

## NEWS

# Arbor Day ceremony honors city residents lost to COVID, recognizes health care 'heroes'

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Telegram &amp; Gazette

Published 5:49 p.m. ET April 30, 2021 | Updated 9:08 p.m. ET April 30, 2021

WORCESTER — City residents who died during the COVID-19 pandemic were honored on Arbor Day with the planting of three trees Friday at Elm Park.

To date, 421 Worcester residents have died as a result of the pandemic, City Manager Edward M. Augustus said.

In addition to recognizing those residents who have passed away during the pandemic, the trees are also a tribute to the city's health care professionals and other essential workers, organizers said.

“All of those people are heroes. They allow us to get through this pandemic,” Augustus said.

City Councilor Sarai Rivera said people have learned and gone through a lot, so it means a lot to Worcester residents to have a beautiful park to enjoy and to remember others.

“(We’re) also able to walk by and reflect on the lives that were lost, and the sacrifices that were made by so many people and so many workers,” she said.

Joining Augustus and Rivera in the ceremony on Russell Street hosted by the city's Department of Public Works & Parks were Mayor Joseph M. Petty and environmental organizations, including the Greater Worcester Land Trust, Mass Audubon, Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Worcester Parks/Forestry, the state Department of Conservation and Recreation, the USDA, and National Grid.

The city is planning to plant more than 200 trees throughout the city this year, including 50 inside public parks.

Petty said the installation of trees in city neighborhoods not only increase property values, but also have shown to reduce stress and help the cool the city during the summer months.

On Tuesday, the City Council unanimously voted to support the "Green Worcester Plan."

The vision of the plan is to make Worcester the most sustainable and climate-resilient midsized city in America by 2050.

Augustus praised the Parks and Forestry departments for not only helping beautify and rejuvenate the city by planting trees, but also maintaining and managing all city-owned streets and trees, even during snowstorms.

"They do a lot of very difficult work and usually in very difficult circumstances when we're at home, safe and sound," Augustus said. "They're leaving their warm and comfortable home to make the city safe."