



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

34 Willowhurst Crescent – Application to Remove a Private Tree

Date:	January 29, 2013
To:	Scarborough Community Council
From:	Jason Doyle, Director, Urban Forestry, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	37 – Scarborough Centre
Reference Number:	P:\2013\Cluster A\PFR\SC22-022613-AFS#17009

SUMMARY

This report recommends that City Council deny the application for a permit to remove one (1) privately owned tree. The owner has requested tree removal in order to build a detached garage at the rear of the property.

The subject tree is an American elm (*Ulmus americana*), measuring 85 cm in diameter, located at the rear of the property. This tree is in fair to good condition and Urban Forestry cannot support removal of this tree.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that:

1. City Council deny the application to remove the privately owned American elm tree at 34 Willowhurst Crescent.

Financial Impact

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

ISSUE BACKGROUND

On March 28, 2011, an application was received for removal of an 85 cm diameter American elm tree. The reasons noted in the application for requesting permission to remove the tree were unrelated to construction. A permit to remove the tree was refused.

The owner contacted Urban Forestry to discuss an appeal to the decision. At that time, it was discovered that the owner wanted the tree removed to accommodate construction of a garage. Urban Forestry staff met with the owner on June 9, 2011, and provided suggestions on how the proposed plans could be revised (i.e. build the proposed garage outside of the tree protection zone or minimize the impact by cantilevering the proposed garage over the tree roots) to allow for protection of this very significant tree. The owner indicated his intention to advise the project architect to make revisions to the plans. The owner did not proceed as indicated and submitted an application to Committee of Adjustment for a minor variance to construct the proposed garage with measurements exceeding the length and height permitted in the Zoning By-law. The Committee of Adjustment application was approved on February 21, 2012, and the owner subsequently reapplied for a tree removal permit.

COMMENTS

An application was received from the owner of 34 Willowhurst Crescent on June 26, 2012, for a permit to remove a privately owned American elm tree located on the subject property. The tree is located in the backyard adjacent to the side lot line. The property owner wishes to remove the tree in order to accommodate construction of a garage, which is in conflict with the location of the tree. Inspection of the tree by staff revealed that it is in fair to good condition.

The American elm is an especially valuable and significant tree. This species was almost completely destroyed during the 1960s and 1970s due to Dutch Elm Disease (DED) (*Ophiostoma ulmi*). This disease continues to infect and kill American elms across North America and very few mature elms have survived in Toronto. Due to the age and health of the subject tree, it is clear that it has been able to resist infection. It is not possible to predict whether this tree will survive indefinitely, but given its current health and demonstrated ability to resist the disease, preservation is recommended. American elms can live for several hundred years.

American elms are sensitive to disturbance and construction activities and can only tolerate a minimal amount of stress. Elms under stress are an attractive breeding ground for both the native elm bark beetle (*Hylurgopinus rufipes*) and European bark beetle (*Scolytus multistratus*). These beetles are the primary vector of the fungus which causes DED. Female beetles emit pheromones attracting other beetles, potentially carrying fungal spores to the trees. More beetles attracted to the trees increase the chance of the fungal spores being present, and leads to an exponential increase in the likelihood of the trees contracting DED.

Those elms that have survived DED may represent a potential source of genetically resistant offspring, and therefore a means to reintroduce this stately species back into the urban forest. The University of Guelph is currently conducting research on DED resistance utilizing clones of such trees.

As required under *Section 813-17, of City of Toronto Municipal Code, Chapter 813, Trees, Article III*, a Notice of application sign was posted on the subject property for the minimum 14 day period in order to provide an opportunity for objection by the community. No letters of objection were received.

Urban Forestry does not support removal of this tree. Options for redesign of the garage exist that could see the tree retained and protected. Should Council approve this request for tree removal, approval must be conditional upon the owner agreeing to plant one large maturing tree on the property and providing cash in lieu of tree planting for two additional large maturing trees for planting elsewhere in the city.

Toronto's Official Plan policy 3.4.1 supports the preservation of significant trees, citing their many benefits:

- (1) To support strong communities, a competitive economy and a high quality of life, public and private city-building activities and changes to the built environment, including public works, will be environmentally friendly, based on:
 - (d) preserving and enhancing the urban forest by:
 - (i) providing suitable growing environments for trees;
 - (ii) increasing tree canopy coverage and diversity, especially of long-lived native and large shade trees; and
 - (iii) regulating the injury and destruction of trees.

Trees improve the quality of urban life and contribute greatly to our sense of community. They are aesthetically pleasing and soften the hard lines of built form and surfaces in an urban setting. Trees contribute to the overall character and quality of neighbourhoods. Studies suggest that social benefits such as crime reduction and neighbourhood cohesion can be directly attributable to the presence of trees.

The environmental benefits of trees include cleansing of air, noise and wind reduction, and protection from ultraviolet radiation. Trees reduce rain water runoff thereby reducing soil erosion and lowering storm water management costs. They also contribute to moderation of temperature extremes and reduction of the urban heat island effect by providing shade during the summer.

Trees provide many economic benefits, including the enhancement of property values. Homes with mature trees have higher value when compared to similar types of homes in similar locations without trees. Mature trees are associated with reduced home energy consumption. Air conditioning costs are lower in a home shaded by trees and heating costs are reduced when trees break the winter cooling effects of wind.

Trees are a community resource, which can make the city more attractive to investors, tourists and prospective residents, thus contributing to growth and prosperity.

The American elm tree at 34 Willowhurst Crescent is a significant and valuable part of the urban forest. It is a rare survivor of the devastation of Dutch Elm Disease. With proper care and maintenance it should continue to provide benefits to the property owner and the surrounding community for many years to come. Urban Forestry therefore cannot support removal of this tree.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Jason Doyle
Director of Urban Forestry

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Photo of 85 cm diameter American elm tree at 34 Willowhurst Crescent

