



Town of Fairfield
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

TREE MANAGEMENT – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

PURPOSE:

The Town of Fairfield has long recognized its responsibility as a steward of its community forest, including the trees in the public right-of-ways along Town roads, in Town parks and open spaces, the Town grounds of public buildings, and on other Town properties. During the course of responding to the many tree concerns from residents, the Town has found it necessary to document its responses to ensure residents are provided with consistent and clear information regarding the procedures and guidelines followed by the Tree Warden and the Department of Public Works.

1. *With over 300,000 Town trees in his care, how does the Tree Warden prioritize his work?*

The Tree Warden assigns priorities to tree work as follows:

A. High Priority Tree Work (designated as priority 1)

The highest priority tree work will be those trees determined to be hazardous to the public by the Tree Warden or his designee in the Department of Public Works trained in the evaluation of hazardous trees.

Hazardous Tree is defined as:

“Any tree, shrub, or other vegetation in part or in whole that is identified by the Tree Warden to pose potential risk to any Town-owned property and or residential property as well as pose risk to the public’s health, safety and welfare.”

It is difficult to predict tree failure with certainty because of the complex interaction between trees and the environment. Any tree that has been identified as *Hazardous* will be abated by either complete removal or corrective pruning to mitigate the hazard. Per Connecticut General Statutes, Section 23-65(a) trees determined to be hazardous may be removed without otherwise mandatory posting.

The primary focus of High Priority Tree Work is large trees with major deadwood and structural defects. In certain instances, the clearance of traffic signage or traffic signals as well as impaired sightline may constitute priority 1 ranking if it is determined that public safety is at risk.

B. Medium Priority (designated as priority 2)

Priority 2 tree work is for trees that have not been determined to be hazardous by the Tree Warden. These trees will be placed on a list kept by the Tree Warden and attended to in the order received. This work will only be scheduled after all trees determined to be priority 1 have been completed or if the tree work is permitted as an exception by the Tree Warden.

Associated priority 2 tree work may include but is not limited to such work as:

- Stump grinding for public safety purposes
- Safety pruning where a “target” is not involved
- Removal of a declining or dying tree that does not have any major defects

- Routine pruning such as crown reduction/raising, pruning low limbs over streets or sidewalks unless low lying limbs pose an immediate risk or danger to public safety
- Clearance of traffic signs, signals and sightlines where public safety is not an issue

C. Low Priority Tree Work (designated as priority 3)

Priority three (3) is non-safety related tree work. Priority three (3) tree work may include, but is not limited to such services as:

- Pruning of ornamental or shade trees for aesthetics.
- Clearance of utility distribution lines on the street. UI and Eversource have an Enhanced Tree Trimming Program in which scheduled routine maintenance will be performed. All maintenance schedules will be determined by the Utility distribution companies.
- Clearance of utility service lines from the street to a residency or other building.
- Contractors working on approved private projects where Town trees are involved. Schedule of work on these trees is the responsibility of the contractor.
- Tree fertilization and disease control.
- Stump grinding or stump removal of Town trees that have been removed (unless stump poses a risk or public safety issue).

2. Can residents perform tree work on Town trees?

No person and/or firm other than the Tree Warden shall perform work on Town trees without a permit. A permit may be issued by the Tree Warden for work to be performed on town trees to include, but not limited to, all trees within the public right of way, parks, schools, open space and all municipal properties. Applications for permits must be made on application forms provided for such purpose by the Tree Warden. Permits shall be issued in conformity with Connecticut General Statutes sec 23-65 (f). All contractors must be qualified and Connecticut-licensed arborists. Contractors must provide proof of license and insurance prior to a permit being processed.

