



Land Use & Environment Committee

Legion Way Street Trees Status Report

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Agenda Item:

Legion Way Street Trees Status Report

Issue:

Chair Langer requested an update on the status of the Legion Way Street Tree Management Program, including addressing the removal of existing tree stumps.

Committee Recommendation:

Not applicable.

City Manager's Recommendation:

Not applicable; briefing only.

Note: The Legion Way Tree Replace Program is currently suspended due to budget and staff cuts. There is no money or staff time identified in 2013 budget for Legion Way trees.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Stacey Ray, Associate Planner
Michelle Bentley, Urban Forester

Background and Analysis:

Historic Streetscape

Legion Way, from Plum Street east to Central Street, is lined by mature Red oaks, Pin oaks, and Sweetgums. This local historic landmark was originally planted in 1928 to honor Olympia residents who had fought in the Spanish American War and World War I, and serves as a living monument to those who dedicated their lives to serve their country. Today, the tallest Legion Way trees are 40-90 feet in height and provide a shady canopy over the streetscape and adjacent homes and businesses.

Unfortunately, until PSE rerouted utilities onto an adjacent alley in 1988, a large percentage of the trees were topped to maintain clearance from overhead utility lines. For the sake of uniformity, the remaining trees were also aggressively topped. Once an accepted pruning practice, topping is

now understood to be permanently damaging to the health, structure, and long-term viability of a tree. As a result, the trees on Legion Way have developed very unnatural, inherently weak support structures. As the trees have continued to grow, the defects have continued to worsen, and the City has had to response to over 20 emergency failures and removals in the last 12 years.

Long-Term Management Program

In 2010, the City Council approved implementation of a Long-Term Management Plan for Legion Way. The intent was to implement a variety of measures, including tree evaluation, pruning, removal, and replanting, to prolong the life of the trees and manage the streetscape for safety. Implementation began in 2010, and included the removal of five of the highest risk trees and a replanting event that honored local veterans.

Unfortunately, due to reductions to the Urban Forestry Program, in 2011 staff was no longer able to continue the outreach needed to continue the program, and all activities related to Legion Way were suspended. However, funds from the Hazard Tree Mitigation Program were used to continue to identify and remove another five of the highest risk trees. Those removals were planned for early 2012.

January 2012 Ice Storm

In January of 2012, Olympia experienced a devastating ice storm. The extensive snowfall followed immediately by heavy ice freezing to the Legion Way trees caused the failure and necessary emergency removal of 10 trees. Including the five original trees slated for removal, a total of 15 trees were subsequently removed from Legion Way in early 2012.

Current Conditions on Legion Way

Implementation of the Legion Way Management Program continues to remain suspended due to a lack of funding. This includes no anticipated action by the Urban Forestry Program in 2013 to evaluate, prune, or remove any trees or stumps. Staff is also still unable to dedicate time to developing community partnerships or identifying potential other funding sources.

Ten stumps remain on Legion Way from the emergency tree removals due to the ice storm. They are not currently planned for removal. Additionally, because of the location of the stumps and the spacing of the existing trees, their removal is necessary to allow for planting replacement trees. Consequently, there are also no plans to plant any replacement trees at this time.

The Legion Way trees are very large, and removing a Legion Way stump requires a minimum of four hours staff time. That estimate includes grinding down the existing stump and major roots with a piece of equipment called a stump grinder, removal and haul away of the chips and other debris created, and filling of the resulting hole with soil so it is level with the surrounding ground surface. The City does not currently own a stump grinder, so one would need to be rented from a commercial rental company or provided by a contractor in order to accomplish this work.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

The Urban Forestry Program has received several inquiries from businesses and residents of the Eastside Neighborhood regarding when the existing stumps will be removed.

Options:

None; briefing only.

Financial Impact:

Staff's estimate of cost to remove 10 stumps on Legion Way is \$5,000 - \$6,000 to hire a contractor to perform the work and someone to provide project coordination, notifications, and on-site management (\$400 to \$500 per stump, plus project oversight).