



MUNICIPALITY OF PRINCETON

Department of Engineering &
Infrastructure Operations

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MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Council
From: Taylor Sapudar, Municipal Arborist
Deanna Stockton, Deputy Administrator/Municipal Engineer
Subject: 2025 Urban Forestry Annual Report
Date: January 30, 2026

Provided herein is the 2025 annual report prepared in accordance with Section 22-17 of the Tree and Shrub Ordinance. This annual report provides data concerning tree removal permits granted and denied, the quantity of complaints resolved, fees and assessments collected, disbursements from the Princeton Shade Tree Trust Reserve and information pertaining to the progress towards the objectives in Princeton's Community Forestry Management Plan (CFMP).

Permit Application Data

- As of January 30, 2026, the Shade Tree Trust Reserve balance is \$89,282.14.
 - \$3,760 in application fees was collected in 2025.
- In the 2025 calendar year, 438 permits for the removal of 1441 trees (not including planning board applications) were issued, with 0 denials.
 - Of the 438 approved permits, 94 permits required the replacement of trees.
 - 345 Permits were issued due to dead, dying, diseased, or ash trees.
 - 95 permits accounted for the removal of 366 ash trees infected with the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB).
 - Remaining exempt permits were for a variety of reasons. Significant decay, bacterial leaf scorch (BLS) of oak, and significant crown decline were the most common instances of removal.
 - 40 permits out of the 94 permits requiring replacements were specifically due to construction-related site improvements, not including planning board approvals.
 - 54 permits were live tree permits issued for multiple reasons. Wrong tree / wrong place, homeowner concern of structural issues, and new landscaping were the most common homeowner reasons.
 - 516 replacement trees are due in 2026.
- \$1100 was received in lieu of two tree replacements.

