

HOUSE No. 1842

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Jonathan Hecht

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the passage of the accompanying bill:

An Act to update the public shade tree law.

PETITION OF:

NAME:

DISTRICT/ADDRESS:

Jonathan Hecht

29th Middlesex

Jason M. Lewis

31st Middlesex

HOUSE No. 1842

By Mr. Hecht of Watertown, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 1842) of Jonathan Hecht and Jason M. Lewis for legislation to regulate the powers of tree wardens in municipalities in the Commonwealth. Municipalities and Regional Government.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the Year Two Thousand Thirteen

An Act to update the public shade tree law.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 87 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2010 Official Edition,
2 is hereby amended by striking out section 2 and inserting in place thereof the following section:-

3 Section 2. The tree warden of a town or city may appoint and remove deputy tree
4 wardens. The tree warden and the deputy tree wardens shall receive such compensation as the
5 town or city determines. The tree warden shall have the care and control of all public shade trees,
6 shrubs and growths in the town or city, except those in public parks or open places under the
7 jurisdiction of the park commissioners, unless otherwise designated in writing by the park
8 commissioners, and shall enforce all the provisions of law for the preservation of such trees,
9 shrubs and growths. The tree warden shall expend all money appropriated for the setting out and
10 maintenance of such trees, shrubs and growths. No tree shall be planted within a public way
11 without the approval of the tree warden. The tree warden may propose regulations for the care
12 and preservation of public shade trees to be approved by the local governing body of a town or
13 city selectmen, which shall have the effect of town by-laws, and may establish fines and
14 forfeitures for violations thereof pursuant to rules and regulations promulgated under section 15.

15 SECTION 2. Said chapter 87, as so appearing, is hereby further amended by striking out
16 section 5 and inserting in place thereof the following section:-

17 Section 5. Tree wardens and deputy tree wardens, but no other person, may, without a
18 hearing, trim, cut down or remove trees, less than 4 inches in diameter 1 foot from the ground,
19 and bushes, standing in public ways; and, if ordered by the mayor, selectmen, road
20 commissioners or highway surveyor, shall trim or cut down trees and bushes that, following an

21 inspection based on accepted industry or government arboricultural standards for the
22 determination of hazardous or dangerous trees, are deemed to obstruct, endanger, hinder or
23 incommode persons traveling thereon or to obstruct buildings being moved pursuant to the
24 provisions of section 18 of chapter 85. Nothing in this chapter shall prevent the trimming,
25 cutting or removal of any tree which endangers persons traveling on a highway or poses an
26 imminent threat to persons or property by the proper state or municipal authority. In all other
27 instances, the person seeking to trim, cut or remove a tree from the public way shall consult with
28 the tree warden. Nothing herein shall interfere with the suppression of pests declared to be
29 public nuisances pursuant to section 11 of chapter 132, including the Dutch elm disease.

30 SECTION 3. Said chapter 87, as so appearing, is hereby further amended by striking out
31 section 6 and inserting in place thereof the following section:-

32 Section 6. A violation of the provisions in sections 3 to 5, inclusive, shall be punished by
33 forfeiture of not more than the assessed value of the tree or trees pursuant to rules and
34 regulations promulgated under section 15. Such monies shall be collected for use by the city or
35 town.

36 SECTION 4. Section 9 of said chapter 87, as so appearing, is hereby amended by
37 striking out the first sentence and inserting in place thereof the following sentence:- Whoever
38 affixes to a tree in a public way, or places a notice, sign, advertisement or other thing, whether in
39 writing or otherwise, or cuts, paints or marks such tree, except for the purpose of protecting it or
40 the public and under a written permit from the officer having the charge of such trees in a city or
41 from the tree warden in a town, or from the department in the case of a state highway, shall be
42 punished by a fine pursuant to rules and regulations promulgated under section 15.

43 SECTION 5. Section 12 of said chapter 87, as so appearing, is hereby amended by
44 striking out the first sentence and inserting in place thereof the following sentence:- Whoever
45 wantonly injures, defaces or destroys a shrub, plant or tree, or fixture of ornament or utility, in a
46 public way or place or in any public enclosure, or negligently or wilfully suffers an animal or
47 vehicle driven by or for him or belonging to him to injure, deface or destroy such shrub, plant,
48 tree or fixture, shall be punished by a fine of not more than 500 dollars, and shall be liable to the
49 town, city or any person for all damages relating to their interest in the shrub, plant, tree or
50 fixture caused by such act.

51 SECTION 6. Section 13 of said chapter 87, as so appearing, is hereby amended by
52 inserting at the end thereof the following sentence:- In accordance with section 106 of chapter
53 41, the tree warden in any city or town which exceeds 10,000 residents shall be qualified by
54 training and experience in the field of arboriculture and licensed with the department of
55 agricultural resources in accordance with the provisions of section 10 of chapter 132B. A
56 qualified tree warden shall be defined as a person who has completed a degree in a forestry or
57 natural resource management field, has attained certification from the International Society of

58 Arboriculture or through the Massachusetts Certified Arborist Program of the Massachusetts
59 Arborists Association or other equivalent professional certification or, for communities with less
60 than 10,000 residents, completed a series of Professional Development courses offered by the
61 Massachusetts Tree Wardens and Foresters Association or equivalent training.

62 SECTION 7. Chapter 87 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after
63 section 14 the following section:-

64 Section 15. The department of conservation and recreation shall promulgate rules and
65 regulations pertaining to this chapter.