

The Trees of Quinpool Road, 2024

Peter Duinker, April 2024
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Many people who travel the streets of Halifax probably hardly notice the trees they pass by. Without thinking about it, we sense that Quinpool Road, particularly in the Business District between Robie St. and Connaught Ave (some of it pictured above), is pretty much devoid of trees. On the other hand, we readily sense that Connaught Ave. is loaded with trees. But beyond that, most of us don't pay much attention to what kinds of trees exist along our Halifax streetscapes, nor what condition they are in.

As a city resident living just north of Quinpool Road, and as a lifetime tree hugger and scholar, I study the trees in various Halifax neighbourhoods. I am fascinated by how trees come and go, and how they grow. Trees get bigger, trees get removed (usually when they show signs of age-related decline, or a storm blows them over), and new trees get planted.

I wondered, as I walked Quinpool in mid-April, whether anybody might find a guide to the trees along that street to be of interest. Sure, it's not a showcase of street trees, but the foot traffic along the street is intense all year round (not to mention the vehicle traffic!), so why not? You could either do the walk and take a copy of this document on paper or your phone, or you could tour the street using Google Street View (I did this in April; the images for the east end of the street are from July 2019, and for the west end of the street from August 2023 – not much has changed, though, in the Quinpool tree population over that period).

Before writing this article, I used the internet to see what photos there might be of Quinpool Road from decades past. You might find others, but the best one for me is a [1960 photo](#) of the street taken toward the east from about

100 m west of the intersection with Oxford. The photo makes it clear that Quinpool has been devoid of trees for at least 64 years!

So let's start. We'll begin our sylvan journey along Quinpool Road from its east end at Robie St. I will include both municipally owned trees (i.e., in the road right of way) and private trees if these are close to the sidewalk – I can't tell where the property boundaries are, and it doesn't really matter anyway because you can enjoy all these trees up close, whether public or private. The photos are all by me.

The intersection with Robie St. is called the Willow Tree. It is named so because for a long time, a [willow tree](#) stood in the median right at the beginning of Quinpool Road. I'm not sure when that tree was removed, but over the past two decades there have been two or three attempts to get a willow tree growing there again. Each attempt has failed, and the current sapling there is really struggling to survive. I predict a bleak future for this tree (see photo below).



Next, not far along on the south side of the street (6048 Quinpool), we encounter an American elm tree in good condition. At least two decades ago the tree was in decline. John Simmons, formerly chief urban forester for HRM, told me that he personally gave that tree a thorough pruning for health and structural integrity and now, as is evident, the tree is flourishing. That's a good thing, because there are no more trees along the south side of Quinpool from that tree all the way to about Monastery Lane! For an article about elms along Halifax streets, see [here](#).

The former site of St. Patrick's High School is on the north side of Quinpool before Quingate. The two trees closest to Windsor St. are [little-leaf lindens](#). One of the clear signs of a linden tree is the thick growth of shoots coming out of the base of the tree (see photo). Other tree species do this to some degree but not nearly as prolifically as little-leaf linden. Further along the former school property are three elms. They are not in great health (see photo) and are probably not worth saving when the former school property gets developed. I predict that all the trees along the Quinpool side of that property will be removed. For the trees that belong to the municipality (the elms at least, as they are on the street side of the sidewalk), doubtless the developer will have to agree to replace the trees at a rate to be negotiated with HRM's urban forester.