Permitted tree work (Not limited to):

- Removals
- Pruning
- Fertilizing, spraying for disease or insect control
- Tunneling or removal of roots for installation of sidewalks, driveways, sewer /water/gas lines. A construction zone must be established before work is to begin around a Town tree.
- Changing of grade with the root zone
- Planting or transplanting

3. What system does the Tree Warden use to manage the risk of tree failure?

Reducing hazards posed by public trees is a prime responsibility of the Tree Warden. Recommendations that are made by the Tree Warden are intended to minimize or reduce hazardous conditions that may be associated with trees. Trees inherently pose a certain degree of hazard and risk from breakage, failure or other causes and conditions. Therefore, due to the complex interaction between trees and the environment there is and can be no guarantee or certainty that efforts to correct unsafe conditions will prevent breakage or failure of a tree. The recommendations made by the Tree Warden should reduce the risk of tree failure, but they cannot entirely eliminate such risk, especially in the event of a storm or any other act of God. A qualitative tree risk assessment will be done on requested trees using a rating system of consequences and likelihood to determine risk significance levels.

Serious Defects: are defects that have been found by the Tree Warden that pose an unacceptable risk of failure of the tree. The removal of the tree will be recommended as a high priority (priority 1)

Less Serious Defects: are defects that have been found by the Tree Warden that do not predispose the tree to a severe or critical risk of failure. Pruning, cabling, or bracing will assist in correcting or compensating for the defect. However, these recommendations do not totally preclude the possibility of the risk of failure, especially during a severe storm or other acts of God.

4. *What is my recourse if I think Town tree roots are penetrating my sewer line?*

Trees are not to be removed for penetrating sewer laterals. Tree roots will only begin to penetrate sewer laterals that have flaws or defects. For example, old clay pipes can separate at joints, shift over time due to ground movement, or become crushed causing access for tree roots to penetrate the failing pipes. Should you experience issues with your sanitary sewer lines and tree roots are involved, you must coordinate with the Tree Warden any work that may negatively impact the overall health of the tree.

5. *A Town tree drops a lot of acorns on my driveway. Can the tree be removed?*

No tree shall be removed “for doing what trees do naturally”. Trees shall not be removed for the following reasons, but is not limited to shedding fruit, nuts, leaves, twigs and small branches, or sheltering wildlife, sidewalks and or driveways raised due to roots. As stated under risk management, a tree will only be removed if it is designated by the Tree Warden as a hazardous tree that poses risk to the public health, safety or welfare.

6. *Do other Town departments need approval from the Tree Warden?*

Town Projects initiated by other Town Departments will require a permit and approval from the Tree Warden. If tree work is to be contracted by a private tree company cost of tree work shall be incorporated into the project budget. Any trees permitted for removal by the Tree Warden shall be posted for a period of ten days and may be subject to a public hearing if contested.

7. *Can a landscape contractor plant a tree in the Town right-of-way?*

No tree(s) shall be planted within the Town right-of-way or on municipal property without an approved permit from the Tree Warden. Planting of a tree requires Permittee/Contractor to contact Call Before You Dig. All trees must be planted in accordance with ANSI A300 (part 6) Transplanting standards.

8. *Are there replanting requirements should approval be given for Town tree removal?*

Trees removed for approved Town projects by Town Departments will be replanted by the Town Department requesting the original removal on at least a 1:1 ratio. Trees species, size and planting locations shall meet with the approval of the Tree Warden.

Town trees removed by private contractors of landowners for approved projects will be replaced on Town owned property at an appropriate ratio to be determined by the Tree Warden. The Tree Warden will determine the tree species, size and locations of replanted trees.

9. *Does the Town have a Tree Planting Program?*

The Town Tree Warden in conjunction with the [Town Forestry Committee](#) conducts an annual [Tree Planting Program](#) to plant trees and shrubs on Town properties and in Town right-of-ways for the purpose of enhancing scenic quality, maintaining Town character, expanding the environmental benefits of trees, and providing other public benefits. The Town Forestry Committee meets with

individual residents and/or Neighborhood Associations to develop a cohesive plan that suits both the Town and the neighborhoods. Plans are approved by the Tree Warden and installed by the Town. The Town uses a model entitled ‘Right Tree Right Place’ that identifies trees that are suited for specific locations.