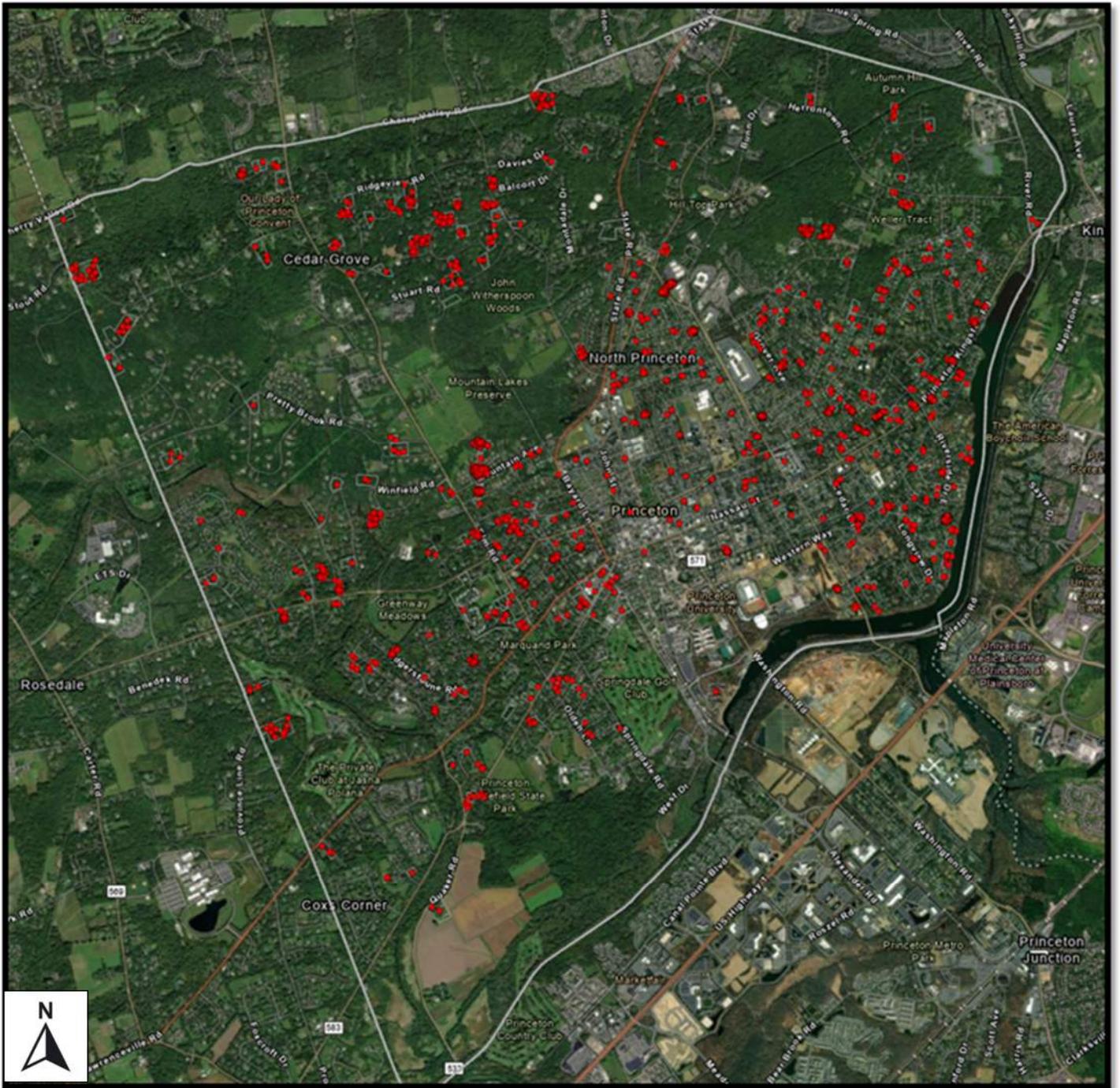


Figure 1: Trees Removed by Permit in 2025

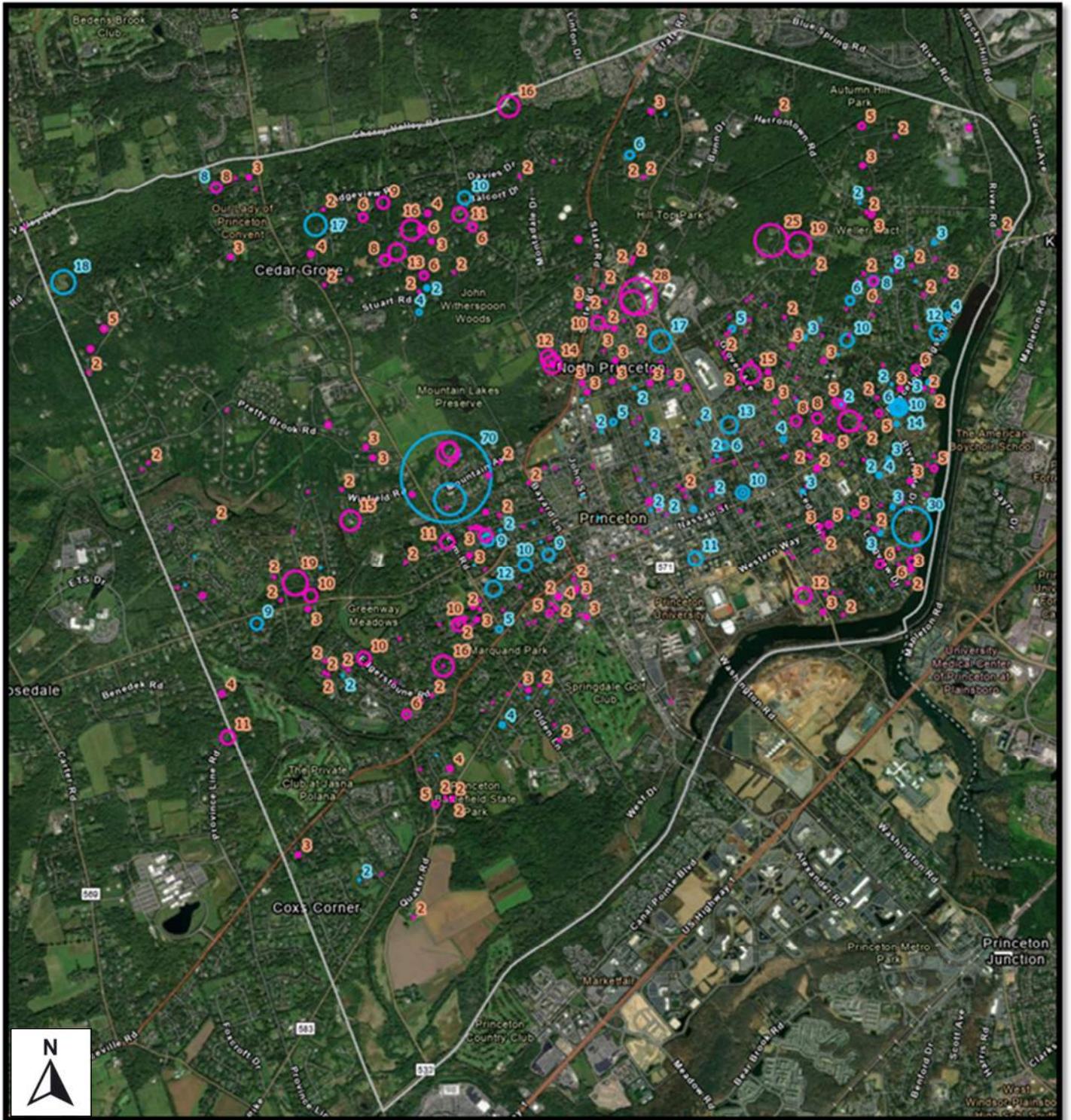


Figure 2: 2025 Tree Removal Permits
Pink: Dead/Dying/Diseased/Ash; Blue: Live Tree Permits
Number represents the number of trees removed per permit

