

## Testimony--Trees on Melnea Cass

I am Dr Brita Lundberg; I am a medical doctor, an internist and infectious diseases expert; I represent Climate Code Blue, an organization of physicians and public health experts who believe that the climate crisis, like a “Code Blue” in the medical setting, requires our urgent attention.

I am here to talk about the City’s proposal to cut down over 100 mature trees on Melnea Cass Blvd - a busy thoroughfare that produces an outsized amount of traffic-related air pollution.

The removal of this tree canopy and these trees is an environmental justice issue; an equity issue; and importantly, a health issue.

### **A health issue**

Cutting down these trees will exacerbate existing health inequity like asthma, COPD and heart disease that disproportionately burden the residents of this community.

### **Asthma**

Boston is already ranked #8 for US cities with the highest rate of asthma. One in eight children in Boston has an asthma diagnosis and the prevalence is even higher in communities of color.

Studies have shown that urban trees reduce asthma hospitalizations by removing dangerous pollutants, which improves air quality. Removing this important tree canopy will remove that important filter, increasing pollution

and particulate matter in the area, which will worsen asthma and COPD here.

Increased air pollution is associated with increased mortality from COVID. This is certainly NOT the time to be increasing air pollution--in the midst of an epidemic that thrives on air pollution.

### **Heat-related illness**

Trees can reduce severe heat in the summer. In Boston, historically redlined neighborhoods like Roxbury have been shown to have less tree coverage and because of the increased heat absorption of asphalt and large buildings, are much hotter than neighborhoods with extensive greenspace and trees. That is why they are known as “heat islands.”

This is important because no other category of hazardous weather event in the United States has caused more fatalities over the last few decades than extreme heat. Removing trees will make residents in Roxbury more vulnerable to heat-related illnesses like heat stroke, heat exhaustion, dehydration; even a few degrees of excess heat is associated with a greater risk of heart attack and stroke.

### **Mental health**

Trees are important to good mental health: they have been shown to improve mental health by reducing mental stress and incidents of violence in communities. [Trees are important to healing:](#) in studies of hospitals where patients could look at trees out the window, just three to five minutes spent looking at trees, flowers or water can reduce anger, anxiety and pain and induce relaxation, according to medical research that studied people’s blood pressure, muscle tension, or heart and brain electrical activity when looking at these views.

Finally, trees help combat climate change, which is a public health priority in Boston. In January, the City Council unanimously resolved that climate change is a health emergency. Removing trees will not help Boston reach its 2050 carbon reduction goals.

In June, Mayor Walsh pledged his “ commitment to making Boston a national leader in healing the wounds of our history and building a more just future.” But you can’t heal the wounds of history by cutting down trees in an environmental justice community.

If Boston kills these trees, it will fail to reach its commitments to racial justice, health equity, or to climate change--and it will harm the mental and physical health of the residents of that neighborhood and weaken the fabric of the community-- a lose for Boston, a lose for the Mayor, a lose for the community. By saving these trees that offer health benefits to a community with much higher rates of chronic health conditions, including asthma, heart disease, and stroke-- a vulnerable community--the Mayor will demonstrate his leadership on equity, on environmental justice, and on health.

<https://www.mdpi.com/2225-1154/8/1/12/htm#app1-climate-08-00012>

How Hospital Gardens Help Patients Heal - Scientific American