

Long-term urban forest study begins

By Quinn Suomala
Staff Writer

HOLYOKE – The data collection for a long-term urban forest study began on Friday, Oct. 13.

This study is dedicated toward investigating the health of trees planted in 94 pits across the city of Holyoke.

Students from Smith and Holyoke Community Colleges

will measure the pit sizes around the trees as well as the diameter of breast height, the diameter of the trees over the next several years to see how they grow in their environment.

“We’re starting a long-term study on the health of these trees...and we have trees that were newly planted in Holyoke,” Holyoke Community College Professor Sage Franetovich said. “We’re

going to come back year after year to measure the trees and see how well they’re doing and see if there’s a correlation between the size of the pit and the health of the tree.”

The goal of this is to learn more about what size pits trees need to grow healthily in urban areas. It will also demonstrate which types of trees thrive best

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Smith College and Holyoke Community College students gather to go over their work after they finish measuring the trees for the day. Work began on the study last Friday.

Turley photo by Quinn Suomala



Smith College Professor Jess Gersony and Holyoke Director of Conservation and Sustainability Yoni Glogower have worked together for the past year to bring this study to fruition.



Holyoke Community College Students Malylna Dansereau, Veronica Kozac, Courtney Matrni, Hailey Prive and Barbara Ann Santiago work together to measure the length of a pit around a tree.



Holyoke Community College Students Brian Zylich, Steven Saettone and Alex Hines collaborate to measure the diameter of a tree.

Turley photos by Quinn Suomala



Students from Holyoke Community College and Smith College worked to help measure trees for the long-term urban forest study beginning in Holyoke.



Holyoke Community College student Alex Hines and Professor Sage Franetovich work on measuring one of the trees.

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in the city environment, with climate change affecting weather and temperatures.

“So we can get a sense of which species do better in different sized pits and...also think about climate change, we can see how different species handle the change in climate better than others as we measure them every year,” Smith College Professor Jess Gersony said.

Using this information, the Holyoke Office of Conservation and Sustainability will try to improve the tree canopy in Holyoke to improve the quality of life for residents.

That office and the Department of Public Works will use the information to plan out future sidewalk and roadway projects to ensure that the sidewalks and roads remain accessible and also open to more trees.

“We want to plan them [sidewalk and road projects] comprehensively so pedestrians can get around, bikes can get around, and we can still have a healthy tree canopy to lower local ambient temperatures and improve air quality

and quality of life for our residents,” Holyoke Director of Conservation and Sustainability Yoni Glogower said.

This study has been planned over the last year. Holyoke Conservation and Sustainability received a grant in 2021 from the state’s municipal vulnerability preparedness program to help them make the city’s first urban forest equity plan.

This plan included a variety of activities centered on community engagement and a full public tree inventory. It was all centered around the goal of improving Holyoke’s tree canopy cover and giving it a more equitable distribution across the city.

From there Gersony and Franetovich got involved with the project.

Gersony is interested in plant physiology, specifically looking into how trees are affected by climate change. This study provided the perfect opportunity for her to expand her work on the subject.

“I was just googling around and I found the urban forest equity plan for Holyoke and I was just blown away by it,” Gersony said. “I was like, this is the work that I believe in and I want to sup-

port, so I reached out to Yoni and Sage.”

Since they connected, the two professors and Glogower have been working on developing this study.

Glogower was able to use the urban forest equity plan to work toward securing another grant, the DCR Greening the Gateway Cities Program’s Implementation Grant and Partnership Grant.

These two grants gave Glogower \$120,000 to be used toward identifying the 94 sites in the city that could use a tree pit or could increase the size of the current tree pit.

“We were looking for sidewalks in areas that were prioritized in the plan or where there was constituent interest... but also areas where there was adequate sidewalk space to begin with where we can put one in without impeding ADA accessibility,” Glogower said.

The trees were planted in the 94 lots last summer and, as they were working on planting the trees, Glogower wanted to investigate how big the pits needed to be to support healthy trees.

Hence, the study that began Oct. 13, was born.

“We wanted to see how big we needed to make these things in order to support a growing tree and a healthy urban canopy,” Glogower said.

Glogower reached out to the professors about the idea, and both were eager to assist.

“Yoni brought the question to us and Sage and I both said ‘Oh, I want to help,’” Gersony said.

Both professors brought in their students to assist in the data collection for the study, allowing them hands-on experience to see where they can take botany in their future careers.

“This is a really great teaching opportunity for both classes to think about how they can apply botany and plant biology in a way that has direct impacts on the community,” Gersony said.

The students will continue taking measurements and recording of the trees for the next week or so, until all 94 are measured.

This study will continue into the future and help to improve the urban forest of Holyoke as all involved learn from the data collected.