10. What role does the Tree Warden play in the removal and pruning of trees around utility lines?

The Town of Fairfield recognizes that the residents require and deserve safe, reliable electrical service, but not at the expense of proper arboriculture practices.

The Tree Warden for the Town of Fairfield will issue permits on a tree to tree basis to United Illuminating (UI) and Eversource Utilities to remove and or prune trees for the clearance of electrical utility lines. Work shall be performed only to specifications approved by the Tree Warden.

Pruning of trees shall be performed in a manner that retains the structural integrity and overall health of the trees.

The Town of Fairfield does not permit ‘ground to sky’ pruning for any utility line clearance maintenance. Town trees with limbs equal to or greater than 6 inches in diameter that are located more than 15 feet over electrical distribution lines on structurally strong wooded trees may remain if they are determined to be healthy and not structurally defective, split, decayed, poorly crotched, lion tailed, or insect infested. These limbs shall remain and be selectively pruned to reduce their weight. Strong Wooded trees include but may not be limited to: Oaks, Sugar Maples, Sycamore, London Plane, Elms, and Hickories. The Tree Warden shall have the final decision as to what tree species are considered structurally strong.

If UI/Eversource wishes to prune or remove Town trees, it is the responsibility of the utility company or their contractor to contact the Tree Warden and obtain a written permit for the trees they wish to work on.

Trees permitted for removal by the Tree Warden shall be posted for a period of ten days and subject to a public hearing if contested. Trees that are determined by the Tree Warden to be “Hazardous” may be removed without posting (in accordance with CT General Statue Chapter 450 Section 23-65(a)).

The Town of Fairfield understands the need for utility distribution line protection and is in support of appropriate pruning of individual trees, leaving strong limbs and branches that are not in contact with utility distribution lines. Tree pruning will be approached on a tree by tree basis not as a blanket application of predetermined criteria. Ex: 8ft on either side, 15ft above and 10ft. below utility lines. 20ft overhead and ground to sky.

All approved tree work shall be done in compliance with ANSI A300 Standard Practices for tree pruning and ISA published ‘Tree Pruning Guidelines’.

Town Tree Warden must be notified at the beginning of each work week as to where crews will be working in Town.

Town of Fairfield requires contractors to completely remove all brush and debris from the work area. Brush or wood cannot remain in the public right-of-way or on municipal property for a period longer than three days. Logs or debris must be left in a safe location, not to pose a risk or hazard to the safety and well-being of the public.

If at any time the utility companies and or their contractors fail to comply with conditions set forth in the approved permit, approved permit shall be revoked.

11. *If a private tree falls into the Town right-of-way, who is responsible for its removal?*

When a tree from private property falls on a Town road or right-of-way the Town has the right to remove all the branches and wood within the right-of-way to allow for movement of traffic for the public and emergency vehicles.

Branches and wood may be removed and cleaned up immediately or in emergency situations such as storms where numerous trees have fallen and blocked Town roads the debris may be pushed to the side of the road to allow for passage of vehicles and debris will be removed at a later time.

Trees will be cut; wood and brush will be removed from the right-of-way by the Town back to the private property line only.

12. *Conversely, if a Town tree falls on private property, who is responsible for its removal?*

When a town tree falls onto private property the Town will be responsible for the removal of all wood and brush. The Town will respond to these calls on a first come basis and or severity of damage. The Town tree crew will remove the trees only after all roads and critical municipal facilities are cleared after a disaster event.

13. *Does the Town pickup brush and wood from tree removal?*

The Town will *not* remove or clean up any wood, brush or debris that residents may bring to the road that was not involved with the cleaning of the right-of-way.

14. *Does the Town grind tree stumps?*

All stumps that are within the public right-of-way or on municipal property will be ground below the surface; loam and seed will be added. Exception will be made for trees that are removed in a natural wooded area or in area that does not allow machine access.