

A property owner has asked the town to pressure his neighbor to remove a tree that has fallen from the neighbor's yard into his yard. What should we do?

Nothing. This is a private civil matter between neighbors and should be resolved between the parties, or perhaps in Superior court, but not in a selectboard meeting.

Local government must be responsive to taxpayer concerns, and should be involved if, in fact, it has an interest. However, cities and towns should not intervene in private civil matters. Sometimes it is difficult to uncover the true nature of an issue and whether the municipality has any authority to provide a solution. Sometimes a town official may need to explore the issue to reveal whether the municipality has any control over the situation. For instance, is there a violation of a local zoning bylaw, or a building or health code? Many times, however, the authority to resolve or correct the action lies elsewhere, and it is best not to get involved.

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