



Testimony of Deborah Shapley, President of Restore Mass Ave
Before the Committee on Transportation & The Environment
City Council of the District of Columbia
Mary M. Cheh, Chair
April 8, 2016, Room 500, John A. Wilson Building.

My name is Deborah Shapley. I am a DC native. To correct the witness list, please note the name is spelled S-h-a-p-l-e-y.

I testify as President of Restore Mass Ave.^{1/} RMA is a non profit which I and some neighbors founded in 2006 with the goal of restoring the historic tree canopy of the part of Massachusetts Avenue Northwest where I am lucky enough to live.

Double rows of trees, based on L'Enfant's vision, once stretched along Massachusetts Avenue for seven miles across our city. We are restoring the trees and landscape of the two miles that extend from Dupont Circle to Glover Bridge and Rock Creek Park in Ward 2, and from there out to Wisconsin Avenue in Ward 3.^{2/}

So far we have arranged planting of more than 330 new trees to fill in the original double rows. 170 have been street trees from Urban Forestry Administration; many of the others were donated by Casey Trees, who should be thanked here, and by other sponsors.^{3/}

If you drive west along "Mass Ave" from Dupont Circle, especially now when new linden leaves are emerging in lovely green clouds, you experience the delightful effect of full rows of street trees, though much more remains to be done

Not enough good can be said of the Urban Forestry Administration (UFA). When I first met onsite with Ranjit Babra, the local UFA arborist, and John Thomas, the UFA director, they quickly understood our vision. Looking around (such as at Mass Ave and 23rd Street by Sheridan Circle) one could see the very old lindens planted both along the curb and as second row trees in the early 20th century. One sees the very old ginkgos in the sidewalks around Sheridan Circle. So at our request UFA filled gaps there with this species. Some blocks once had enormous elms shading them; for these sites UFA chose zelkova and later disease-resistant elm varieties.

With the years, UFA has gotten used to RMA reps sending lists of desired species for empty tree boxes to recreate the historic vision. They're used to corrections we seek when UFA plants a species different from that agreed. Or when the tree box

was not excavated properly. Or when the planters leave the tree at a terrible angle.

To pick up on the Committee's discussion about UFA not watering new trees, our attitude is this. We don't wait for UFA to respond to 311 requests or voice mails. RMA volunteer Treekeepers go out and find spigots and ask to use them; they drag hoses. Where weeds choke new street trees, they weed and mulch. We lobby foreign and US owners to care for these trees; now dozens do so with pride.

Even so, it's a monthly and seasonal battle to get the trees growing well.

The moral of my story is this. Even on Mass Ave, with all RMA's work getting owners to care for trees, and the services we provide, too many trees die or die back. Instead of the pretty, budding linden I plucked this morning [hold up sample], too many die [hold up dead branch].

The city budget proposal to cut UFA tree-planting by 80% over six years is plain wrong. As the Committee just heard, in Wards 5, 7 and 8 one in five tree boxes, or 21%, have no trees. That is unacceptable service to those neighbors. And, if not remedied with new UFA trees, the Mayor's goal to expand canopy can't be reached.

Continuity of UFA professional staff has been crucial to RMA's success, but this is threatened in the budget as well. We know that with climate change, new pests are emerging that could harm trees. Last fall Restore Mass Ave warned that according to experts a previously harmless bug - oak lecanium scale - is damaging willow oaks in northwest and by the Navy Yard.^{4/} This pest is not on the UFA's public list of hazards.

Cuts to the UFA budget for tree maintenance and services - the backup for field arborists - will hurt the professional knowledge the agency needs to size up and address new threats. You would cut the staff's knowledge, if you didn't care which bug ruined which standing trees. But pest devastation can quickly reverse gains in canopy from UFA planting new little sidewalk trees.

Our prize-winning book *A Grand Avenue Revival* recounts how Washington became the "City of Trees" at the end of the 19th century.^{5/} [Show book] When "Boss" Alexander Shepherd took office in 1871, a Parking Commission was appointed of three gentlemen, all leading horticulturalists. They supervised tree planting throughout the city, as city streets and utilities expanded. They kept detailed records by street and tree species. The three men served for decades, two well into the 20th century. Institutional continuity was important long before the city faced climate change and other modern challenges.

So Restore Mass Ave protests, first, the harm of cutting the UFA tree-planting budget at all, let alone by 80% over six years.

Second, we protest the up-and-down sawing, that the city budget people feel free to take money from UFA accounts and shift them to some other agency. And maybe on another whim, in a few years, put the funds back.

Respectfully, I suggest the Mayor and City Council agree to separate the UFA budget from these see-saws. Only then is the city likely to meet the Mayor and Council's goal of expanding tree canopy over 40% of District land by 2032.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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1/ <http://restoremassave.org>

2/ <http://restoremassave.org/map-where-we-work/>

3/ <http://restoremassave.org/events-archive/>

4/ <http://restoremassave.org/green-your-street/>

5/ <http://restoremassave.org/grand-avenue-revival-book/>