

MPRB updating tree ordinances to respond to EAB and other tree diseases

Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission presents annual report

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In light of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) discovery in St. Paul last May, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) is amending its ordinances to more effectively respond to the EAB spread.

"The current MPRB ordinances pertain only to Dutch Elm Disease (DED) and does not allow the city to abate or mitigate EAB or other destructive tree pests," said Ralph Sievert, MPRB forestry director. "The proposed amendments would enable the MPRB to respond when EAB is inevitably discovered in Minneapolis. It would also allow action to be taken on tree pests that have not yet been discovered."

The current MPRB ordinances (Chapter 10 Article II) on responsibility and authority are specific to elm trees, DED and infestation. The amendments broaden the ordinance's scope to invasive species tree pests and infections. The City of Minneapolis has proposed amending its ordinances, which are also currently DED-specific. Those ordinances relate to pesticide applications by tree companies and the storage, sale, and transportation of firewood.

The amended ordinances were passed by the MPRB's Administration & Finance Committee on Oct. 21. It will receive the required three readings on Nov. 4, 18 and Dec. 2, and if approved by the Board, will be added to the Code of Ordinances.

The Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission (MTAC) unanimously supports the passage of the ordinance changes. During its annual report presentation at the Oct. 21 meeting, MTAC Committee Chair John Uban outlined the next steps in the EAB strategy:

- Monitor ash trees and remove the worst first.
- Educate the public to not prune or remove ash trees from May to September as that is when the EAB is most active.
- Explore policy issues, such as selective pesticide use, selective tree removal and ordinance changes.
- Identify funding sources.
- Identify location to put cut-down ash trees.

The 200,000 ash trees in Minneapolis (including 38,000 public trees) and 900 million ash trees throughout the state are at risk. MPRB's estimate to remove all 38,000 public ash trees over time, grind stumps and replant boulevard trees is \$26 million.

Urban Forest Issues

The annual report outlined other issues facing the urban forest, including:

Improve Tree-Watering – MPRB added used 10 water trucks that disperse 10,000 gallons of water/week; newly planted the trees are the priority. Tree gators, which act as reservoirs for watering, are being used. In addition the public has been encouraged to help water trees through public information.

Increase the Tree Canopy – Due to disease and insects, more trees are being lost than planted. With the current tree canopy in Minneapolis at 25 percent, the MTAC is set a goal of 30 percent by 2030. Ways to improve the canopy include providing incentives to private-property owners and aerial mapping to compile data on the urban tree canopy. The GIS-based mapping project would identify impervious surfaces, water and bare soil to monitor canopy-cover targets and quantify the value of trees in stormwater reduction, energy savings and air quality.

Utility Tree-Pruning – MTAC is working with Xcel Energy’s tree-pruning program to improve notices to residents before pruning, educate the public about aesthetics vs. pruning and work with cable companies regarding low cables.

Recommendations for future efforts as outlined by the MTAC include:

- Avoid tree grates where possible with raised planters, permeable paving and roof runoff channels.
- Continue to fund the City Trees Program.
- Adopt design guidelines for streets and sidewalks.
- Adapt the street master plan to include more species diversity.

“We value our relationship with the MTAC and all the work they do to help us enhance the Minneapolis urban forest,” said Jon Gurban, MPRB Superintendent. “Trees are such an important resource not just for the quality of life and their beauty, but what they do for the long-term health and well-being of our environment and society. Both the MPRB and MTAC remain committed to safeguarding our natural treasure.”

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