



STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH *All of God's Creation*

Social Justice Committee, Holy Cross Parish, Mt. Airy, April 14, 2024

Protect Our Trees in Mt. Airy. Act Now.

Good things come in trees! In urban areas like Philadelphia, and specifically, Mount Airy, trees are especially vital for creating and maintaining safe, livable, and healthy neighborhoods.

In a time of changing climate and extreme weather events, from neighborhood to neighborhood, the concentration of trees contributes to vastly different risks to life, health, and property, most notably from flooding and extreme heat. **Trees and other vegetation reduce rainwater runoff and improve water quality by absorbing and filtering rainwater.** When trees and vegetation are replaced with asphalt and concrete, instead of being absorbed, the rainwater flows into rivers, creeks, and overwhelmed sewers that flood, endangering lives and property.¹

Globally, 2023 was the warmest year ever recorded.² **Within Philadelphia and even within Mount Airy, heat is not distributed evenly.** Data show that temperature differences between Philly neighborhoods on the same day can be as wide as 22 degrees.³ Trees and vegetation lower surface and air temperatures by providing shade and cooling through evaporation and transpiration.⁴ Oftentimes, the more socioeconomically challenged an area is in Philadelphia, the hotter it is.⁵ A 2019 Plan Philly analysis found that **massive differences in tree coverage between Philly neighborhoods closely correlated with neighborhood income**, with the poorest half of city residents living in areas that contained just one-third of all city street trees. This subjects the City's most vulnerable populations to the greatest dangers of heat related health risks and higher utility bills.

Currently, right in Holy Cross's backyard, decisions are being made that will determine whether the Mount Airy of the future is safer, healthier, and more resilient to extreme weather or not. **On April 17th, the City's Zoning Board of Adjustment will decide whether the property at 29 E. Mt. Airy Avenue – located just a couple hundred feet from our church - is allowed to chop down 3 healthy "heritage trees" – a species of trees that are greater than 24 inches in diameter – to make way for a parking lot. Such an action is not allowed under city law; however, the property owner is requesting an exception to this rule.**⁶

The proposed removal of these trees is part of a continued pattern of destroying tree and vegetation cover across the City and is a threat to our neighbors' quality of life. From 2008 through 2018, Philadelphia lost hundreds of acres of trees, as the percentage of the City with tree cover declined from 20% to 14%. **Contact Councilperson Cindy Bass at [215-686-3424](tel:215-686-3424) and let her know that you do not support a zoning variance for 29 E. Mt. Airy Avenue that will remove heritage trees.**

¹ <https://extension.psu.edu/how-do-trees-reduce-stormwater-and-flooding>

² <https://www.noaa.gov/news/2023-was-worlds-warmest-year-on-record-by-far>

³ <https://whyy.org/articles/philadelphia-built-environment-temperature-increase-12-degrees/>

⁴ <https://www.epa.gov/heatislands/using-trees-and-vegetation-reduce-heat-islands>

⁵ <https://whyy.org/articles/philadelphia-built-environment-temperature-increase-12-degrees/>

⁶ Section 14-705(f) of The Philadelphia Code.