

THE TREE CANOPY ABOVE OUR NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS

The magnificent tree canopy above our streets greatly enhances the quality of life in our neighborhood, as well as the value and beauty of our homes. We think of that canopy as an essential part of our neighborhood and an amenity of our individual homes, but all those canopy trees are located within the City of Houston rights-of-way, and the City has no budget to maintain them. The people in our neighborhood have worked together over many, many years to create our street canopy, and it is the property owners in our neighborhood who continue to maintain the trees that afford us this valuable asset.

Our Esplanade Trees. Roughly 30% of our street canopy is contributed by the "Esplanade Trees" that grow in the medians of two City streets, specifically the esplanades in the 1600 and 1700 blocks of North Boulevard and South Boulevard. Edgemont Civic Association funds all of the costs to maintain these esplanades, including the lawns, the trees, and the sprinkler systems that water them (the City does provide the water). Arbor Care Inc. maintains our Esplanade Trees under a program that involves assessment and fertilizing every year (about \$2,000) and pruning every other year (an additional \$12,000 plus). These costs have gone up over time.

Our Street Trees. The other roughly 70% of our street canopy is contributed by "Street Trees" located in the City rights-of-way between sidewalks and City streets. Edgemont's maintenance program for Esplanade Trees through Arbor Care does not extend to Street Trees. Individual homeowners planted our Street Trees in the City rights-or-way abutting their properties, and individual homeowners continue to be responsible for fertilizing, pruning and generally maintaining those Street Trees. A number of our Street Trees are not healthy, in many cases because of root damage and chemical poisoning from sidewalk paving projects (see below), injury to low limbs from being hit by trucks, or root and other damage inflicted during construction projects. We should all be aware that City rules require Street Tree branches to be pruned so that they are at least 14 feet above the street, starting 24 inches back from the curb.

Tree Canopy Data Base Project. The Board has engaged Arbor Care to provide a comprehensive assessment and data base for all the Esplanade Trees and Street Trees that provide our street canopy, as indicated on the accompanying map. The data, to be collected over the next several months, will include:

- catalogue (common name and trunk circumference)
- rating of general health
- description of any currently recommended service or treatment
- estimate of cost of each recommended service or treatment

Sidewalk Projects and Street Trees. The City's Tree Protection Ordinance requires everyone to consult with the Parks and Recreation Department's Urban Forestry people before commencing sidewalk work that is near the roots of trees. Sidewalk paving projects in our neighborhood are almost always near the roots of Street Trees.

The City has no budget to repair or replace our sidewalk “panels” when that becomes necessary (often because roots of Street Trees have tilted or broken those panels). Keeping our neighborhood sidewalks safely walkable is up to us property owners.

For repair or replacement of residential sidewalks, as long as the work does not cross a driveway, the Houston Permitting Center currently requires filing of the two attached forms: a pre-construction notice must be filed two days before construction commences, and a second notice must be filed when construction is completed. **As required by the City’s Tree Protection Ordinance, the Houston Permitting Center’s pre-construction notice form for residential sidewalk work not crossing a driveway contains this instruction in Note 1:**

**“If sidewalk repair is near existing tree roots contact HPARD,
Urban Forestry at 832-395-8459.”**

Pre-clearance by Houston Parks & Recreation - Urban Forestry, as required by City ordinance, has proven to be a reliable mechanism to protect Street Trees from being harmed when sidewalk paving projects are undertaken:

- Several replacements of concrete sidewalks carried out during the 1990s and 2000s seriously harmed Street Trees in our neighborhood. Some of those Street Trees have never recovered. No one intended to hurt those trees, but unfortunately forestry expertise was not brought to bear along with paving expertise.
- When big remodeling projects are undertaken, Edgemont’s Architectural Committee has prior notice and can alert homeowners to their responsibility to get Urban Forestry involved and pre-clear plans for sidewalk work. Similarly, neighbors acquainted with the Urban Forestry approval requirements can avail themselves of that expertise, along with their own tree-service provider’s expertise.
- *We should all be aware of the City Ordinance requirement to get the Parks & Recreation Department’s Urban Forestry people involved before starting sidewalk projects.* And we want to make sure all of us make use of their expertise.

During the ongoing COVID pandemic, we should email a site plan (which can be hand drawn) to Parks & Recreation - Forestry Plan Review (ForestryPlanReview@houstontx.gov) and get their approval before proceeding to repair or replace sidewalk panels. At this time, nothing is being done through in-person meetings with Urban Forestry. In the future, we can hope to be able to connect through the following contact information:

Urban Forestry
901 Bagby Street, 1st Floor
Houston, TX 77002
[832-395-8459](tel:832-395-8459)

When any of us see sidewalk work being undertaken near Street Trees in our neighborhood, we should confirm that the contractors have obtained the required pre-clearance from Urban Forestry. If they haven’t, we should alert the homeowner, and we should send a message to Trees@Boulevardoaks.org.

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