

Kayla Williamson - kaylaannwilliamson@gmail.com

Dear Board of Finance and Board of Representative members,

My name is Kayla Williamson and I am a senior at Westhill High School and the President and Founder of the Westhill Environmental Club. I am reaching out to you because the Westhill Environmental Club is excited to be working with many groups in Stamford to advocate for Tree Resolution 4159 to Better Manage and Care for Trees on City Property. As the largest high school in Stamford, Westhill High School represents the City's future generations. In the classroom, students learn about the vital economic, regulatory, and provisioning services trees provide at no cost to humans. Yet, many of us experience subpar tree cover in our neighborhoods - especially in low-income communities. Trees are vital to local ecosystems and provide immeasurable aesthetic value to Stamford streets and properties.

The Urban Resources Initiative (URI), a tree advocacy group in New Haven (~20 sq. mi) plants 500 trees per year to simply keep up with urban development and natural tree death. Stamford - around 52 sq. mi - would need to plant 1300 trees to follow URI's lead. Yet, the Forestry Department only planted 85 trees (and removed 350) in 2022. Stamford is not keeping up the pace of planting new trees to replace those being removed on a yearly basis. Trees take years to mature. The need to plant more trees is NOW if Stamford wants a healthy tree canopy for future generations.

As you consider the budget proposal for the 2023-24 fiscal year, Westhill wants to demonstrate its support for tree planting and tree equity in Stamford so that we can catch up to our neighboring municipalities, like Bridgeport and New Haven. Tree Resolution 4159 is just the first step in changing the culture around environmental sustainability. Tree planting, GIS mapping, and additional Forestry Department workers will help build resilience against the current and impending effects of climate change in Stamford.

Help students advocate for the trees!
- Kayla Williamson