



Request for City Council Committee Action from the Department of Public Works

Date: July 28, 2015
To: Honorable Kevin Reich, Chair Transportation & Public Works Committee
Subject: **Tree Failure Study Report**

Recommendation:

Receiving and filing a response to the February 3, 2015, staff direction resulting from the findings of the Tree Failure Study conducted by the University of Minnesota following 2013 storm damage.

Previous Directives:

February 3, 2015: Transportation & Public Works Committee staff direction: Staff directed to continue to work with the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board Forestry Division, the Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission, and the Minneapolis Pedestrian Advisory Committee on recommendations for changes to City policy and practice that will limit the impacts to trees from City sidewalk repair work, and report back to the Transportation & Public Works Committee by July 31, 2015.

Department Information:

Prepared by: Michael D. Kennedy, Director, Transportation Maintenance & Repair

Approved by: _____
Steven A. Kotke, P.E., Director of Public Works

Presenters in Committee: Michael D. Kennedy, Director, Transportation Maint. & Repair

Financial Impact

Action is within the approved budget.

Community Impact

- City Goals
 - Great Places: Natural and built spaces work together and our environment is protected. We manage and improve the city's infrastructure for current and future needs.

Supporting Information

At the February 3, 2015 Transportation & Public Works Committee, Public Works and University of Minnesota Professor Gary Johnson presented the findings of a report summarizing tree failures and their relationship with sidewalk repair work. Study results reported a high correlation between storm-related tree failures (windthrows) and sidewalk repairs. The report was received and filed, and staff were directed "to continue to work with the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board Forestry Division, the Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission, and the Minneapolis Pedestrian Advisory Committee on recommendations for changes to City policy and practice that will limit the impacts to trees from City sidewalk repair work, and report back to the Transportation & Public Works Committee by July 31, 2015."

Since then, a review team comprised of representative individuals from the aforementioned groups met regularly to prepare a response to the staff directive. The February 3 report highlighted many steps that had been taken since the release of the report. Work will continue on those. In particular:

- The 2004 Urban Forestry Policy is obsolete and requires a significant refresh to remove many of the technical aspects in the report to create a policy or guiding document.
- The remaining technical aspects are proposed to be upgraded to current best practices and incorporated into or placed in a new section of the Minneapolis Standard Specifications for Construction. That will ensure annual review and consolidate them in the same repository as other construction standards for easier reference and enforcement.
- Continue collaboration with Plan Development Review, Utility Connections, and others such as the Downtown Minneapolis Greening Task Force, to provide consistent standards and directions, best management practices and as-needed direction to foster optimal procedures for successful tree installation, particularly in hardscape environments.

There are a number of advancements stemming from field experience, storm events, and a growing body of knowledge since the release of the 2004 Urban Forestry Policy. This includes the policy document itself, a growth in the understanding of best management practices, greater utilization of field inspection staff, enhanced collaboration with MPRB Arborists, data gathering and inventorying strategies gleaned from storm response and FEMA reporting, closer working relationships with property owners when trees are affected, and the establishment of the MPRB Forestry Preservation Coordinator (FPC)

The team discussed options for moving forward that directly relate to sidewalk replacement and repair. This is different from long-term planning or new construction options. The vast majority of sidewalk work is done in a built environment with limited options for mitigation. In this context the team found that two core values compete with each other: promoting and maintaining a robust urban forest verses safe passage for all citizens on an adequate, quality, and well maintained sidewalk system, all housed within a narrow corridor. The kinds of damage mitigation options being considered are:

- Consider more ramping of sidewalks to avoid root cutting.
- Consider arching the sidewalk around "magnificent" trees, where the change in the alignment of the sidewalk may be allowed to encroach onto private property.
- Build retaining walls to save tree roots as necessary.
- Grind projecting sidewalk edges instead of removing and replacing sections of sidewalk.
- Use new types of sidewalk materials or products that can move with tree root growth to prevent projecting, trip-able edges.

- Investigate new funding sources to apply new methodologies without charging property owners for the additional expense.
- Support the Forestry Preservation Coordinator. By having a dedicated expert involved on a regular basis, there is no single or other more effective deterrent to tree loss from construction and maintenance conflicts and activities.

Many of these changes impact funding, easement and right-of-way, or other factors that will require further policy discussions and research. The financial responsibility for sidewalk repair currently rests with abutting property owners. Ramping or other efforts to mitigate root cutting or loss usually require significant costs. Public Works and the MPRB will continue to update the Urban Forestry Policy and look into options for funding the additional costs that may arise.

In collaboration with the MPRB, Public Works has submitted a proposal in the Mayor's budget to fund a portion of the FPC position. The Public Works contribution for 2016 is proposed to be \$94,075.

Public Works recommends that this report be received and filed.

Attachment: PowerPoint Presentation