

The EQC Urban Forest Subcommittee recommends that the Commission's response to concern expressed about follow-up to the 2014 Urban Forest Plan separately address near-term matters city staff and Council should take up and climate action planning.

Experts increasingly recognize the importance of a sound, well managed, urban forest. Northfield's trees will increasingly become an asset as climate changes continue. Trees play an essential role in the environment because they absorb greenhouse gases, improve air quality, can help in the management of stormwater, and lower air-condition based energy consumption.

A citizen recently asked about follow-up to the 2014 Plan. The EQC at an August, 11, 2015 City Council work session informed Council about the Plan but no formal actions were taken on it. A few of the Plan's recommendations have come to fruition; most have languished despite their importance.

Near-term city actions the EQC urges:

- **City Forester:** City code 86-32 defines the "Forester's duties" and the city's website's FAQ about trees directs citizens to contact the "City Forester," yet this appears to be a ghost position. It is not even mentioned in the duties of the Streets and Parks Supervisor -- the position for which the City requires some training about trees and appears to have made most responsible for tree-related tasks.

The City Administrator should designate a City Forester and make that role a clear part of the individual's duties.

- **Social media information:** More robust information about trees should be readily available via the City's website, its search box and wherever on the website trees are discussed such as the Street & Parks Division>Outside Your Home>Trees page.
Staff should make available the Approved Boulevard Tree list and list of prohibited trees; information on the value of residents planting trees, suggestions of trees that staff most desires to provide diversity; issues of trees and power lines; proper planting and care of trees, and other information.
- **Budget for the urban forest:** City staff and City Council should start looking into what the budget *should* be and how the city can better meet those budgetary needs and at what pace. The current budget floor is clearly too low. Work should begin on what the budget floor should be, an effort should begin to reach it on a yearly basis, and that should be refined by the climate action planning recommendations.
- **Better Coordination:** Make readily available in one place and streamline information such as inventory lists, canopy assessments, previous and current work schedules, and service requests. Create a longer term vision for the budget, and staffing with respect to trees and how staff in different units of government can better coordinate information and ideas about the urban forest as it relates to each unit relative to the city as a whole (e.g., streets and parks, new housing, stormwater management, etc.).
- **Tree inventory:** Develop a plan and means for updating the tree inventories on a sensible, regular basis. GreenCorps Urban Forestry Member Alan Toczydlowski did this

in 2015-16 resulting in EQC resolution 16-386, but it's not clear if that has been adopted as the official list.

- **Designation of approved and prohibited trees be delegated to the EQC:** We recommend that City Council establish at least consulting powers for EQC to review the list and related information at least yearly and recommend changes to the City Council. Given all the demands on Council, it is difficult for Council to be as informed about this matter as EQC. Council may want to follow the Plan's recommendation to give the EQC authority over the lists of approved and prohibited trees.
- **Update the Land Development Code and Northfield Code as the Urban Forest Plan recommends.**
- **GreenSteps:** The City of Northfield has completed Best Practices for "urban forestry." Ensure that these are properly recorded for the MPCA and made known to the public in outreach material.
- **Management of trees with emerald ash borer (EAB):** Assess progress of the Management Plan for the Emerald Ash Borer.
- **The impact on the Urban Forest must be considered as part of stormwater planning and improvements.**

The climate action planning should be attentive to:

- The 2014 Urban Forest Plan itself and other documents EQC and the city has accumulated that provide good information for the climate action planning taking place.
- The Plan's push for the city to take a proactive rather than the reactive approach it has to an urban forest. Our recent inquiries have found that the City continues to approach tree issues in a piecemeal, reactive manner.
- The value of an urban forest and a forest canopy helping keep a city cooler and thus using less energy, etc.
- Concern about invasive species, diseases, etc., often caused by climate change and how the City can be responsive to that likely increasing.
- The need for greater professional expertise. The plan calls for staff activity more dedicated to the urban forest, more EQC consulting, and outside professional consultation. This is needed. The City's application for a GreenCorps position 2015-16 promised follow-up on the survey with respect to recommendations the intern made about need for certain trees in certain areas. This does not seem to have been pursued, and it should be.
- The importance of good data. Much good data about trees has been collected since the Plan but largely through outside funding and staffing. Attention needs to be paid to how to keep the information up-to-date and expand it.