

What are Trees in Berkeley Heights Worth? A Million Dollars?

by Richard Leister

Berkeley Heights, NJ (July 21, 2014) -- Over the past three years trained volunteers under the auspices of the Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission have been carrying out a survey of the trees along the right of way on Township streets. When residents see the volunteers measuring the trees, they often ask what's happening.

The easy answer is the Township wants to know the condition of the trees, which so far number more than 4,600. But much more is involved in this survey.

The data (including tree species, diameter, leaf and branch quality) are entered into an i-Tree program developed by the US Forest Service in cooperation with university researchers and the Davey Institute. The sophisticated software assigns specific values to the trees and extrapolates overall values.

What are these trees of worth? More than \$522,000 according to the software calculator. This is the total annual benefit of the trees. Not part of this calculation is the cost of purchasing, planting and pruning trees. Add an estimated \$150 for the cost of purchasing, planting and pruning each tree, and the value easily comes to more than a million dollars.

This, of course, is only the value of the trees planted in the right of way next to the street. The value of the total tree canopy is many times greater. One estimate, based on satellite imagery, put it at \$30 million.

How does this [annual benefit](#) break down? One benefit is that trees provide shade and thus save energy. Annual energy savings amount to nearly \$226,000. Plant a tree so it shades your house from the afternoon sun and you will see the savings in lower air conditioning costs.

Another benefit is that trees improve air quality because they absorb pollutants and give off oxygen. In fact, trees sequester carbon dioxide. In addition, trees help control storm water runoff, intercepting more than 6.7 million gallons annually at a value of nearly \$60,000. Finally, trees provide an aesthetic value of nearly \$194,000, not to speak of homes for birds and other creatures.

"Berkeley Heights has a large investment in trees," says Richard Leister, a master gardener and chairman of the Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission. "This is why we should take care of our trees and continue to plant them. Everyone in the Township should take some responsibility. Townspeople expect the Township to take down hazardous trees that are in the right of way. But we ask that when the Township plants new trees along the right of way, residents water them until they are established. That's a small favor to ask for such an important investment."

The Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission was established to protect, develop or use natural resources, including water resources, located within the Township. The Environmental Commission is an advisory group with the responsibility to recommend plans and programs to the Planning Board for the development and use of open lands and wetlands. All the members volunteer their time on a variety of projects and tasks.