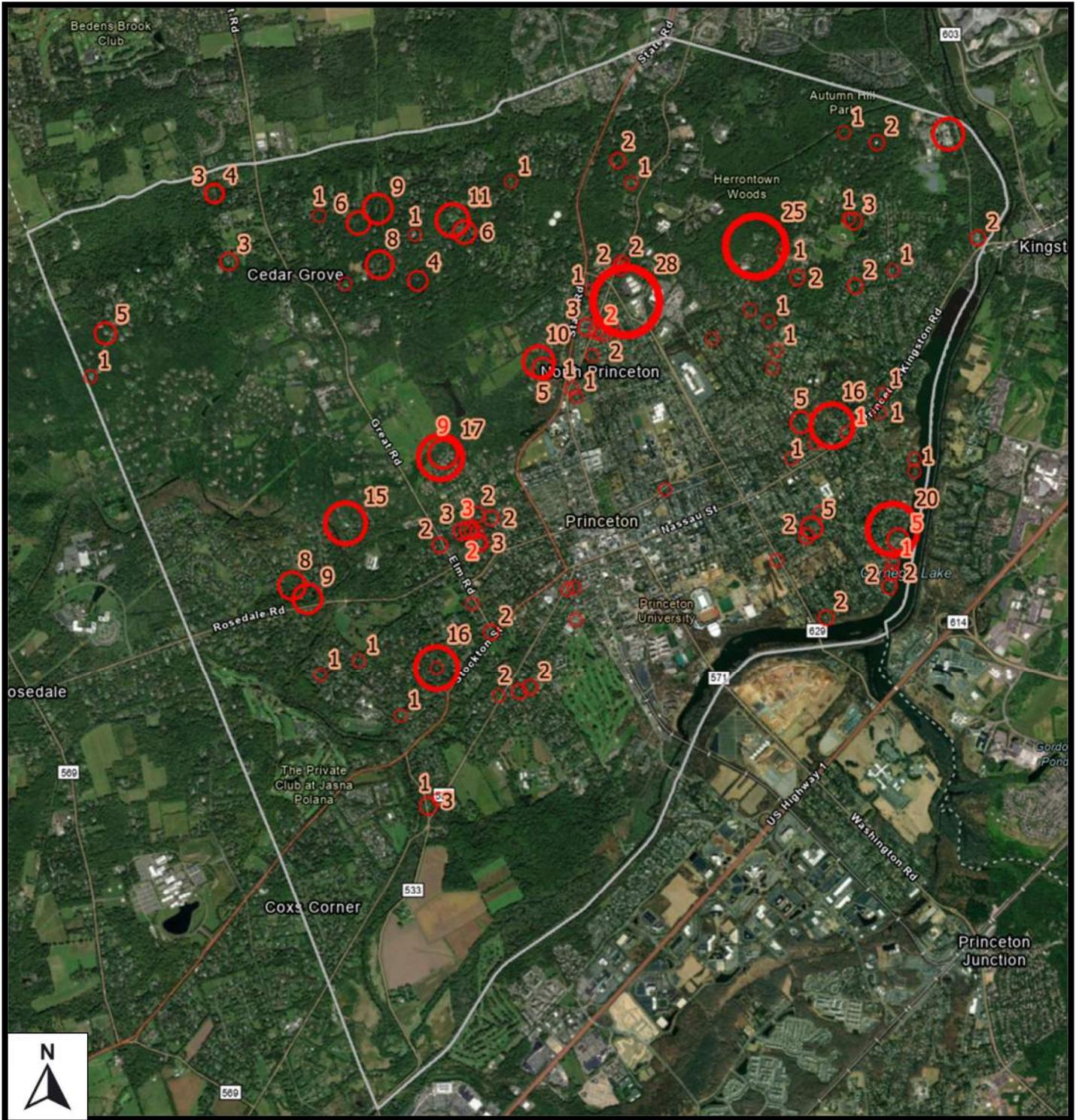


Figure 3: Tree Removal Permits (95) for 366 Ash Trees
Number represents the number of ash trees removed per permit

Urban Tree Canopy Report

In February 2025, Princeton completed an assessment and analysis of its tree canopy cover to gain a comprehensive understanding of its current distribution, recent changes, benefits to residents, and identifying opportunities for future tree planting. The existing tree canopy covers sixty percent of the municipality. Between 2010 and 2023, Princeton's tree canopy experienced a total loss of 652.76 acres (5.54%) over 13 years, with nearly all U.S. Census block groups seeing a reduction in canopy cover. The full report is available at <https://www.princetonnj.gov/DocumentCenter/View/20307/Tree-Canopy-Assessment-Report>.

Community Forestry Management Plan (CFMP)

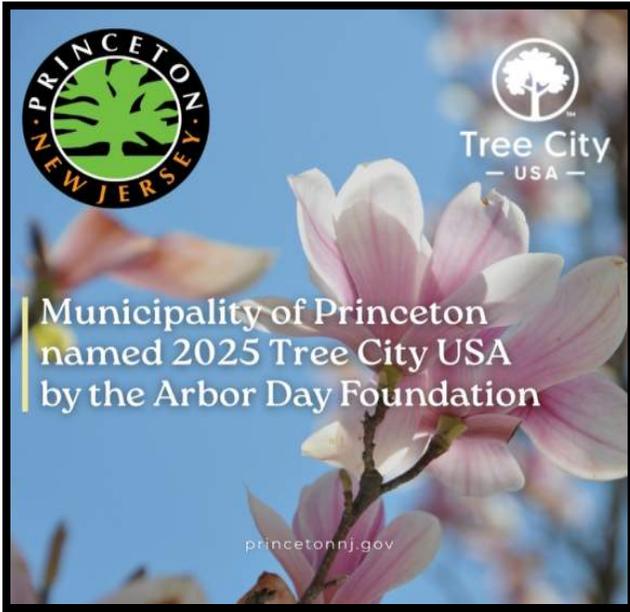
Princeton's five-year Community Forestry Management Plan (2025- 2029) was approved by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection in January 2026. Prepared with assistance from Davey Resource Group, the CFMP provides a clear, strategic framework for managing public trees in a safe, sustainable, and cost-effective manner. The plan enables eligibility for state and federal grant funding, supports proactive risk management and storm preparedness, guides informed decisions related to planting, pruning, and removals, strengthens ordinance enforcement, promotes equitable canopy distribution, and demonstrates the municipality's long-term commitment to responsible urban forest stewardship and climate resilience. The full report is available at <https://www.princetonnj.gov/DocumentCenter/View/22671/Princeton--Community-Forest-Management-Plan-Signed>.

Update of the Shade Tree Commission Ordinance

On December 22, 2025, Princeton Council approved an updated Trees and Shrub ordinance (Ordinance No. 25-19), effective in 2026, to strengthen the protections on Princeton's tree canopy. Specifically:

- The threshold to submit a tree removal permit application is lowered from 8" diameter at breast height (DBH) to 6" DBH.
- The tree replacement ratios have been edited to result in more replacement trees required for the largest DBH tree removals. In the current ordinance, trees larger than 39" DBH have a four-tree replacement requirement; the proposed amendment decreases the DBH to 33" for this requirement.
- Definitions have been added or edited for endangered species, ornamental tree, Princeton Shade Tree Trust Reserve, significant tree, and specimen tree.
- The exceptions in Section 22-12 have been reduced. While the current ordinance does not require applications for dead / dying tree and ash tree removals, applications have been submitted with fees and replacement tree requirements waived. The proposed amendment would codify this scenario. The exception for tree removals related to land use board applications is also being removed. Instead, these applications are required to submit a tree removal permit application under Chapter 22.
- Replacement tree species shall not include invasive species listed on the New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team's Do Not Plant List.
- The application fee is being increased from \$40 to \$100 to more fully encompass the operational costs to administer this permit program.
- The 20-day automatic permit approval provision is proposed to be removed from Section 22-14. This provision has not been activated in the last five years and is detrimental to the goals of maintaining, conserving and protecting the canopy.
- The informal resolution procedure in Section 22-16 has been enhanced to codify the current activities by the Municipal Arborist in enforcing the Trees and Shrubs regulations.
- The annual reporting process in Section 22-17 is being updated to reflect current practice. The Arborist prepares the report in consultation with the Shade Tree Commission.
- The tree preservation and protection requirements for a development in Chapter 10B-227A are proposed to be strengthened to reflect the language in Chapter 22.

- The tree replacement table in Chapter 10B-227A is being replaced with a redirection to the tree replacement table in Chapter 22.
- The shade tree escrow fund referenced in Chapter 10B-227A is proposed to be updated in this amendment. The correct terminology for this fund is the Shade Tree Trust Reserve, as defined in Chapter 22. The use and reporting requirements codified in land use code section and are being removed and can be formalized by resolution.



Tree City USA Recognition

In 2025, Princeton renewed its Tree City USA designation through the Arbor Day Foundation for the 29th consecutive year. This continued recognition reflects the Municipality's long-standing commitment to urban forest management, public tree care, community engagement, and adherence to nationally recognized forestry standards.

Land Preservation, Reforestation, and Climate Resilience Open Space Acquisition – Lanwin and Shechtel Properties

On December 30, 2024, the Municipality of Princeton, in partnership with Ridgeview Conservancy, The Watershed Institute, Friends of Princeton Open Space, and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, completed the acquisition of the Lanwin property located along Herrontown Road and Mount Lucas Road. This 90-acre parcel is contiguous with existing preserved lands, strengthening regional habitat connectivity for migratory birds and wildlife. The site includes mature forest as well as shrub–scrub habitat in formerly farmed areas. The property is permanently preserved as open space and is available for passive recreational use.

