



Respect, transparency win support for removing a beloved tree

It can be hard for residents to see a much-loved tree cut down, and that can make things difficult for forestry staff who need to do the job.

A recent case in Urbana shows how staff can reconcile residents to a removal: by taking the time to explain the need, with concrete evidence; inviting public discussion; making it clear that officials understand the importance of tree preservation; and respecting residents' concerns.



Caption: When this magnificent hackberry in Urbana had to be cut down for safety reasons, City Forester Mike Brunk's efforts to educate residents to the need helped disarm opposition.

A legacy hackberry in Urbana, 16 feet in circumference, had been carefully maintained for many years, but had become unsafe. City Forester Mike Brunk recommended that it was time to take the tree down. He brought the issue to the city's Tree Commission and invited the public for a discussion of the removal.

Several residents were opposed to cutting down the hackberry, but Brunk took the time and made the effort to educate them and help them understand that, even though the tree was a special part of the community, its life had come to an end.

A letter to one of his residents shows the lengths to which he went to show residents he understood and respected their concerns and feelings and to explain the need for removing the tree:

"Thank you for your letter and interest in our community trees. I appreciate your attention to this concern and effort in rallying community support. . . . I have some intimate experiences with this tree and respect this Hackberry as an important component of our urban forest. This recent decision did not come without careful consideration. I have an attachment to all our community trees but this big fellow and I have connected on more than one occasion. I climbed to the top of this tree, I pruned this tree numerous times, cabled it

to increase its longevity and repaired it after the 1990 ice storm. The big fellow has held me in its top as I peered across the canopy of the community. Yes, I'm connected to this tree in a big way.

"Our recent tree inventory ranked this tree a 9 out of 10 hazard by Davy Tree Resources, our chosen contractor to complete the city wide tree inventory. I inspected the tree upon Davey's notice and have inspected it several times since on my own and with others. I agree with Davey's assessment that the tree is in a hazardous condition and its structure is compromised due to the hollows. The cabling system in the tree now becomes a concern. The cabling system relies on one side of tree to support the other. Therefore the integrity of the cabling system has also been compromised since major supporting branches connected to the cables are in decline and showing decay. I am afraid of a catastrophic failure in this tree if we lose one of these major limbs. I believe it's not a matter of if the tree will fail but rather a matter of time as to when the tree will fail."

"I plan to contact the tree commission to attempt to establish a Tree Commission meeting in the City Council chambers on the evening of January 16th or 30th. . . . Support for community trees is what started the Urbana tree program and support and open dialog is necessary to keep it moving in the best direction. I am anxious to hear the input and hope to gain similar support for our Legacy Tree program."

It is clear that Mike heads up an excellent community forestry program. He was able to make this decision because he has a tree inventory and a management plan for care and protection of trees and potential risks. Mike takes the time to educate his residents on the significance of trees and proper tree care so they too can be an asset and support to his program.

Ultimately, the tree was removed and a memorial fund was established to recognize this and other legacy trees in the City of Urbana. The entire community was invited to participate in a group photo with the hackberry on a Sunday afternoon in February.

As the tree was being cut down, Brunk provided an excellent explanation of the removal and the memorial in the following [video](#).

What could have been a very bad public relations situation was turned into a wonderful opportunity for education that won public support for a tough decision and for the city's trees.