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East Providence's tree planting efforts increase livability - by Roberto DaSilva

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The city of East Providence is on a mission to increase the livability of its neighborhoods and commercial areas by implementing an aggressive tree planting program. The city maintains approximately 8,300 public trees along its streets, parks, schools and other public properties. Many studies have shown that a healthy urban forest increases the quality of life for residents, attracts visitors to businesses, and improves social spaces in the community. Their roots improve water quality by reducing stormwater runoff and soil erosion. Trees not only add value to homes (between 3 and 15%), but they also clean the air, provide food for wildlife, keep homes cool on hot days, and lessen cold winds, lowering heating costs. In fact, trees properly placed around buildings can reduce air conditioning needs by 30% and can save 20 to 50% in energy used for heating. Perhaps most importantly, trees cool the air in urban “heat islands” by providing shade. This is of increasing importance as the effects of climate change are being felt more every year.

The city developed a community-wide street tree inventory in 2021 and, with the help of a The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) grant, is conducting a follow up analysis and a risk assessment of approximately 1,500 trees. Findings will provide the city with information to make informed decisions to prepare for climate change and hazardous weather events.

For the past two years, the city has implemented a Setback Tree Planting Program, which offers free tree plantings to homeowners. Trees are planted on private property near the street, where they have more room to grow, while providing public benefits. Nearly 150 trees were planted in 2022 through this program, as well as planting in parks and streets, and this number will be surpassed in 2023. The city is also partnering with Groundwork RI to plant even more trees in 2024.

The city of East Providence is also one of three local communities selected to participate in the Urban Forest Technical Assistance Program offered by the state of Rhode Island through the Green Infrastructure Center (GIC). This program expands upon our urban forestry management and climate resilience efforts by including an analysis of tree cover and identification of new planting areas. The city also received a grant from RIDEM to fund an emerald ash borer treatment program. This program treated 70 ash trees across the city to protect them from this invasive beetle, which kills infected trees.

East Providence has been a designated “Tree City USA” for nearly 30 years and is a recipient of the 2021 Tree City Growth Award for its planting efforts and city-wide tree inventory. The city adds trees whenever public works projects are planned to increase the quality of life for its residents. East Providence recognizes that tree planting and urban forest management is necessary as a climate resilience action and is proud of its achievements in this area.

Roberto DaSilva is the mayor of the city of East Providence, R.I.

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