

City to tell homeowners about tree removal

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Port official says policy will be followed more closely after resident complained about not knowing ash would be cut down

Port Washington officials on Tuesday said they will notify property owners before taking down trees in the right of way in front of their homes.

That's been the city's policy for more than 15 years, but it hasn't been followed recently, Street Supt. Dave Ewig told the Board of Public Works.

"It wasn't adhered to on a regular basis in recent years, I'm discovering," Ewig said.

That was discovered after a resident complained in January that he had not been notified before the city removed a healthy ash tree in front of his house — one of two white ash trees he had planted 29 years earlier and cared for ever since.

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

Because of that, he said, he was surprised when one of the trees in the parkway in front of his house at 1724 Parknoll La. was removed.

"It's taken a long time for them to get to that size. We wanted to make sure they stayed healthy," he said. "We value them for shade. They provided us with some privacy."

Ewig said the two trees were only 10 feet apart, and the one the city removed was being crowded out by the other.

That's especially important now because the emerald ash borer, an invasive pest that kills ash trees, seeks out weaker trees initially, officials said. They are 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, they added.

The form the city uses to notify residents that a tree will be removed lists five reasons for this decision — structural weakness, hazardous condition, general declining condition, insect or disease and root damage — and workers will mark those conditions that apply.

The notices aren't mailed, but instead dropped off at houses, Ewig said.

The street department tries to give homeowners at least two weeks notice before a tree is to be taken down, he added.

Frequently, Ewig said, trees are marked with an orange X in August and the notices handed out, while the removal isn't done until winter.

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When replacement trees are planted, another letter is sent out to the homeowner, Ewig said.

Ald. Mike Ehrlich, a member of the board, suggested the department print the notices on brightly colored paper so home owners see them.

“What if the homeowner is adamant they do not want the tree taken down?” Board Chairman Craig Czarnecki asked.

“We take it down,” Ewig said, noting trees planted in the right of way are owned by the city.