In 2025, Princeton permanently preserved a 24-acre parcel (Shechtel) through open space acquisition, preventing future residential development. Like Lanwin, this 24-acre site is contiguous to other preserved lands that provide habitat linkages for migratory birds and wildlife. This property contains a mature forest and shrub-scrub habitat in formerly farmed areas. It is preserved as open space and provides passive recreation and parts of the site are subject to a wetlands/stream corridor deed restricted area and greenbelt deed restricted area.

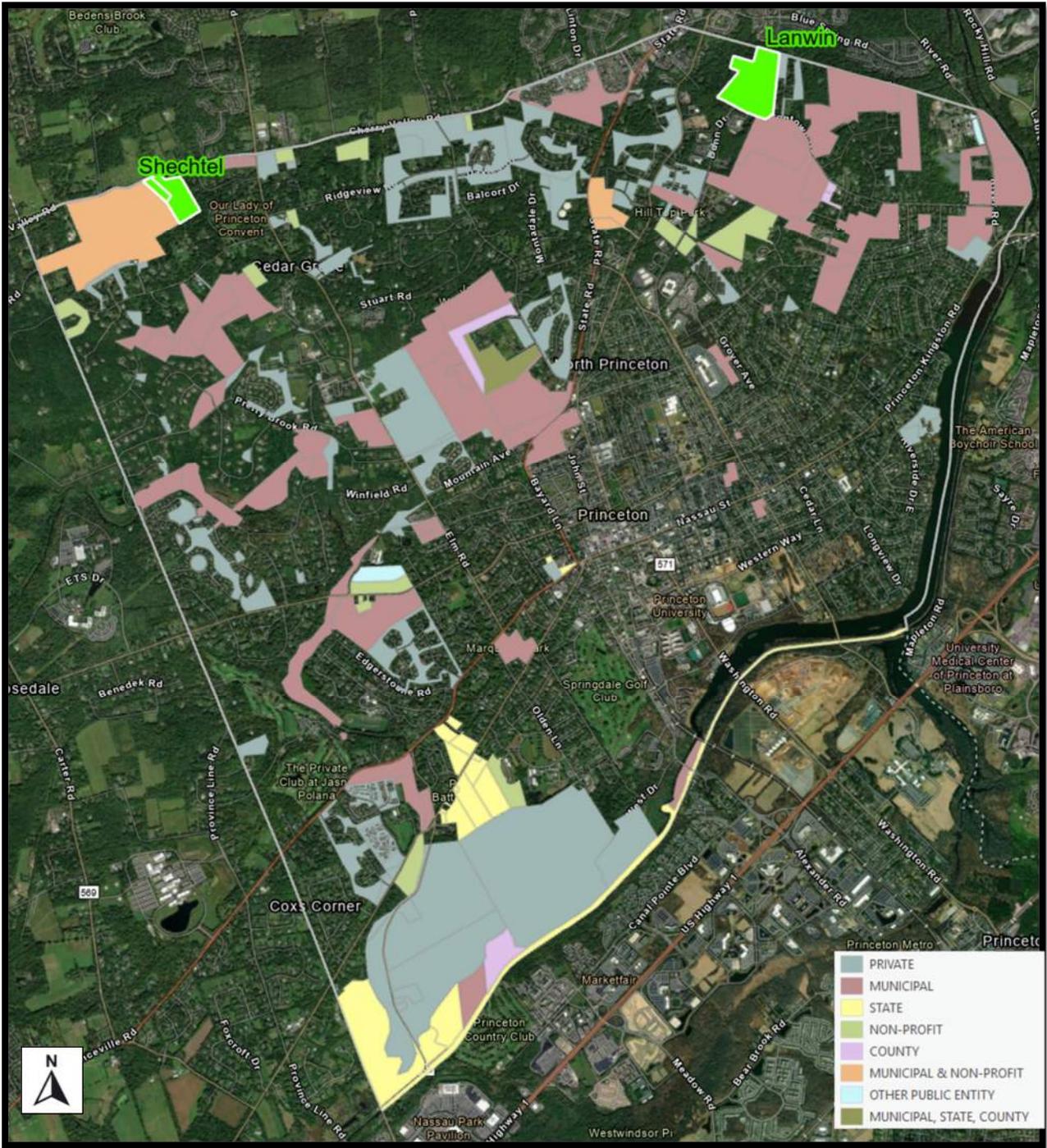


Figure 4: Shechtel and Lanwin Preserved Open Space Superimposed on Recreation and Open Space Map

Community Park North Forest Restoration (CP North)

Princeton, in partnership with Friends of Princeton Open Space (FOPOS), is replanting 45 acres of forest at Community Park North, part of the larger Mountain Lakes open space encompassing nearly 400 acres of preserved open space and farmland. This project focuses on an area of the forest which experienced a microburst which decimated former spruce and pine plantations, invasive species proliferation, and suppressed forest regeneration due to deer browse.

To date, six planting plots have been cleared of invasive vegetation, with dead wood consolidated to create planting areas. Protective fencing is installed, and the contractor planted 2,553 native trees within fenced areas and along adjacent infrastructure corridors. FOPOS volunteers planted an additional 600 trees.

Over the next two years, invasive regrowth will be treated with targeted herbicide applications, and volunteers will manually clear invasives along a stream corridor and plant approximately 2,000 additional trees. Ongoing monitoring will include fence maintenance, tree replacement as needed, and follow-up treatments to ensure long-term success.

The project is supported by a \$552,000 NJDEP Natural Climate Solutions Grant. The total estimated project cost is \$695,980, with the balance provided through in-kind municipal staff time, volunteer labor, and municipal coverage of select materials and consultant services.



Figure 7: Community Park North Reforestation (CP North)

Microforest at Quarry Park



Princeton's first microforest was planted at Quarry Park on October 4, 2025, transforming an underutilized park area previously dominated by turf grass and invasive plants. Over 100 volunteers planted nearly 1,300 native trees and shrubs across the 6,000-square-foot site. The planting includes fifteen tree species and six shrub species, with dominant species such as red maple, shagbark hickory, sweetgum, tulip poplar, white oak, American hornbeam, eastern redbud, northern spicebush, and arrowwood viburnum. This initiative also contributed to exceeding the municipality's annual street tree planting goals.

