

To: Northfield City Council, Mayor Erica Zweifel
Cc: City Administrator Ben Martig
From: Northfield Environmental Quality Commission
Date: TBD

Advisory Memo - Suggested Revisions & Updates to the 2014 Urban Forest Asset Management Plan, and recommended incorporation into Land Development Code

Introduction

The trees in Northfield's public spaces – its parks, parkways and other City-managed properties – along with the trees on private properties in Northfield, comprise the City's "urban forest." The urban forest of a municipality is an important and often undervalued and under-appreciated asset. Recognizing this asset, the City Council in 2015 approved the "City of Northfield Urban Forest Asset Management Plan (UFAMP)", prepared by a professional forestry consultant. Since 2015, changes in Northfield's urban forest, particularly the increasing loss of ash trees to emerald ash borer, have underscored the need for the UFAMP to be updated and implemented. The EQC feels that the UFAMP is the City's best chance to enhance the quality and diversity of the Northfield urban forest. To that end, the EQC further suggests that the impact of the UFAMP would be enhanced by incorporating it into the City's land development policies.

Recommended Action

The Northfield Environmental Quality Commission reviewed the 2015 UFAMP, and recommends to the City Council that its urban forest management goals and guidelines be **incorporated by reference** into the Northfield Land Development Code. This would provide uniformity in management policies for the Northfield urban forest, and would set clear guidelines for both public and private management of Northfield's trees. The EQC makes this recommendation to the City Council with several suggested updates and edits to the 2015 UFAMP, as outlined below.

Comments and Recommended Edits to the 2015 UFAMP

- Page 1.1 - Paragraph 4. The City Arborist/Horticulturalist should review and edit¹ paragraph 4, describing the existing urban forestry, for accuracy and updating. There is more recent data and information available since the UFAMP was approved, particularly regarding

¹ The Environmental Quality Commission is available to assist with further review and edit of the UFAMP, under the direction of the City Arborist.

emerald ash borer management strategies and implementation of removal/replacement of ash trees.

- Pages 1.2 - 1.9. The City Arborist/Horticulturalist should review paragraph 3 of pg. 1.2, “greatest concern” for the urban forest, for accuracy and to ensure that the language aligns with City goals and policy. Also review the table of priorities that follows that paragraph.
- Page 1.12 - Section on Detailed Recommendations for Acceptable Tree List. This section should be revised to remove language that places a blanket prohibition on cottonwoods, silver maples and willows that are currently on the Prohibited Species list. These species are essential keystone species to the riparian forests along the Cannon River. The document currently does not distinguish between natural and urban/developed areas of Northfield, despite their clear structural and ecological differences and management needs. The UFAMP text should make it clear that certain trees, i.e., cottonwoods and willows, are not acceptable parkway trees, but may be acceptable on private property, and are allowed in the City’s natural areas.
- The Detailed Recommendations for Acceptable Trees List should be updated reference to allow for tree species that are currently USDA Zone 5 but would likely survive as the Northfield climate warms (City is currently Zone 4b). A draft list of Suggested Tree Species for Northfield is attached.
- Page 1.14 - Detailed Recommendations for Land Development Code (LDC). The City and Planning Commission should consult this section when reviewing the LDC. The list of recommendations for specific topics of review on page 1.15 is an excellent guide/to-do list.
- Page 3.1 - Section on Public Involvement/Engagement. The suggestions in this section may need to have some specific actions stipulated. Additionally, the EQC recommends that the City enter the UMinn Tree Steward Community Volunteer Program. There are currently ~20 cities around Minnesota in the program. The UM Extension estimates that the volunteer Tree Steward program saves an average of \$35,000 per year for participating cities by training citizen volunteers in tree planting and maintenance to augment existing City staff. Volunteers would work under the direction of the City Arborist/Horticulturalist.
- The Land Development Code should clearly emphasize that having and implementing an urban forest plan is a requirement of the Northfield Climate Action Plan approved in 2019.
- The EQC has reviewed and updated the Suggested Trees for Northfield list (attached) for review and concurrence by the City Arborist/Horticulturalist.

Attachments:

- Suggested Tree Species for Northfield

EQC Review Draft