

Homeowner miffed by tree removal

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
Wednesday, 23 January 2013 19:40 -

<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/012413/treeSM.png> **Complaint from resident who wasn't notified beforehand prompts city to review policy**

Last Monday, the City of Port Washington cut down a healthy ash tree on Parknoll Lane without notifying the homeowner, who planted the tree 29 years ago and wants to know why the action was taken.

The tree wasn't infested with the emerald ash borer, the invasive pest that has killed millions of trees across the nation and was discovered in the city last year, he said.

But the borer is precisely the reason for removing the ash tree, city arborist Jon Crain said.

The tree was crowding a second, larger ash tree in the parkway that the city has earmarked for treatment against the borer, he said. To give that larger tree the best chance of survival, it needed more space.



A new tree will be planted in the parkway this spring, although it will be planted farther away from the other tree than the ash was, Crain said.

The department is currently trimming trees and removing those it knows are infested with the emerald ash borer, including 15 on Webster Street, Crain said.

"We're going to be sure anything we do know is infested is taken down this winter," he said. "We don't want that insect to be coming out in spring."

The city is taking an aggressive approach to ash trees, removing those that could have a detrimental effect on other, stronger trees or are in a state of decline, Crain said.

"They (the borer) go for smaller, weaker trees," he said. "They're just a food source for the emerald ash borer."

But to Richard Thompson, the ash tree that was cut down last week was more than just a tree.

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It was one of two white ash trees he planted in the parkway after building his house at 1724 Parknoll La. 29 years ago, said Thompson, who explained his situation to the Common Council Tuesday.

“We value them for shade. They provided us with some privacy,” Thompson said, noting they served as a buffer to a condominium across the street. “It’s taken a long time for them to get to that size.”

One of the trees — the one cut down by the city — was struck by a car while it was just “a stickling,” he said, so it was smaller than the other.

But he and his wife nurtured the trees, even hiring an arborist to treat them when a flowering pod appeared on them several years ago, Thompson said.

“We wanted to make sure they stayed healthy,” he said.

So he was surprised when he came home last week to discover one of the trees had been removed with no prior notice or explanation, Thompson said.

When he called the city, he was told the tree was cut down because it was “in decline,” he said, but no one could explain what that meant.

“It is bad enough that we are going to lose trees to the emerald ash borer, so why cut down perfectly healthy trees?” he asked. “I would have been glad to pay for some treatment to keep the tree, as I have done in the past.”

Thompson said Crain returned his call and said the city would develop a policy requiring homeowners be notified when trees in front of their houses are removed.

That’s been the city’s practice, Crain said, although he acknowledged he failed to warn Thompson.

“I do sympathize with the homeowner,” he said. “I did fail to communicate with him. We’ll try to make sure and notify people so they’re not shocked when they come home to find trees cut down.”

Thompson asked the Common Council to support this effort.

“We think of these trees as part of our property,” he said. “I think these are fairly reasonable expectations.”

Ald. Jim Vollmar said he agreed with Thompson.

“There should be a policy of notifying property owners,” he said. “He had a good point.”

Ald. Paul Neumyer agreed, saying he has fielded complaints from constituents in the past

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about trees being removed from the parkway in front of their homes without notice.

He asked that the matter be referred to the Board of Public Works for further discussion.

Image Information: A STUMP IS all that remains of a healthy ash tree cut down by Port Washington workers last week. The tree was one of two planted by the homeowner, who wasn't notified of the city's intent before the tree was removed. Photo by Sam Arendt