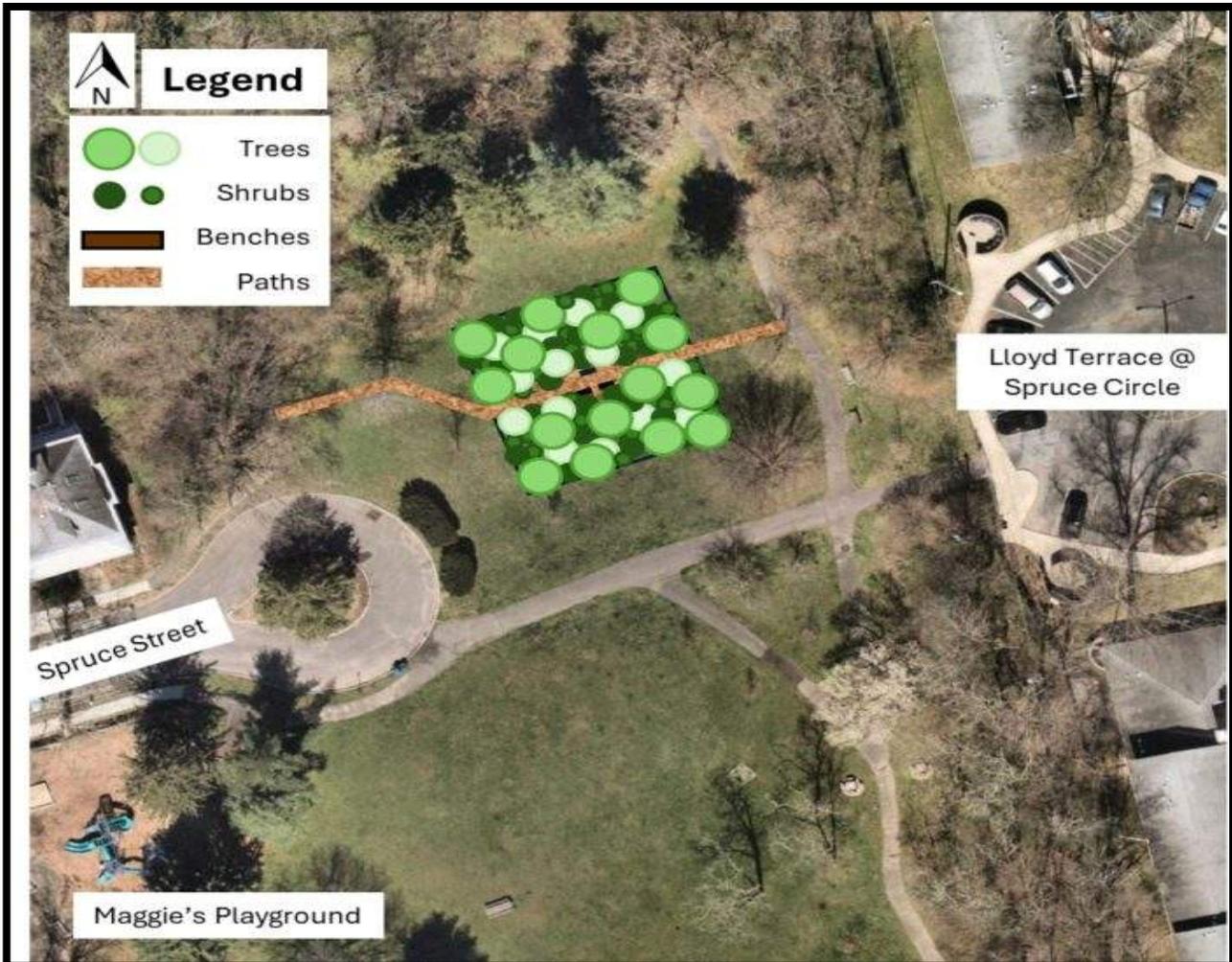


Figure 8: Microforest at Quarry Park on Spruce Street

Tree Planting and Species Selection

The Municipal Arborist, with assistance from the Shade Tree Commission, developed a Recommended Tree Species List to guide residents, developers, and contractors toward resilient, appropriate species selections. It is publicly available on the municipal website at <https://www.princetonnj.gov/1628/Recommended-Tree-Species>.

Capital Planting Projects

During 2025, 276 trees were planted through municipal spring and fall planting contracts including a mix of large canopy shade trees and utility-compatible species distributed throughout the municipality. Block plantings occurred on Cherry Valley Road at the Griggs Farm area, Birch Avenue, Cherry Hill Road, Greenway Meadows Poetry Walk, 400 Witherspoon Street, and Farrand Road, among other locations.

Five Shade Tree Commission commemorative trees were also installed in conjunction with the capital planting contracts: a Princeton elm and swamp white oak at Harrison Street Park; a sugar maple at Community Park North; an eastern redbud at Greenway Meadows; and a Sweetgum at Rogers Refuge.

