

## Talking Trees #2

Suggested headline: Responsibility for public trees

Debbie Kinder

The many benefits of urban trees are often taken for granted. If you have looked for a parking place or a walking route this summer, you know the value of the shade provided by our tree canopy.

When the City of Wisconsin Dells contracted with American Transmission Company to run a high voltage power line through the city, we didn't anticipate their demand that we cut all of the mature trees on the north side of Minnesota Ave. within a prescribed distance from the power line. That requirement came later, and the resulting loss of trees is keenly felt by residents along the avenue.

“Public trees” include all trees in the right of way—between the sidewalk and the street—as well as all trees in city parks and on city property. Under our current ordinance, property owners with public trees in front of their homes are responsible for entire cost of maintaining, trimming, planting, and removing these trees. Permission to remove and plant trees must be obtained from the Public Works department. Trees affected by Dutch Elm disease have additional rules.

If there is no sidewalk, the city's right of way is determined in relation to the road. The Original Plat for Kilbourn shows almost all rights of way at 80 feet. To estimate whether your trees are public trees, measure from curb to curb and split the distance to determine the estimated centerline of your street. From that centerline, take a measurement of 40 feet to determine the right of way. If your trees are within 40 feet of the centerline, they are public trees.

There are exceptions. The right of way for the Oak Lawn subdivision is 66 feet, so those residents should measure 33 feet from the estimated centerline of their streets. Bowman Road from Indiana Ave. to 200 feet south of Iowa Ave. has a right of way of 100 feet, so those residents should measure 50 feet.

The Tree Board, which advises the City Council's Public Works Committee, is working on a revision of the city's ordinances to share the cost of the city's trees between the property owners and the public works department. The list of acceptable trees and definitions of tree diseases as a public nuisance will be revised as well. The Tree Board is also considering fundraising activities. We will write grant applications for funds available to Wisconsin Dells because of its Tree City status awarded last April.

The current tree ordinances can be found on the city's website: <http://citywd.govoffice2.com/> Click on ordinances and then go to 5.05 Planting, Maintenance, and Removal of Trees and Shrubs and 17.03 Dutch Elm Disease.

Citizens are welcome to attend Tree Board meetings, which are held at the Municipal Building on the last Tuesday of each month at 7 PM. Chairman Chris Swart can be reached at 254-6160.