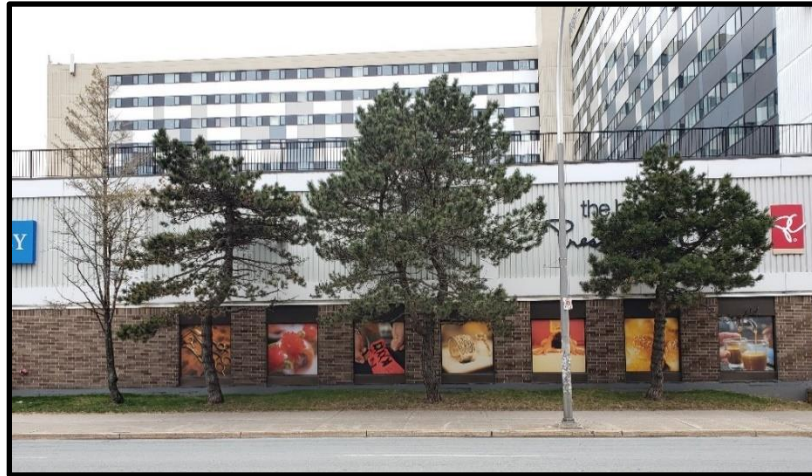


Before we get to more trees, let's look at the circular tree pit on the north side of Quinpool just a few steps from Quingate. The Google Street View imagery shows the pit covered in grass. No doubt, based on the trees in pits further down the street, this pit had a tree in it at the time of re-capitalization of the street many decades ago. Some 10-15 years ago, HRM planted a conifer tree of about 1.5 m tall in it (see photo below). Soon after, that tree was dead, and it took several years before HRM Urban Forestry removed it. The pit has sat empty for quite a few years since. I cringe every time I walk by it as I think about the tragedy of so many older tree pits and how they serve/served their intended trees rather poorly.

Speaking of tree pits, those that amount to little more than a concrete-lined hole in the ground and filled with soil (of unknown quality) are clearly not a good way to try to give new trees a reasonable chance to thrive in the very difficult circumstances of a busy street. The recapitalizations of Argyle St. and Spring Garden Rd. incorporated soil cells specially designed for proper tree rooting. We need more of that and, to my understanding, we will get it when new buildings are constructed streetside and the strip between curb and new sidewalk is narrower than 1.5 metres.



Further along the north side, next to the Superstore building, we have a short row of conifers. If you care to read an interesting study about conifers in Halifax and the fact that there are so few of them in the built-up areas across the city, undergrad student Levyn Radomske investigated this topic for his [thesis](#) project last year. The four trees here include one Douglas fir (the most westerly) and three Austrian pines (see photo). Douglas firs are rare in Halifax. They are native in Canada only in the west, mostly in BC. There was another Douglas fir in the grass along the Canadian Tire store, but it declined slowly and died a few years ago. This one is also in decline and will die soon. Austrian pines are much more numerous in Halifax – an iconic set of large ones sits in the median of University Avenue between the fire station and Dal Dentistry. The ones here are not particularly old or special, but Austrian pines seem to be able to thrive in a diversity of sites around Halifax. As the name implies, they are native to Europe.



Our next tree is special. It is in a tree pit at the Quinpool door to the Superstore. Some years ago, this little-leaf linden's crown was in serious decline and was unsafe with deadwood. So HRM implemented the first stage of a total takedown. Frequently, tree removals are done in two stages – the crown is removed first, with the cut-off materials small enough to handle by hand as they are fed into a chipper. The large trunk is left for later removal using a flat-bed truck with a loading arm. Once the crown was removed on this tree, it seemed to find a new life and the 6-metre trunk shot out a fulsome new crown of shoots all along the stem. I petitioned HRM not to cut down the tree and to allow it to flourish with its new crown. The tree has been growing like this for about five years. Clearly, the roots and stem had much more life in them than the crown. Who knew that this would be the reaction to the crown removal? Trees sometimes have powerful and positive reactions to strong pruning (this is the basis for the cultural practices of pollarding and coppicing trees, techniques much more common in Europe than here – but that's another story). I smile in admiration every time I pass by this tree.



Not far further down the street is a mature black locust also in a tree pit just west of the Quinpool door to Canadian Tire. We wrote about the [black locust](#) in our 2020 series on street trees. This tree has white flowers (there is a purple variety too), and the spring flower show is worth watching for. The tree seems in very good condition.