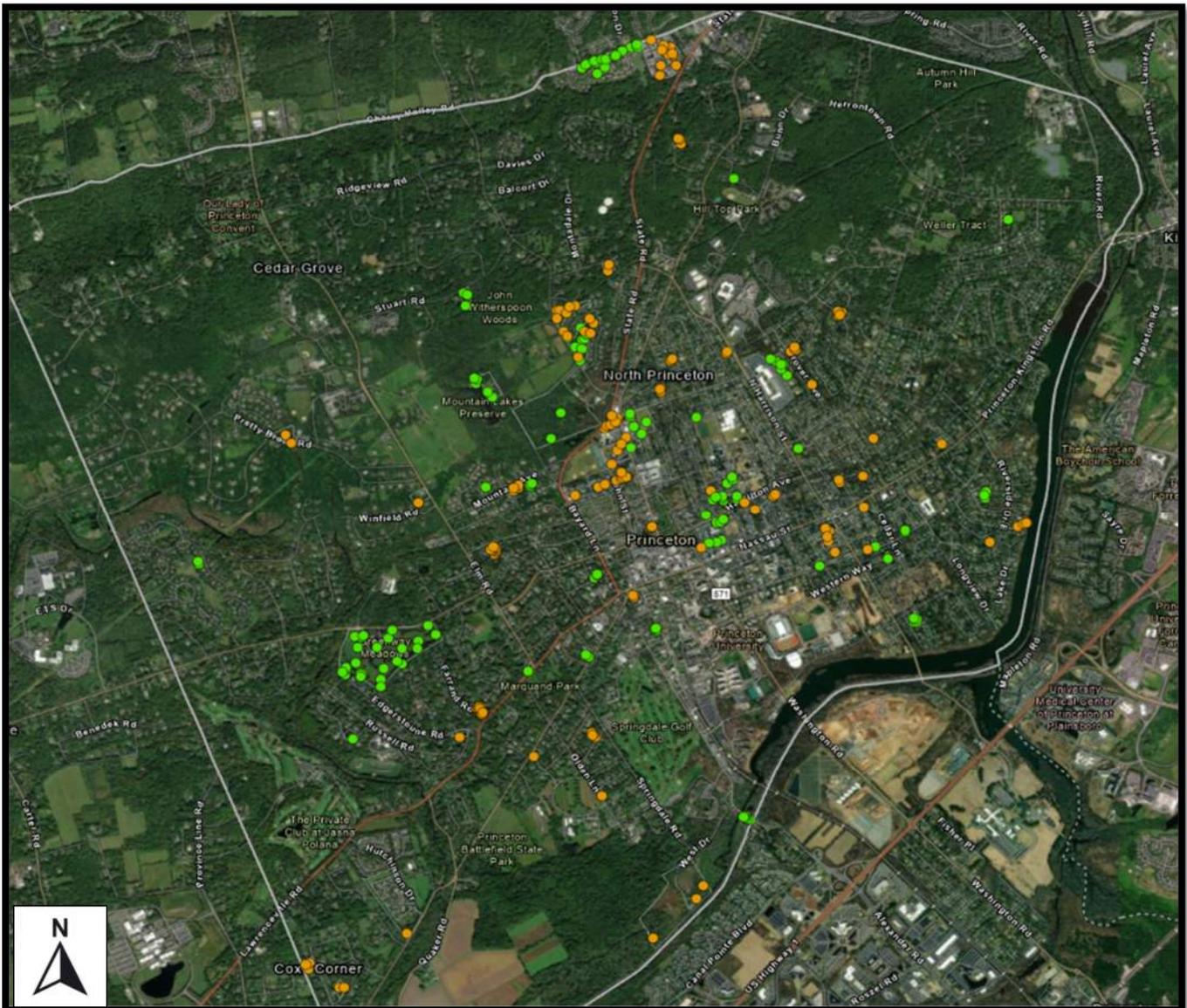


Figure 9: 2025 Capital Street Tree (276) Planting Locations
Green Dots: Spring Planting; Orange Dots: Fall Planting

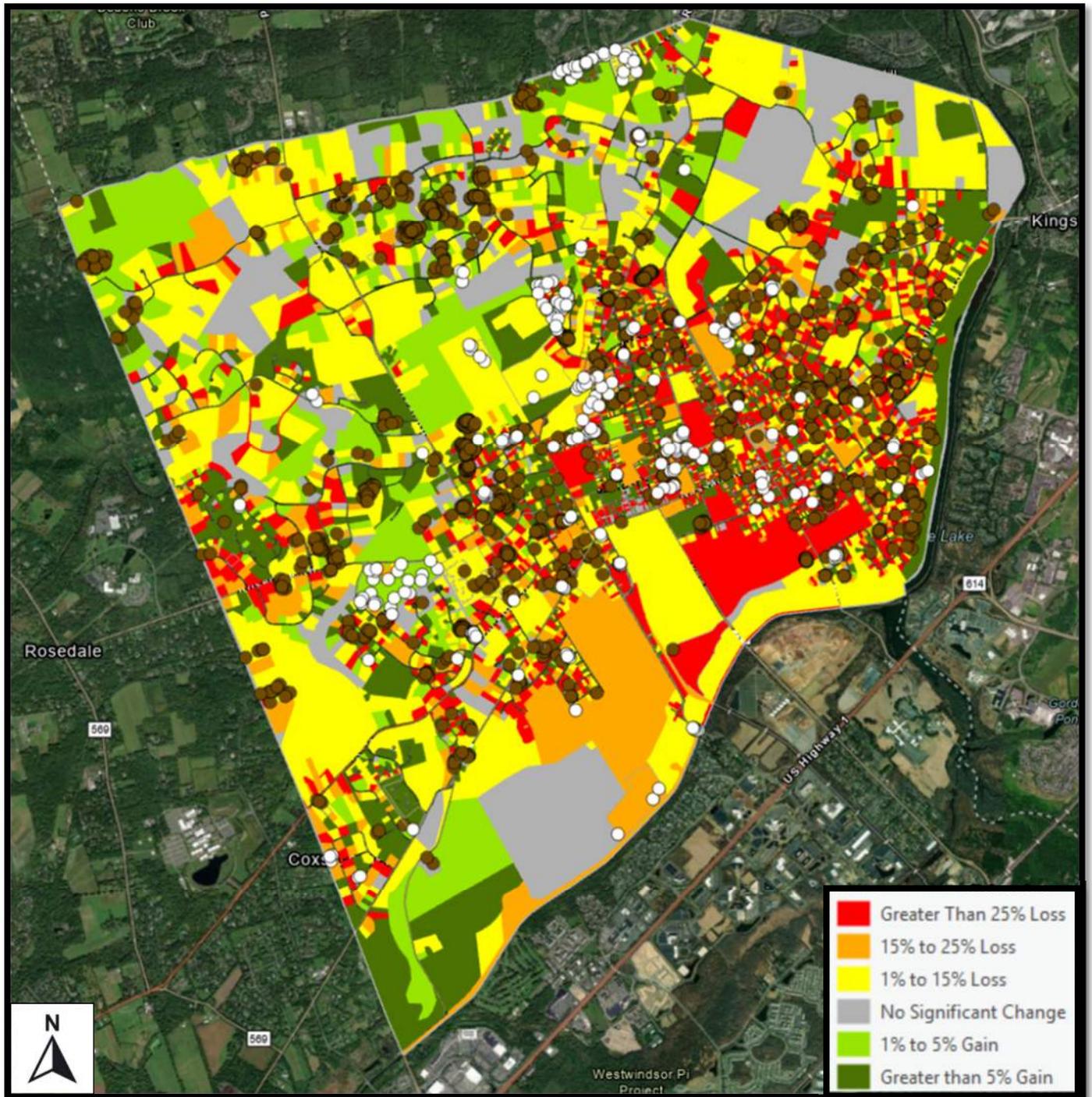


Figure 10: 2025 Street Tree Planting (White Dots) and Removal (Brown Dots) Locations Superimposed Over the Princeton Tree Canopy Loss / Gain Map Between 2010 and 2023

