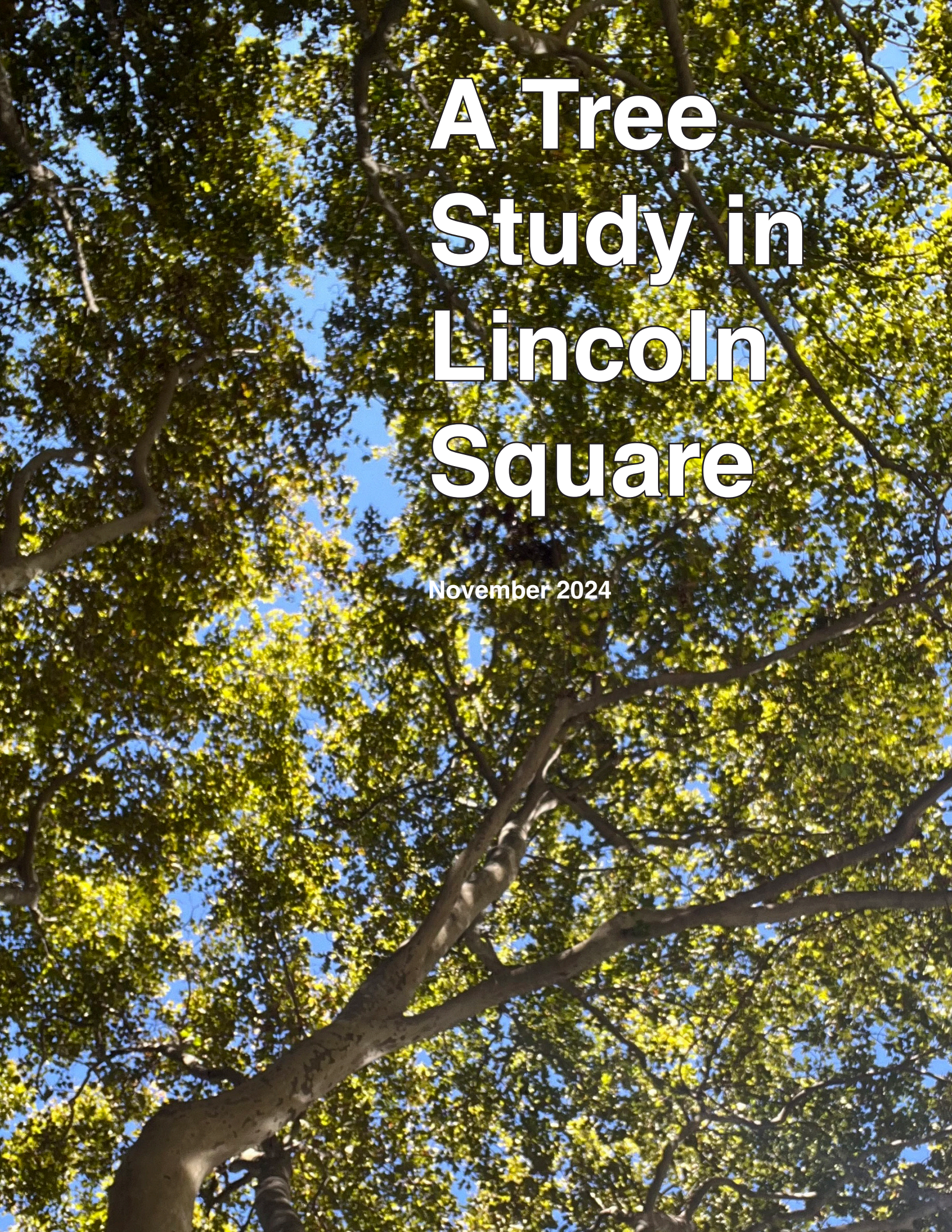


A Tree Study in Lincoln Square

November 2024

Contents

The Lincoln Square BID

Founded in 1996, the Lincoln Square Business Improvement District (BID) is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit that improves the quality of life in Lincoln Square, an area known for its rich offering of culture and entertainment. The BID's mission is to make Lincoln Square cleaner, safer, and more beautiful, and to undertake various improvement projects. It focuses its efforts on supplemental sanitation and security services; the beautification of public spaces, malls, and parks; and the promotion and marketing of the area's diverse business and cultural offerings.

