

81 Twenty Fourth Street – City Owned Tree Removal Investigation

Date:	August 18, 2009
To:	Etobicoke York Community Council
From:	Richard Ubbens, Director, Urban Forestry, Parks Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	Ward 6 – Etobicoke-Lakeshore
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

Etobicoke York Community Council, on June 9, 2009, requested that staff further investigate the issues raised by the owner of 81 Twenty Fourth Street regarding starlings and the owner's request to remove the City-owned green ash tree. The property owner has expressed concern about the nuisance of roosting birds, possible damage to plants, the risk of damage to the dwelling caused by bird feces and urine and potential risk to personal health. It has also been reported that a neighbour feeds the birds, which has encouraged the birds frequenting the area.

Urban Forestry has consulted with staff in Public Health in the preparation of this report. A previous site visit by Urban Forestry staff in response to an earlier inspection request revealed that the subject tree is 60cm in diameter and is in fair and maintainable condition. Evidence of some bird droppings were initially observed, but at a time of year when birds would typically not be present if they migrated south for the winter. During inspections performed between June - August of this year no bird droppings were observed. Further, area residents have indicated that the birds in question were pigeons and that starlings have not been present either in this year or in past years. Urban Forestry cannot support the removal of the tree

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Parks Forestry and Recreation recommends that City Council deny the request to remove (1) City-owned tree at 81 Twenty Fourth Street.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

In accordance with *City of Toronto Municipal Code, Chapter 813, Article II*, an application had been made in January 2009, requesting permission to remove a healthy City-owned tree fronting the property municipally known as 81 Twenty Fourth Street. The application was subsequently withdrawn.

At its meeting held on June 9, 2009, Etobicoke York Community Council considered a motion by the ward councillor. Etobicoke York Community Council directed the Director, Urban Forestry and the Medical Officer of Health to further investigate the issues raised by the homeowner of 81 Twenty Fourth Street and provide a report and recommendation to the September 15, 2009 meeting of the Etobicoke York Community Council.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/ey/decisions/2009-06-09-ey28-dd.htm>

COMMENTS

An application had been received from the owner of 81 Twenty Fourth Street complete with the required \$300.00 application fee, requesting permission to remove a healthy City-owned 60cm diameter green ash tree. The owner subsequently withdrew the tree removal request and was granted an application fee reimbursement.

A canvas of a number of residents on Twenty Fourth and Twenty Second streets, north of Elmer Avenue, in the general vicinity of the subject site, revealed there was never a starling problem, but rather the issue was related to pigeons. A number of canvassed residents indicated a former homeowner on Twenty Second street bred pigeons at one time. The homeowner who bred the pigeons moved away from the area however annual congregation of pigeons around the original breeder's house had continued. Other residents indicated that a few of their neighbours feed the pigeons, which encourages their presence. The ash tree is not what is attracting the pigeons to the neighbourhood and removing it would not decrease their presence.

Urban Forestry staff consulted with staff in Toronto Public Health (TPH) on a number of occasions, including after the determination that pigeons were the cause of the homeowner's original tree removal request. TPH staff indicated pigeon droppings do not pose a significant health risk to humans, and advise that large amounts of bird feces are only a health hazard in rare situations where they are found in confined spaces and are inches in depth. Toronto Public Health has reviewed the risk of bird feces to human health largely in relation to pigeons, which are much more commonly encountered in urban settings. The findings would also apply to flocks of European starlings. Toronto Public Health reviewed the scientific literature in 2001 and 2008 and confirmed that the risk to human health from exposure to large flocks of pigeons in urban settings is very low. The health risks of feral pigeons were also examined by researchers in Basel,

Switzerland as part of developing a systematic approach to managing pigeon populations in that city (Haag-Wackernagel, D. and H. Moch. Health hazards of feral pigeons. Journal of Infection 2004). They examined all published studies on this issue from 1941 to 2003 and concluded that the health risk to people was very low. The information from these reviews has provided the basis for the policy and procedures presently employed by TPH when investigating pigeon and other bird complaints. The Toronto Public Health Staff Report, Pigeon Feeding is available at:

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-12761.pdf>

The subject green ash tree is a significant and valuable part of the forest community and should continue to provide benefits to the property and to the community for many years to come. Removing the tree will not eliminate pigeons from returning to the neighbourhood. Eliminating their food source would be the preferred method to prevent pigeons from returning to the neighbourhood. The subject tree is healthy and viable and Urban Forestry cannot support removal of the tree.

CONTACT

Peter Dmytrasz,
Supervisor, Tree Protection & Plan Review,
Tel: 416 394 8551,
Fax: 416 394-5406,
Email: pdmytras@toronto.ca.

SIGNATURE

Richard Ubbens
Director, Urban Forestry, Parks Forestry and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment No. 1 – Photo of green ash tree
Attachment No. 2 – Photo of driveway and car

Attachment No. 1



Attachment No. 2