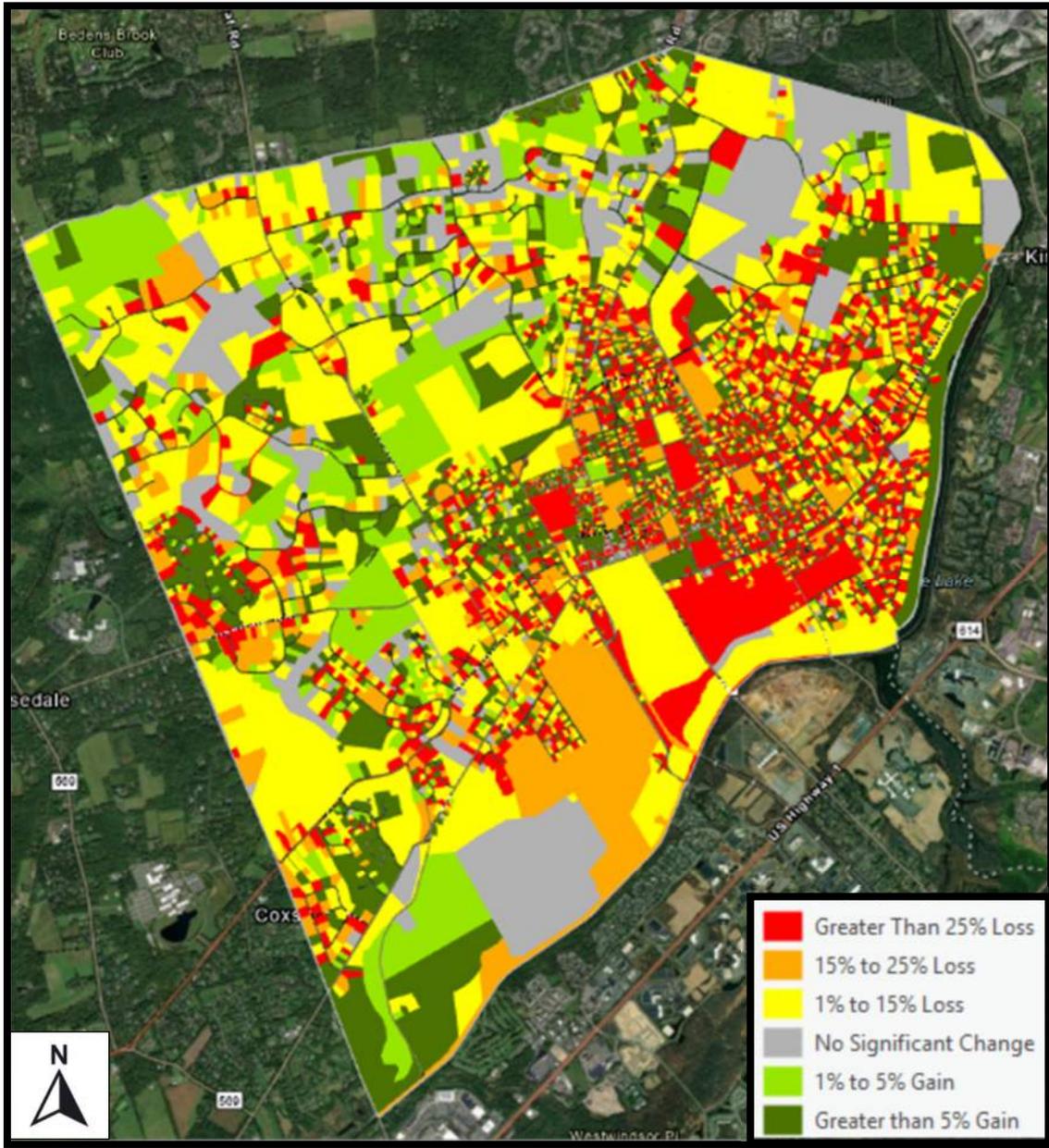


Figure 11: Princeton Tree Canopy Loss / Gain Map Between 2010 and 2023

	Share of Acreage in Category	Removals	Plantings
Greater than 25% Loss	17.3%	23.9%	21.2%
15% to 25% Loss	18.1%	19.8%	13.0%
1% to 15% Loss	50.2%	32.2%	22.2%
No Significant Change	2.5%	4.2%	0.7%
1% to 5% Gain	2.9%	5.7%	17.7%
Greater than 5% Gain	8.9%	14.2%	25.3%
TOTAL	11,782 acres	1,441 trees removed	282 trees planted
Ratio of Removal to Planting = "About 5 Trees Removed For Each Tree Planted"			

Figure 12: Princeton 2025 Tree Removal and Planting Summary Statistics

75% of removals and 56.3% of plantings occurred in parcels that experienced canopy loss, while 20% of removals and 43% of plantings occurred in parcels that experienced canopy gain.