The Lincoln Square BID is a public-private partnership governed by a Board of Directors and derives its revenue from an annual assessment on all real property located within the boundaries of the BID. Members of the BID include property owners, businesses, hotels, restaurants, retailers, cultural and non-profit institutions, public officials and residents. As a steward of the neighborhood, the BID ensures curbs and sidewalks are clean and safe, and that public spaces are lushly planted.

Green Space in Lincoln Square

The BID has always focused its attention on lanscaping throughout Lincoln Square. Outdoor public spaces in the area include gardens within the Broadway Mall and three parks (Damrosch, Dante, and Richard Tucker). Its parks, planters and Broadway Mall from 60th – 70th Street make chameleon-like changes from brilliant panoramas of bold tulips to sweeps of sunny wildflowers to evergreen shrubs and lighted trees during the holidays.

As partnerships crop up in the city to support increased tree canopy, now is a perfect time for the BID to consider ways to bettter maintain the wealth of trees located within its boundaries.

Trees in New York City

According to the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation's (NYC Parks) website, NYC Parks "has jurisdiction over all trees growing in the public right-of-way, including trees along streets, parkways, and in city parks." More specifically, Parks' Forestry Divisions maintain almost 600,000 street trees citywide. Newly planted city trees are watered and maintained by a tree planting contractor for two years, after which the Borough Forestry offices take over the care and maintenance of the trees. Forestry crews then manage and maintain the mature trees. The Parks Department even maintains a New York City Tree Map that indicates the last time that each tree was inspected and the results of the inspection, including any work that was performed on the tree.

Tree inspections occur every few years, but while NYC Parks maintains the trees, property owners are encouraged to maintain the tree beds. Some property owners take great pride in surrounding trees with tree

guards, flowers, and other decorations, but others overlook these small patches of land or provide minimal care.

Why Trees Matters

Although Central Park with its hundreds of acres of wildlife is just steps outside of the Lincoln Square BID, caring for the trees within the neighborhood is still essential. Among their many benefits, trees:

- promote physicial and mental health,
- increase safety for motorized traffic and pedestrians,
- increase business,
- improve air quality,
- provide shade, and
- absorb precipitation, which helps prevent flooding.*

While the City aims to plant 1 million trees throughout the five boroughs by 2030, quality matters just as much as quantity. According to a 2016 report by the World Healthy Organization, research has “shown that the quality of public open spaces (including parks and gardens) in the neighborhoods is more relevant to mental health, than their quantity (Francis et al., 2012).” This suggests that maintaining tree beds may be just as critical as planting trees in the first place.

* Burden DO. Urban Street Trees: 22 Benefits. Public Manag. 2008:https://www.vibrantcitieslab.com/resources/22-benefits-of-street-trees/.

Tree Survey and Findings

Purpose of the Survey

In September 2024, the trees within the neighborhood were surveyed, with the goal of understanding which trees and their surrounding tree beds needed attention or additional care. While New York City's street trees are managed by NYC Parks, property owners are encouraged to perform regular maintenance on street tree beds next to their properties. Many large residential property owners hire private landscapers to maintain their tree beds, and some business owners also choose to landscape the tree beds directly in front of their buildings, though many do not.

Methodology

To collect information about the trees, the streets in the BID were combed, with a photo taken of each tree bed and notes taken regarding their conditions, including whether or not each tree had a tree guard and which tree beds were landscaped. Each tree was assigned a number and catalogued in Excel. This internal database was further supplemented with information from the New York City Tree Map, including the City's identification number for each tree, the type of tree, and its trunk diameter.

