

Urban Forestry Citizen's Advisory Committee (UFCAC) **Recommendations of the Street Tree Subcommittee**

Summary of Meetings

Topic: Street trees. Urban Forestry's Recommended Street Tree List Street, planting strip width and spacing requirements, and other policies related to street trees.

Meetings:

June 16, 2009

3:30-5:45pm

In Attendance:

Melissa Burt (Urban Forestry Tree Committee)

Susan Traver (CAC Historic Preservation)

Pam Luders (CAC Utilities)

Julie Neff (CAC City Departments)

Steve Nittolo (Urban Forestry Program)

Jeff Perry (Urban Forestry Program)

June 29, 2009

3pm-5pm

In Attendance:

Garth Davis (CAC Natural Resources)

Susan Traver (CAC Historic Preservation)

Julie Neff (CAC City Departments)

Nancy MacKerrow (Citizen, Susie's Trees)

Steve Nittolo (Urban Forestry Program)

Jeff Perry (Urban Forestry Program)

July 27, 2009

3pm-5:30pm

In Attendance:

Garth Davis (CAC Natural Resources)

Pam Luders (CAC Utilities)

Susan Traver (CAC Historic Preservation)

Julie Neff (CAC City Departments)

Nancy MacKerrow (Citizen, Susie's Trees)

Steve Nittolo (Urban Forestry Program)

Following is a summary of subcommittee concerns with the city's street trees and Recommended Street Tree List.

1 – Recommended Street Tree List

The recommended street tree list referenced in the Arboricultural Specifications and Standards appears to have been developed with the assumption that very large planting strips are available (but in fact are unrealistic in most circumstances). In addition, it is not clear whether

large canopy trees are allowed in the City's standard 5' planting strip. Finally, the current recommended street tree list, as written, does not appear to provide flexibility to allow large maturing trees in the most common size of planting strip.

Objective: Provide flexibility to allow larger maturing trees (than currently specified) in the most common size of planting strip.

Impact: if the status quo is maintained, it may result in a predominance of smaller trees in the city which is a concern because large trees provide vastly greater benefits. Another result would be a decrease in species diversity.

Recommendations:

1) Revise recommended tree list in Arboricultural Specifications and Standards Manual for consistency with the city's standard 5' planting strips. The list would note that size of tree permitted will be site specific and may include trees for the following locations:

a. Standard 5' planting strips, trees located under power lines, or when a physical or environmental constraint prevents the planting of larger trees: Small Trees

b. Standard 5' or larger planting strips: Medium and Selected Large Trees

c. Exceptional planting sites (for example, 8' or wider): Large and Extra Large Trees

2 – Historic Landscape Preservation and Existing Planting Strips Less than 5' Wide

Many of the city's existing planting strips are less than 5' wide. Many of these strips are located in historic neighborhoods with high property values in large part due to the trees. There is concern that once the existing trees are removed, they will not be replaced with a tree of any size per the Arboricultural Specifications and Standards which require a minimum 5' planting strip. A solution for these existing situations is needed.

Objective: The ability to take advantage of existing planting strips.

Impact: By maintaining the status quo, we will lose our historic landscapes and forest canopy. This could potentially negatively affect property values.

Recommendations:

1) Consider options for allowing high branched or other tree that does not have large buttress roots in existing narrow planting strips greater than 3'-0" planting width (as measured between curb and sidewalk when located behind a 8' parking strip). Provide education/advocacy to supplement with large tree(s) on private property along street/sidewalk if a small tree is used. Develop a list of trees that may work in these existing conditions.

Challenges

- Engineering clear zone policy <http://www.spokaneengineering.org/Policies-Procedures/Clear%20Zone%20Policy%20Revised%206-26-08.pdf> (3' from face of curb

when adjacent to a travel lane (however when a parking strip is adjacent to the curb, the requirement is only 10' from travel lane so 2' from the curb).

- Arboricultural Manual Policy requiring 5' min. width.
- Damage by street sweepers, high FedEx vans, garbage trucks, car doors.
- Maintenance needed – 5 year pruning cycle and currently money is not available.
- May need to plant large trees to withstand potential damage.
- May prevent people from moving sidewalks (but people would still be required to move sidewalk when it eventually fails).
- Ensuring that people understand that this is not an optimal situation, it may cost more in maintenance, ensure they understand that it would be better to move sidewalk and choose from a larger palette.
- Ensure that this does not require additional work for the Urban Forestry Program or that additional staff is hired to supplement.

2) Take out sidewalk and put in a large tree – leave as permeable surface or other alternate sidewalk (rubber sidewalks, permeable paving (concrete or pavers), crushed compacted gravel flush with sidewalks utilizing gravelpave or equal.

