

Stricter tree-cutting code is proposed

By ANTHONY R. MANCINI

Members of Bedford's town and tree advisory boards discussed proposed revisions to the town's tree preservation laws at a Feb. 19 public hearing, which, if enacted, would tighten restrictions on removing trees and would standardize the definition of a tree.

Officials are considering requiring a tree removal permit for any tree that is over 12 inches in diameter at a height of 4.5 feet from its base. The law is now set at 18 inches at the same height. Tree removal permits are granted by Bedford's tree enforcement officer.

"Eighteen inches just seems to be pretty high," said town councilman Chris Burdick at the hearing. "There seems to be a strong consensus on that as well."

Michael Serio, chairman of the tree board, said allowing a resident the right to cut down a tree 12 inches in diameter still gives them substantial freedom.

"A lot of municipalities are smaller than that," he said at the hearing. "They go down to an 8-inch or 4-inch limit."

Officials said another proposed revision, shortening the expiration date of a tree removal permit from two years

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— CHRIS BURDICK, TOWN BOARD MEMBER

to one year, would also bring Bedford in line with other municipalities and help reduce paperwork for the town.

"That really is much more the norm in other municipalities," Mr. Burdick said. "It's administratively easier for the building department to maintain it on that basis. Typically it's done actually in a very short time."

Mr. Serio said that a two-year permit was designed for larger projects. Any project that requires cutting down a substantial number of trees today would require many more approvals than a tree permit.

"A lot of the tree preservation law was really geared around logging and the forest industry. In today's real world, that's going to involve more boards than just a tree permit," he said. "This really is pertaining to a residential tree removal permit. Twelve months, the job is well done."

Mr. Burdick said other boards have

their own permitting authority when it comes to tree removal.

"The permits that would be given out by the planning board or the wetlands control commission are completely outside of this," he said. "They're not subject to any of these restrictions that we're talking about."

Mr. Burdick said there was also a need for streamlining the definition of a tree in the town's code. Currently, in the tree preservation section of the law, a tree is defined as a living, woody plant with a crown of foliage that has a trunk 6 inches or more in diameter at 4.5 feet from its base and is at least 13 feet in height. However, in the wetlands section of the law, the definition of a tree is essentially the same, with one major difference. It says a tree is at least 4 inches in diameter 4.5 feet from the ground. This difference could potentially lead to a discrepancy, as the tree ordinance limits the

number of trees that residents are allowed per year, depending on the size of the property. For instance, a permit is required for a resident who wants to remove more than 10 trees on a lot 4 acres or less.

Under town code, Bedford residents have the right to remove any dead tree from their property or any tree that poses a danger to a structure, vehicles or pedestrians. Mr. Burdick said that these rights would most likely remain as is and that the town would continue to heed the advice of any expert who says a tree is not safe.

"You have an insurance company coming in and saying this poses a danger, that's it," he said.

Officials also floated the idea of requiring a sign at the site of an ongoing tree removal that has been permitted by the town, to cut down on complaints from other residents. Mr. Burdick said most of the town's complaints dealing with tree removals were about permitted projects.

"Many of those complaints are unfounded because they have permits to do what they're doing," he said.

After town officials finalize the proposed revisions, they would be subject to a public comment period and a vote from the town board. A date has yet to be determined.

Conservation board proposes adding maps