



See Something Say Something Citizenship

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Recently, I was walking to the Mallston (a.k.a Ballston Quarter) through a privately-owned public space between several buildings, one of which was the Ballston Exchange. The public use area is a mix of public seating, landscaping beds, and trees outside of the various restaurants and apartment entrances on either side.

I noticed that there were small and unusual growths on the trees planted there, and used iNaturalist as well as additional research to learn that they actually were calico scale insects. Calico scale insects can be destructive to trees, and after scanning every tree in the plaza I quickly realized that they were abundant on every single one. (As a note - calico scale insects are native, but that doesn't mean they are great for our trees!)

One thing to know about these privately-owned public spaces is that these developers/management teams very much want to keep the trees there alive, something I picked up after many [SPRC](#) meetings as a Park and Recreation Commissioner. Trees are expensive to plant and maintain in these spaces - any Tree Steward can tell you about the cost of tree maintenance in an urban heat island, especially ones that are in areas where sunlight is blocked by tall buildings and there isn't a lot of root space available. The property managers understand the value of biophilia in urban spaces, and these natural aspects are often part of their pitches to get public opinion on their side. If the trees died, they would need to replace them (expensive) and their space would look terrible in the meantime (bad PR).

But it is also true that there aren't as many 'eyes on the ground' once the construction is completely done, and while maintenance obviously happens (these spaces do not stay the way they are if left to their own devices), 'see something, say something' can apply to the average citizen here too. The same way we would [report stormwater pollution](#) if we saw it, Arlingtonians can also reach out about issues in spaces like this.

The first thing to do is find out who is responsible for the maintenance of this tree. I was given the information of the Ballston Exchange Management Office, which makes sense given that this was right outside the Ballston Exchange building. You can ask for this information with the [Report a Problem tool](#) on the Arlington County website.

I sent the property management company an email with a picture of the calico scale insects attached, mentioning the concerns I had about the health of the trees. In truth, I didn't know if they would actually respond - sometimes it feels like emailing general inboxes can just go into a void. However, I unexpectedly got a near-instant response from someone saying they would

contact their landscaping vendor about it. Out of curiosity, some time later (I can't recall quite how long after, but it was at least a week), I went back to the area to examine the trees - and the calico scale insects were entirely removed. I examined every tree and could not find a single one.

I am not sure I would have been able to use iNaturalist and then other resources to identify the calico scale insects, or even understand the impact that these pests could have on the trees, had I not done the ARMN training. I also would not have the knowledge about privately-owned public spaces and the responsibility these property managers have towards the trees on their property without my Park and Recreation Commission background. I'm extremely glad to be able to utilize these two aspects of my community engagement in Arlington to help our natural resources, even in small instances like this!