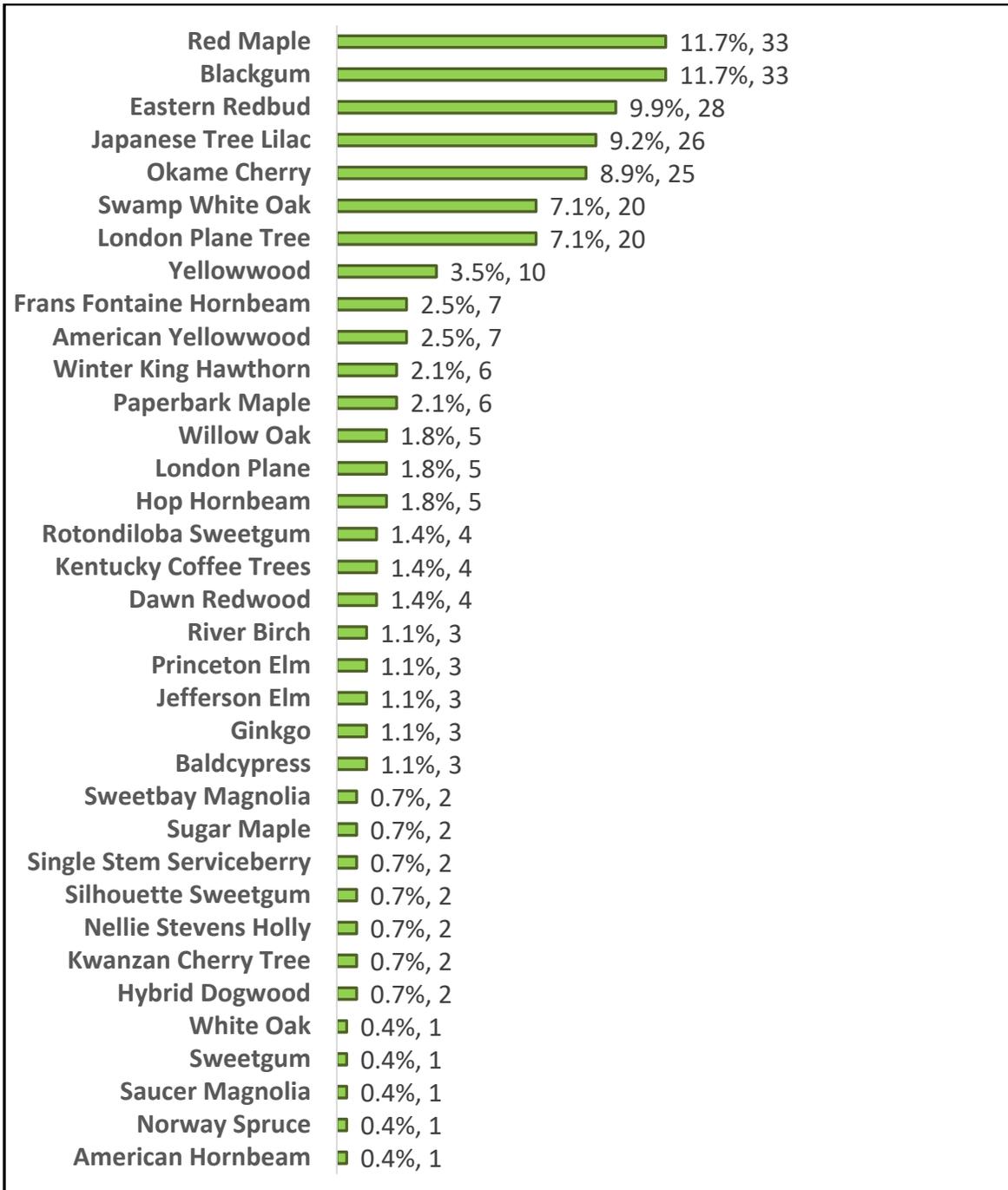


Figure 13: 2025 Capital Tree Planting (276 Trees) Species Distribution

Emerald Ash Borer Injection

As part of proactive pest management efforts, the Municipality treated 54 municipal ash trees, representing a total of 1,504 inches in DBH, using systemic injections to prevent Emerald Ash Borer infestation and preserve high-value public trees. The volume of trees treated are located on Vandeventer Avenue and Mercer Street and at Harrison Street Park and Marquand Park.



Witherspoon Street Rain Garden Installation

The Witherspoon Street rain garden, constructed as a part of the Witherspoon Street capital improvement project, was planted on April 28, 2025. Located between the street and sidewalk at the municipal building parking lot, the rain garden serves as a demonstration green infrastructure project. Planting was performed by municipal staff with support from Sustainable Princeton volunteers and Community Park Elementary School students. More than 600 native and adaptive plants were installed.

The rain garden functions as a best management practice for stormwater management, filtering runoff through mulch, engineered bioretention soil, sand, and a stone reservoir before discharging to the existing drainage system. Plantings were selected and arranged in zones based on water tolerance to maximize infiltration, evapotranspiration, and long-term performance.

Westminster Choir College Inventory

In June 2025, Princeton's Urban Forestry Department completed a comprehensive inventory and assessment of trees and stumps across the 23-acre Westminster Choir College campus. A total of 260 trees and stumps located along roadways and throughout the campus were inventoried. The data was collected and analyzed to evaluate species composition, tree condition, and maintenance needs, supporting informed management decisions that enhance public safety, environmental quality, and long-term urban forest health. Tree values and ecosystem benefits were quantified using the i-Tree Eco model developed by the U.S. Forest Service in partnership with The Davey Tree Expert Company.



Figure 14: Westminster Choir College Campus Tree DBH Distribution

Gray Dot: Young (1"-8"); Blue Dot: Established (9"-16"); Yellow Dot: Maturing (17"-23"); Orange Dot: Mature (24"+)

Professional Development and Workforce Capacity

Continuing education completed throughout the year directly supported the objectives of the Community Forestry Management Plan by ensuring professional competency, regulatory compliance, and adherence to best management practices.

Municipal tree crew members, Shade Tree Commission members, and the Municipal Arborist participated in multiple continuing education opportunities to maintain CORE, New Jersey Licensed Tree Expert, and ISA requirements. Additionally, one tree crew member completed a five-week climbing and training program through the Committee for Advancement of Arboriculture (C.A.A.), advancing workforce development, safety, and operational efficiency. The Municipal Arborist renewed both New Jersey Licensed Tree Expert and ISA certifications, ensuring qualified oversight of municipal tree management.



Interagency Coordination

Positive working relationships continued with PSE&G, Mercer County Department of Transportation, and the New Jersey Department of Transportation, with PSE&G committed to consistently perform

maintenance pruning along Princeton’s primary electrical distribution lines to support system reliability and public safety.

Public Outreach and Education

The Municipal Arborist continues to collaborate with the Communications Director to expand urban forestry content and outreach on the municipal website and social media, including the “Tree of the Month” video feature launched in November 2025 and other public-facing educational initiatives.



The Municipal Arborist conducted Arbor Day presentations to the four third-grade classes at the Princeton Public Schools, highlighting the importance of trees and distributing native seedlings sourced from a local nursery.

The Shade Tree Commission participated in annual community events including Princeton Porchfest and the Sustainable Princeton Beerfest, distributing native seedlings. At the annual Community Night Out, the Department of Infrastructure hosted an outreach table to discuss municipal tree initiatives, distribute the Recommended Tree Species List, and provide 36 one-gallon native trees to residents.



We appreciate your continued support of Princeton's urban forest. If you have any questions, please contact the Municipal Arborist, Taylor Sapudar at tsapudar@princetonnj.gov or (609) 688-2566.