

Montclair looks to fill in lost tree canopy

Editor's note: This story has been updated with information provided by Deb Ellis of the Montclair Environmental Commission.

Sean Spiller

With portions of Montclair's canopy downed or damaged due to the rash of "once-in-a-century" storms and blustery winters that have hit the region in recent years, the municipal government will give residents an opportunity to help restore Montclair's treescape.

Third Ward Township Councilman Sean Spiller announced at last week's council meeting that Montclair has secured a grant from the state Department of Environmental Protection that will supply seedlings for residents to pick up and plant on their properties.

The pickup date is scheduled for Saturday, April 12 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Edgemont Memorial Park Boathouse, Deb Ellis of the Montclair Environmental Commission told The Times. A total of 250 trees will be given out, according to Ellis, featuring red oaks, redbuds and black gums.

Spiller credited the municipal Department of Public Works and the Environmental Commission for helping him move quickly on securing the grant after the opportunity presented itself. The tree allotment includes upward of two dozen different varieties, according to Spiller.

Though constituents in the 3rd Ward have brought the loss of trees to his attention recently, Spiller said that the need to rebuild Montclair's canopy is a township-wide concern, one that he was reminded of consistently while attending Environmental Commission meetings.

Montclair Community Services Director Steve Wood told The Montclair Times that his department has been aggressive in recent years in hewing trees that are deteriorating and those that are hazardous or have the potential to become hazardous. Late last year, Wood said, Township Arborist Steve Schuckman informed him that Montclair had finally gotten ahead of declining trees, an opinion backed by a steady decrease in trees downed during recent storms.

Calls placed to Schuckman's office were not returned by press time.

Each year Community Services requests about \$150,000 for tree removals and tree plantings, said Wood, who noted that the Township Council recently accelerated \$100,000 of that funding to cover a tree-removal contract. The remaining \$50,000 will primarily fund plantings later this year, according to Wood, with some additional removals.

Last year, 304 Montclair trees were removed by municipal workers or by contract. A total of 325 trees were



planted, a number that is somewhat misleading, according to Wood, as it represented not only regular spring and autumn 2013 plantings, but scheduled autumn 2012 plantings that had been delayed by inclement weather.

This year and moving forward, Wood said that Montclair is on track to consistently plant between 200 and 300 trees per year on streets and in municipal parks with the 1,000 seedlings secured in the DEP grant supplementing that number on residential properties.

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