The survey did not look at any trees in Damrosch Park, which is maintained by NYC Parks. It also excludes the eight London Plane trees within Dante Park, and the trees within the Broadway Malls, which are already maintained by the Lincoln Square BID through a contract with A. Bulfamante Landscaping.

Findings

There are 423 street trees, representing 23 different species, in Lincoln Square. Just over half of tree beds are surrounded by tree guards, which are an important way to keep trees safe from pedestrians, dogs, and bikes. As of October 2024, only about 30% of the trees in Lincoln Square have plants or shrubs planted around them.

What are tree guards?

Tree guards, according to the NYC Parks, "are fences around the perimeter of a tree pit that provide a physical barrier between a tree and our sometimes harsh urban environment. These tree guards reduce soil compaction, shield the trunk from physical damage, and prevent pet waste from entering the tree pit. Tree guards have been proven to extend the longevity of trees, reduce mortality rates, and can also provide a small protected planting bed for gardening."

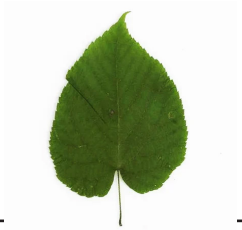
423
Trees

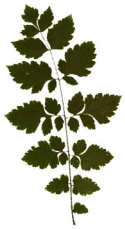
23
Species

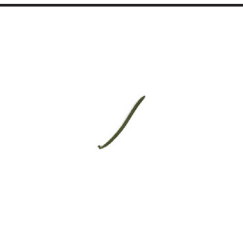
30%
Of Tree Beds Include Plants

Tree Directory

The following chart shows the 23 different types of trees that can be found in Lincoln Square. The number and types of trees in the area is constantly changing due to construction, trees dying or being removed, and new iniatiatives to plant trees. The photos of tree leaves shown below are provided by the NYC Parks website.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Leaves	# of Trees in District
American basswood	Tilia americana		7
Callery pear	Pyrus calleryana		42
Chinese juniper	Juniperus chinensis		3
Cornelian cherry dogwood	Cornus mas		1
Dawn redwood	Metasequoia glyptostroboides		1

Common Name	Scientific Name	Leaves	# of Trees in District
English oak	Quercus robur		1
European hornbeam	Carpinus betulus		5
Ginkgo	Ginkgo biloba		36
Goldenrain tree	Koelreuteria paniculata		6
Japanese maple	Acer palmatum		3
Japanese pagoda tree	Styphnolobium japonicum		29
Japanese tree lilac	Syringa reticulata		1

Common Name	Scientific Name	Leaves	# of Trees in District
Japanese zelkova	Zelkova serrata		21
Kentucky coffeetree	Gymnocladus dioicus		2
Littleleaf linden	Tilia cordata		1
Northern red oak	Quercus rubra		10
Pin oak	Quercus palustris		16
Red maple	Acer rubrum		1
Silver fir	Abies alba		1

Common Name	Scientific Name	Leaves	# of Trees in District
Silver linden	Tilia tomentosa		1
Thornless honey locust	Gleditsia triacanthos var inermis		225
White oak	Quercus alba		2
Willow oak	Quercus phellos		8

Next Steps

Given the significant number of tree beds that are not well-maintained in the neighborhood (about half), the Lincoln Square BID should consider a new tree bed initiative. The initiative could involve working with property owners, businesses, and residents to put a new spotlight on the state of tree beds and trees in Lincoln Square.

There are several potential programs and funding opportunities that the BID can consider pursuing, such as:

- Creating a contest to incentivize business owners and residents to better maintain their street trees;
- Using existing funding, or finding grant opportunities to create the funding necessary, to expand the BID's horticultural program to all under-cared for tree beds;
- Working with nearby schools or the New York Public Library (Riverside branch) to encourage maintenance of the tree beds as an educational community-building program;
- Requesting discretionary funds from Council Member Brewer;
- Partnering with Council Member Brewer and local organizations like Big Reuse to teach about caring for tree beds; or
- Starting a local volunteer group centered on planting in underutilized tree beds.