

Tree Canopy Repaired for Roxbury Y

The Roxbury YMCA, at the intersection of Martin Luther King Boulevard and Warren Street, will soon boast of a new garden with a gathering space, hardy ornamental plant material, and hands-on nature opportunities for the many children who use the Y daily. COG's landscape designer, Monica Fairbairn, is providing pro bono design services; Earthworks, a nonprofit dedicated to creating a healthier and more sustainable urban environment in greater Boston, secured funding and is stewarding the project.



While the new green space is currently an area of compacted soil, worn turf, and tightly clipped yews, it was the damaged and hazardous street trees leaning over the garden space that created the real obstacle to developing the garden.

COGdesign applied to Hartney Greymont, Inc. and received in-kind service to prune the trees.

When Hartney Greymont arborist and project manager Scott McPhee first arrived at the Roxbury YMCA, he was taken aback by what he saw. "The trees needed a lot more work than I expected. They were very thick and had lots of dead limbs."

McPhee and his crew surveyed the four ash trees planted in the sidewalk next to the Y and conferred with the police detail about roping off the work area to ensure the safety of pedestrians. Four teams of arborists, heavy with their saws and ropes, then spread out with deceptive ease up and into the trees.

On the ground, McPhee kept his attention on his crew, ensuring balanced cuts, pointing out dead branches, answering questions, and climbing to give a hand when needed. While the aerialists were working, another ground team fed the cut branches to the chipper.



According to COG's designer Monica Fairbairn, the four ash trees growing in a planting strip in the sidewalk were seriously impacting the opportunities for the garden. "Site lines along the length of the garden were interrupted by low ungainly branches," Fairbairn said, "and it seemed unlikely that we could create an intentionally layered garden that met the needs of the client."



The trees had visibly dead branches, damage by vehicles, and very low hanging branches over sidewalk and street. Since it was unlikely the City of Boston could prune the trees soon, an offer to help from Hartney Greymont was timely. “With Hartney Greymont offering in-kind service,” Fairbairn explained, “we secured City of Boston approval and a permit from the Boston Parks Department to have them trim the ash trees.”

The ash trees are also heavily infested with ash flower galls which detract from their appearance but is not life-threatening to the trees. The galls result in unsightly tumor-like brown growths in the spring but safety was the main concern on this November day.

The goal was removing the dead branches before they fell from the trees.



According to McPhee, Hartney Greymont has been offering a day of service for about ten years. At first, the company donated work to the towns they service but then started working on projects in underserved communities which were backed by groups appreciative of the donated service. In addition to “giving something back to the community,” McPhee explained that the day of service also benefits Hartney Greymont by building camaraderie within the crews. They use their skills on projects, like the trees at the Roxbury Y, which make a difference to a whole community. Working in a public setting also brings attention to the high level of skill required to do the job. McPhee emphasized that an experienced climbing arborist, like the ones at work on this day, result from extensive training, knowledge, strength, dexterity, and adherence to safe work practices.



As the tree work progressed through the morning, Fairbairn noticed that “the trees grew visibly lighter and filled with air as they worked. The nakedness of the winter branches was a bit of a shock when it was all done, but the promise of healthier, safer trees in the spring, and a better frame for the garden, was reassuring. The project site opened up and so did the possibilities!”



Many thanks to the Hartney Greymont crew of *Marbin Sanchez-Baquedano, Shane Narbonne, Brian Baumbach, Alex White, Arthur Braccio, Scott McPhee, Tobin Zwicker, Dan Kilmartin, Corey King, Rudis Galvez, John Aprea, and Roger Fasnacht.*

