It’s looking like the celebration of the 50th Earth Day will be a muted event due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people are unaware that there is another environmentally conscious day during the week. But, with Million Tree Initiatives being announced in cities around the world, and the Trillion Tree Initiative that has been endorsed by President Trump, Arbor Day is a holiday that should be getting more notice in the future.
Arbor Day was first celebrated in 1872, and became a national holiday in 1907 thanks to Theodore Roosevelt and the first Chief of the United States Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot. Like Earth Day, Arbor Day is a day of action. Celebrated on the last Friday of April, it is a day dedicated to tree planting.

Trees have been on the radar of the city of Buffalo ever since the Dutch Elm disease stripped neighborhoods of their mature tree canopies. The October Storm in 2006 did the same for much of the rest of Western New York. The area came to a standstill for weeks with downed trees brought down by huge amounts of ice buildup. For the rest of New York State, the 1970’s saw stands of trees bleached and defoliated due to the effects of acid rain created by emissions from Indiana and Ohio coal plants. Today, we fight the emerald ash borer, a pest that is not native to North America and likely came to this area in wooden shipping containers from its Asian homelands.

The community responded to the 2006 “arbogeddon” by founding Re-Tree WNY. Their ambitious replanting goal of 30,000 trees took over 12 years, but was reached at the end of 2019. But, as their website notes “Re-Tree is NOT, repeat NOT done with our reforesting with our volunteers.”

As impressive as this effort has been, it pales to the Million Tree Pledge that the Town of Amherst has taken. Their goal is to plant a Million Trees in FIVE YEARS. That would be more trees planted every two months for the next two years than the Re-Tree WNY volunteers did in 12 years. This is a sizeable jump from the 400 trees per year currently being planted by the town.

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Supervisor Brian Kulpa said for too long, the town has lost countless trees due to commercial and residential development. He feels that his commitment is huge, but attainable. At this time, the town is conducting a tree survey, which will give the town a baseline to allow the town to apply for state grants to plant trees. In addition, the town will be updating its zoning laws, asking developers to increase the number of trees per acre in their properties. The town will also be looking to continue to infill bare spots along streets and to increase planting in public spaces and parks.

The Amherst Central Park proposal for the former Westwood Country Club will give the town a large canvas to place a number of the million trees.

*Lead image: Photo by Pedro Kümmel*

Categories: Environment, Region

Tags: 50th Earth Day, Amherst Central Park, Arbor Day, Arbor geddon, Brian Kulpa, Buffalo NY, COVID-19, Million Tree Pledge, October Storm, pandemic, President Trump, Re-Tree, Theodore Roosevelt, Town of Amherst, Trillion Tree Initiative, Westwood Country Club