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June 7, 2021

To the Members of the Watertown Planning Board,

I am writing today regarding the proposal to remove over 200 trees from the Arsenal on the Charles. Urban trees, especially mature trees, improve the livability of cities like Watertown, provide many habitat benefits, and are critical in mitigating the effects of climate change.

Mature tree plays an important role in climate change mitigation by absorbing hundreds of pounds of CO₂ per year, filtering pollutants and particulates to improve air quality, and making cities healthier places to live and work. Trees also help mitigate issues of storm water runoff, which is particularly important in urban areas with significant coverage of impervious surfaces and a higher likelihood of flooding. If excessive levels of rain fall, drains can become overwhelmed and flood the streets, or runoff into the Charles River, which abuts the Arsenal on the Charles. Mature trees can help prevent this by capturing and storing water, both in their roots and in their canopy.

Large, mature trees also help provide valuable green space, which has proven to be invaluable over the past year and a half for recreation, respite, and for seeing friends and family safely. Mature tree canopy provides shade for staying cool in the increasingly hot summer months.

Additionally, trees provide valuable habitat for urban wildlife, who depend on trees for food and shelter. Urban wildlife, including migratory and resident birds, use mature trees for nesting, resting and for places from which to hunt or capture prey. Research has shown that smaller trees can't support the habitat features provided only by large trees.

The Charles River Conservancy also knows from our experience working in the parks in the Charles River Basin, that when mature trees are removed, the small young trees planted to replace them struggle to establish and reach maturity due to the demands of paved surfaces around them, lack of watering, and overall care. Therefore, to ensure the best possible outcome for those who live and work in Watertown, we encourage the planning board to require the proponent to:

1. Provide data about the tree to be removed, including the species of tree, size, and health of the trees.
2. Encourage the preservation of as many native, non-invasive and healthy mature trees as possible.
3. Provide a detailed 3-year plan of how newly planted trees will be cared for, to help ensure they will grow to maturity. These plans should include watering for the first 3 years and pruning.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sasha Vallieres". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Sasha Vallieres
Program Manager
Charles River Conservancy