity.

Responsibilities of the Forestry Division as dictated by the UFP will include planting new trees throughout the city, specifically the neighborhoods with the lowest tree coverage, as well as maintaining the health of pre-existing trees through inspection and maintenance. "It will be a huge change in how the Parks Department relates to the urban tree canopy because up until now the Parks Department has had a yearly tree planting budget, but they don't really have a very big budget or very big staff to do routine maintenance," said Pokorny. "Unless there is some neighborhood support it is very hard to ensure the ongoing health of the newly planted trees."

Pokorny noted that the presence of such groups is less common in lower-income neighborhoods.

Mayor Wu commented, "Dedicating staff and resources to our new Forestry Division will empower the City of Boston to strengthen our tree canopy citywide so every community benefits from these treasured resources."

From: <https://read.thebostonguardian.com/the-boston-guardian;see-2022/10/07;c-4030093>