

Guidelines for discretionary replacement of trees: Items for Consideration

The Landscape Committee desires to create a process for determining whether or not to grant a homeowner's request for removal of a healthy tree.

Homeowners may request to remove a tree for a number of reasons – some more reasonable than others. By the same token, the Tollgate Homeowners Association has a reasonable interest in protecting the look of the neighborhood and the value of the homes. Trees are a major contributing factor to both.

The Landscape Committee proposes six factors to consider for arriving at its decision whether or not to grant a homeowner permission to remove a healthy tree. We propose using a rating scale of 1 to 5 for each factor, where a score of 1 indicates this factor is a good argument for removing a tree and a score of 5 means it is not a good argument and therefore the tree probably should remain. Therefore, a low score on any factor and a combined low score would argue for approving the request to remove a tree. A high score on any factor and a high combined score would argue against removal of the tree.

After judging all six factors, the Landscape Committee will add the "score." If a score is on the "low" end, this will mean the Committee considers that request has minimal impact on key factors. Requests with a "higher" score indicate that there are serious consequences for the factors under consideration. In the end, the Committee still will have to make a determination – but we feel the ratings on key factors will guide us to a proper decision.

These factors are considered in sequence according to the outline below:

Factor 1: Homeowner's rationale

List all reasons given by the homeowner as rationale for replacement and rate each on its merits, with 1 having significant merit and 5 having little merit for removal.

(This rating will be the most subjective of all factors because the Landscape Committee is, in effect, passing judgment on a homeowner's reasoning. Taking up this factor first will reveal a homeowner's alignment with the factors the Committee will be considering and also can give guidance to the Committee on how much or how little they are prone to agree or disagree with the homeowner. This knowledge may help the Committee to understand its own biases at the outset of the process.)

Factor 2: Proximity

The position of the tree within the overall Tollgate landscape is a major consideration, taking into account if the tree has room to grow to its potential, what function it serves in

a yard, in a “mix” of nearby trees, how near it may be to the street, etc.

The rating indicates whether the site of the tree argues for removal (1) or argues against removal (5).

Factor 3: Health and life expectancy

As a matter of policy, Tollgate keeps watch on the health of trees and regularly seeks input from the City Arborist. However, a healthy tree still may have health factors that should be considered when deciding on removal, such as a tree nearing the natural end of its life cycle when a homeowner requests its removal.

If poor health or limited remaining life span is a good reason to remove a tree, then it should be rated a 1. If health or longevity is considered not a factor – in other words, the tree is perfectly healthy and likely to live many years longer – it would be rated a 5.

Factor 4: Enhancement of home

Each Tollgate homeowner typically takes pride in the appearance of their home and wants the front landscaping to enhance that appearance. As Tollgate trees have matured, some homeowners may feel a specific tree has outgrown its contribution to the “ambiance” of their home and may be making the tree removal request for aesthetic reasons. These should be considered.

The rating will indicate the opinion of the members of the Landscape Committee regarding if a tree detracts from the appearance of a home (rating would be 1) or does not detract from the home appearance (rating would be a 5).

Factor 5: Enhancement of street

Likewise, the whole of Tollgate is a “streetscape.” Tollgate desires a street that is a harmonious mix of trees varied in size, height, leaf and bark style, flowering, evergreen or deciduous, etc. Is the tree a Specimen Tree or a more common fast growing tree? How long will it take for a replacement tree to reach an acceptable height? Is the tree attractive or an eyesore?

The rating will indicate the opinion of members of the Landscape Committee on how much removal of a particular tree will or will not negatively affect Tollgate’s streetscape. If it will have little negative impact on streetscape the rating would be a 1 and removal would be considered. Maximum negative impact on streetscape would rate a 5 and would argue against removing the tree.

Factor 6: Opinions of nearest neighbors

Tollgate is a small neighborhood with largely amiable relations among residents. In order to protect this quality of life issue, the Committee will seek the opinions of the next door

neighbors on each side of the requesting homeowner and the residents across the street whose “view” will be significantly impacted if a tree is removed.

The overall opinion of these neighbors as well as their specific concerns will be listed in the chart below. The rating will indicate how little opposition there may be (rating of 1) or how much opposition there is to the request (rating of 5) both in general and for specific reasons.

Other:

In addition to the six factors that will be judged, there are certain reasons for tree removal that the Landscape Committee wishes all to understand will not be considered as qualifying reasons to consider removal of a healthy tree. These include:

1. “Messiness” of tree – falling leaves, nuts, pollen, etc.
2. Individual preference for grass over trees
3. Individual allergies – we reason that all pollens on the street are carried by wind to all parts of the street and therefore not a reason to take down a tree in a specific homeowner’s own yard