

Colts Neck Town Hall Arboretum

Through the volunteer efforts of the Colts Neck Shade Tree Commission, Colts Neck Township now has a nationally recognized and certified class one Arboretum.

The Colts Neck Town Hall Arboretum occupies about 20 acres of the 45 acres surrounding the Colts Neck municipal complex, principally the area between the library, town hall and the lake. It is bounded by Winthrop Road and Cedar Drive. A well-marked, virtually flat walking path provides easy access to all parts of the Arboretum from adjacent parking-

A satellite map of the Arboretum shows roads and buildings, and the specific trees and is overlaid with information providing the botanical or scientific name, the common name, and the exact location of each of the 48 named trees in the Arboretum. The map is displayed outside the lower entrance to the town library. A second similar map is hung in the library proper. In the library are letter-sized copies of the map that are available for personal use while walking through the Arboretum. The map is also published on the township website. The trees are a mix of trees common to our area such as Black Oak, Horse Chestnut and willow; specimen trees such as the Weeping Purple Beech and Dawn Redwood; trees commonly used in local landscaping such as apple, cherry, magnolia, and dogwood; and more unusual trees such as Hinoki False Cypress, purple smoke tree, Ginkgo, Nine Bark, and Japanese Pagoda (or Scholar) tree. Thus, the trees in the Arboretum provide an opportunity to learn about trees found commonly in the Northeast, and provide insight in preparing a home landscape design by seeing specimens of fully grown trees (as opposed to the potted specimens purchased in the local nursery).

The Arboretum is dedicated to education, which extends beyond the grounds of the Arboretum itself. This year, for example, for Arbor Day, the Scouts planted a Kousa Dogwood and an Eastern Nine Bark in the Arboretum. The Arboretum contributes to Colts Neck's designation as a Tree City. This spring, the New Jersey State Forestry Commission made available 1200 seedlings of various types which were distributed by Shade Tree Commission members to the citizens of Colts Neck along with instructions for proper tree planting and nourishing techniques.

The idea for an Arboretum grew originally from an Eagle Scout project by Alec Bernstein in 2005. Trees were identified by the township's landscape architect, Julie McGowan, and converted to a schematic map, which was then posted on the walking trail that surrounds the town hall complex. Additional trees were added between town hall and the police headquarters as part of the 9/11 Memorial, and for Arbor Days. Unfortunately, lack of maintenance and oversight resulted in accumulating damage to the trees. Over the years, trees grew and trees died as trees do. Invasive species such as grape vine, poison ivy, Virginia creeper, honeysuckle, chokeberry, bittersweet, and climbing multiflora rose also

grew. Many of the trees were seriously damaged or smothered as a result. When lost through disease, damage or neglect, a full-grown tree can take decades to replace. To combat this situation, the Shade Tree Commission has undertaken a restoration of the Arboretum. Restoration of the Arboretum has been successful due to the collaboration among the Township Committeemen, the Township Administrator, the Department of Public Works, and the Shade Tree Commission. The Township Committee has given maintenance of the arboretum to the Shade Tree Commission with the willing help of the Department of Public Works. Many volunteer hours have resulted in the removal of masses of invasive vines. The Department of Public Works has removed more than half a dozen dead or dying trees and pruned out dead limbs resulting from storm damage and age. The original schematic map was updated in 2015 with the help of Richard Obal, former Monmouth County Agricultural Agent and member of the Monmouth County Shade Tree Commission. The information was transferred to and overlaid onto a satellite image of the Town Hall area and with the help of Brookdale Community College, in the person of Eric Anderson a Brookdale Community College faculty member and cartography expert. The result is the map, which is now on display in the public library.

The Shade Tree Commission has developed a long-range plan for maintaining the health and development of the Arboretum. We have a much healthier and vibrant group of trees and a vastly improved experience for anyone walking among the trees in the Town Hall area.

Of course, maintenance of the trees requires ongoing watering, pruning, removal of invasive vines, and wrapping of tree trunks to help prevent deer damage. At present, this work is carried out by volunteers in collaboration with the township Department of Public Works. More volunteers would certainly allow us to further enhance the health and appearance of the trees. Work sessions are usually published on the township website or in the minutes of the Shade Tree Commission meetings. From May through September, these sessions are usually scheduled early in the day (i.e. 7 am to 10 am) in order to be finished before the heat of the day. Volunteers are always welcome!

For volunteer information, please contact Gordon Boak of the Colts Neck Shade Tree Commission.