On the corner with Monastery Lane is the last tree for a long stretch on the north side of Quinpool. It is a European ash in a tree pit. So far it is healthy. However, we should be concerned about all the ash trees in HRM because the emerald ash borer (EAB) is here and it is known to devastate ash populations wherever it settles in. Young European ash trees are known to be more resistant to EAB than our North American ash species. The greatest devastation of ash trees by the borer so far is in the area of DeWolf Park, but the borer has been found in a few peninsula ash trees. Perhaps it will bypass this ash or not find it – let's hope.



Directly across from the ash tree, on the south side of Quinpool, are a couple of conifers. The tall one is a Norway spruce, native to Europe and commonly used there for lumber. It seems in pretty good health. We have other Norway spruces in various places around the city, and it has been planted for timber production in a few areas around the Maritimes. Right next to the spruce, to the east, is a smaller Austrian pine that is in poor condition.



Now there's a long stretch of no street trees until after Beech St. On the south side, the street becomes residential and there is a narrow tree lawn of perhaps a metre wide. It contains several trees from there to Connaught (and

further). To end our tree tour of Quinpool's business district, we stop at Beech St. on the south side but venture just one more block – to Elm St. – on the north side.

Of considerable interest to us here are the three young trees in tree pits in front of the Halifax Veterinary Hospital (two birches) and the Ardmore Tea Room (a ginkgo). It's a mystery what kind of tree pit this is – does it have a concrete bottom? How large is the pit? What is the quality of the soil? This kind of pit is out of favour now (see above). Thankfully so, because they are magnets for street litter (have a look down into the pit!). Nevertheless, that three of the four pits support what seem to be healthy trees is remarkable.

We don't generally plant native birches in the streetscape – they are too fickle when it comes to survival. These are doubtless river birches (*Betula nigra*) and both the survivors seem to be doing well. The [ginkgo](#) (pictured) is an obvious choice for a tough, concrete-dominated streetscape – throughout the city they seem to survive all stresses. HRM Urban Forestry staff will need to monitor these trees carefully as they grow in girth – it is highly unfavourable for the tree trunks to touch the pits' narrow concrete openings. One of the birches didn't make it, but the root stock has not given up trying to grow a new crown!



There we are – the trees, sparse as they are, of the Quinpool business district. We've met a willow, four elms, several little-leaf lindens, some Austrian pines, a stressed Douglas fir, a black locust, a European ash, a Norway spruce, two river birches, and a ginkgo. Not a great tree representation for a kilometre of roadway, but better than nothing. It is common throughout North American cities that major traffic arteries lined with businesses have few trees – concrete and asphalt rule the land surface. But it is clear also that if we care enough and have an opportunity to change things, we can readily incorporate way more trees into a busy streetscape – witness the rebuild of Spring Garden Rd.

It's a good thing that the residential areas both north and south of Quinpool Rd. are so well treed (see the photo at the top of the article) – at least the neighbourhood as a whole doesn't have the treeless feel of Bayer's Lake commercial district. I doubt that Quinpool Rd. will be endowed with more/better trees in the near future unless a

major rebuild of the streetscape occurs. Such a rebuild gives a good chance to design the updated infrastructure to accommodate new trees with the best growing conditions possible.

You might wonder why I make an issue of sparse tree populations along city streets. It's this: if there were one place you would get the widest array of [benefits from a tree in the city](#), it is next to a street. Trees help slow traffic, draw pedestrians/shoppers, clean the air of nasty vehicle exhausts, look good, increase safety, and I could go on. Would it not be fantastic to see a Quinpool Road business district with a couple hundred diverse street trees to make the sterile environment so much finer to spend time in? Watch for additional articles on the trees of other well-known streets of Halifax. Meanwhile, as you navigate Quinpool Rd. in the future, you can marvel at the few special trees that grace this streetscape.