

Village Conservancy begins fundraising to plant new trees

By Justin Bigos

Staff Writer

After recently receiving approval at a joint meeting of the Woodstock Village Trustees and Selectboard, the volunteer-led Woodstock Village Conservancy — a project of Woodstock Community Trust dedicated to improving the design and sustainability of public spaces — is now launching a fundraising campaign in order to fulfill its first initiative, “Branch Out Woodstock,” which will coordinate the planting of four new trees on Central street in the village.

On condition of raising the funds, the trees will be installed in currently abandoned tree wells along Central Street in April 2027. The cost of each tree will be around \$15,000, for a total of approximately \$60,000. The Conservancy will fundraise \$70,000-\$75,000 to cover costs and maintenance.

The process of launching “Branch Out Woodstock” was a collaborative venture among various town entities, stressed Stuart Mathews, who — along with the team of Joe DiNatale, Jack Rossi, and Laura Dyess — leads the initiative. The first step was approaching municipal manager Eric Duffy, who received the Conservancy’s proposal positively, Mathews told the Standard last week. Duffy then took the idea to the town selectboard and village trustees, who had various questions about the project.

“They wanted to know what we were thinking; we wanted

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to know what they thought. It was an interactive process. We worked together to come up with the concept,” said Mathews. “We then met with the Department of Public Works. Everybody was on board and supportive. Now we’re kicking it off.”

While the purpose of the “Branch Out Woodstock” initiative may seem obvious and straightforward enough, in speaking with the Standard, Mathews painted a convincing picture of why the project feels so important to the town’s vibrancy.

“If you go down Central Street, there’s a row of trees on either side, sort of leading through the town on all the major streets. On Central Street, there’s a number of what I would call holes — specifically, four — where over the years trees have been removed for one reason or another, and not replaced. In some cases, you can see the cutoff stump. In some cases, you just see an asphalt patch that’s put into the concrete,” said Mathews.

Tree procurement prioritizes native specimens but must also consider health and longevity of the tree species. “We will look for trees which are hardy. It’s a difficult climate to plant a tree [in the Upper Valley]. You’ve got salt from the road, it’s a cramped space, etc.,” said Mathews.

Mathews also stressed the importance of aesthetics in choosing the tree species. “We would look for as hardy a tree as we can get that’s consistent with the look of the rest of the town. You always want some variety in the species that you plant, so that if a blight or something like Dutch elm disease comes through, you don’t lose all your trees at once,” he said. Rossi, also a landscape architect, will assist in choosing the best tree species, said Mathews.

The processes of excavation, soil installation, and repaving will be led by the South



Woodstock Village Conservancy has begun a fundraising campaign to plant four new trees in abandoned tree wells along Central Street.

Courtesy of Woodstock Village Conservancy

Pomfret-based company ArborScape. “They’ve given us a lot of advice on the process and what’s required. It’s not overly complicated, but it is tricky in that you want to make sure that you can get the compacted soil out. There’s pipes, there’s electrical and water, so you’ve got to dig safe and be careful when you’re excavating,” said Mathews.

Once the trees are planted in engineered soil and the concrete around the base of the trees has been replaced, metal grates will be installed around the trees, said Mathews. “The purpose of the cast-iron grate is to protect the base of the tree, but [also] to allow water to get into it,” he said. The tops of the grates will be placed level with the sidewalk to avoid pedestrians tripping on them and to avoid snow removal being impacted by the grates, said Mathews.

The Conservancy’s fundraising campaign will be two-pronged — one for installation and one for long-term maintenance of the trees, and will rely on the community for support. “The town doesn’t really have the money to do this kind of thing, so we thought we could raise [the funds via]

community support for the initiative.”

“We’d really like these trees to survive for many years to come, for the enjoyment of the residents and visitors to Woodstock. We want to make sure we get off on the right foot, so to speak,” said Mathews.

Once Woodstock Village Conservancy gets off on that right foot, Mathews says he foresees it as the start to something bigger. “Our goal is to replace those first four and to maintain them, and then we can see if there’s other opportunities to put more trees in other places further down the road. We can always explore that,” he said.

Those wishing to donate to the “Branch Out Woodstock” initiative can visit woodstock-communitytrust.org/donate.html. Donors should direct their gifts to Woodstock Village Conservancy, and note in the Comments box that their gift should be directed to Branch Out Woodstock.

RIVERSIDE PLANNING GRANT

gathered through a survey after a community meeting last August. Wetmore credited Kyle Katz of the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission with “majorly” helping on the application.

That effort reflects a worry, Wetmore said, that has settled over the park as residents approach each new flood season. “It’s a very anxiety-provoking situation as we approach July 10th, and just in general, anytime there’s a large rain event,” they said, “for a park that’s flooded twice since 2011.” Wetmore noted that residents have described flooding as “a really traumatizing experience where you lose property, you fear for your life. You have to evacuate. It’s really intense.” Sustainable Woodstock finished flood cleanup work in 2023, replacing insulation, addressing erosion, installing new skirting, and power-washing under homes. Still, Wetmore added that “psychologically, it’s scary not knowing what’s going to come this summer.”

This August, the organization plans a preparedness event for Riverside residents, led by a local emergency management official, distributing supplies for building go-bags and covering evacuation planning. It’s not open to the general public for now, though Wetmore said they’d thought about expanding it townwide if there is a lot of interest. In the meantime, Wetmore recommended a simpler step for anyone in the region: “At the very least, everyone should sign up for VT alerts, which sends you an email, calls you, or texts you when there’s a natural disaster or major road closure.”

Riverside, in Wetmore’s telling, is one entry point into a much