Challenges

- Engineering Services requirements for hard surface. City's Design Standards and Standard Plan F-102 "Concrete Sidewalk" infer concrete sidewalk as standard.
<http://www.spokanecity.org/services/documents/smc/?Section=17H.010.180>
- Engineering clear zone policy (3' from face of curb when adjacent to a travel lane (however when a parking strip is adjacent to the curb, the requirement is only 10' from travel lane so 2' from the curb).
- Arboricultural Manual Policy requiring 5' min. width.

3) Depending on feasibility of site and type of project, provide "bump-out" spaces for trees in the parking lane (between curbs and parking spaces). This would also provide an opportunity to designate snow storage on the street (not on the sidewalks).

Challenges

- Engineering Services - drainage.
- Underground utilities
- Snowplowing

4) Owner can revise sidewalk to meander around tree and provide at min. 5' wide planting area between curb and sidewalk to replace a large tree.

Challenges

- In some cases, the owner would need to grant an easement to the City for the sidewalk (Engineering Services).

5) Neighborhoods may be able to join forces (ex. LID) to rebuild sidewalks for large trees.

Challenges

- LID system needs streamlining
- Costs

6) Require property owners to move sidewalks further from the curb after they've failed, or at minimum provide information so they are aware of the benefits of doing so. Have City assessor(s) flag when sidewalks are evaluated.

Challenges

- Easement for sidewalk may be necessary (Engineering Services).
- Need to determine who would oversee and develop this program.
- Trees may not be possible in all circumstances, so there may be no reason to move sidewalk.

7) Provide opportunity for consultation with urban forester to assess whether a large tree is possible in smaller strips. Provide a note on the Recommended Street Tree List – “Please contact the Urban Forestry Program if your planting strip doesn't meet these requirements to discuss options for planting trees on your site.”

8) Revisit spacing of trees both in the Arboricultural Specifications and Standards as well as the Spokane Municipal Codes. Address conflicts between codes and policies.

9) Develop a flyer or other clear means of communication to ensure people understand spacing from all elements (such as signage, fire hydrant, power lines, etc.). Clarify the City's clear view triangle requirements and allow trees in these areas if 30" to 8' vertical clear zone remains. Require that all measurements (using steel tape) have been made prior to calling arborist. If all requirements have not been met, a tree may not be planted. In addition, post all of the above information on the Urban Forestry website.

Challenges

- Urban Forestry staffing limitations
- Costs
- Means of distribution

3 – Discrepancies between the City's Codes and Policies

As an example, SMC 17C.200.050 B.7 states that new trees in a uniform planting should match existing planting pattern and species. While the intent of the code (to maintain historic character) is appreciated, it is in conflict with Arboricultural Standards that advocate for species diversity. There are some species with a moratorium. In addition, some planting strip widths are not large enough to continue existing pattern/species.

Objective: reconcile discrepancies between codes, regulations, and policies.

Impact: maintaining the conflicts in code requirements may result in lack of continuity/preservation of historic landscapes with existing large canopy trees. In addition, the conflicts create confusion for the City's customers and staff.

Recommendation:

1) Inventory all city codes and policies related to the urban forest and ensure that they're consistent.

Challenges

- Costs
- Staff time
- Availability of subject matter experts

4 - Downtown

Downtown is a separate challenge. This is a difficult environment for street trees, but they are highly desirable for environmental and economic benefits. Special provisions are necessary for this area.

Objective: a healthy canopy of street trees to enhance the pedestrian environment.

Impact: Unless the issue is addressed, Downtown will continue to have many empty planting holes and stunted, unhealthy trees.

Recommendations:

- 1) Include note in the Recommended Street Tree List that planting strip widths do not apply in this zone.
- 2) Form a separate task force to address downtown street trees including irrigation systems and planting options in this environment.

Challenges

- Staffing availability
- Business owner costs associated with installation and ongoing maintenance of irrigation facilities to street trees.

5 – Priority on Mature Trees

There is not currently a priority on maintaining mature, non-hazardous street trees.

Objective: Healthy street trees, with a majority at or nearing maturity.

Impact: Without placing a priority on mature street trees, the city will continue to experience higher mortality rates and decreasing canopies. This results in the loss of the environmental and economic benefits of existing healthy trees. In addition, there is increased potential for damage to people and property.

Recommendations:

- 2) Complete the inventory of street trees.
- 3) Identify and deal with problems as they arise.
- 4) Attain a 5-year pruning cycle.
- 5) When designing new projects, place a priority on opportunities to maintain the health of any existing mature, healthy trees.

Challenges

- Funding
- Staffing