



CITY OF HARRISONBURG PUBLIC WORKS

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City Enhances Tree Canopy by Practicing “Right Tree, Right Place” in City Spaces

HARRISONBURG, Va. – Harrisonburg Public Works will be assisting in some environmentally friendly upgrades to the Harrisonburg Public Safety Building plaza this summer.

The department plans to remove four *Betula nigra* “River Birch” trees, which have outgrown their space, to make the building’s plaza safer and more accessible to the Harrisonburg community. The trees will be replaced by trees that are better suited for the space, practicing “Right Tree, Right Place”, enhancing the longevity of the tree’s life in the space, and encouraging a healthier tree canopy in Harrisonburg.

The Harrisonburg Urban Forestry program is recognized as a community asset, currently staffing five certified arborists that are knowledgeable on the management and care of trees to improve urban environment and provide benefits to the Harrisonburg community. With more than 1,500 trees removed from public property in the last few years, mainly due to the Emerald Ash Borer, the City’s Urban Forestry Management Plan includes nine action steps to increase tree canopy. City staff also have planted approximately 300 trees annually in recent years in efforts to replace those that have been removed.

Trees may struggle in urban environments if the tree is not suited for its space or if urban development around trees affects its growth, fast forwarding the end of their biological life. Struggles may include exposure to pests and/or disease, trees outgrowing their space, trees’ roots becoming affected by compaction/construction, etc.

Existing river birch trees located in the City’s Public Safety Building plaza have outgrown their space. The river birch tree is resilient, known for its rapid growth, potential to spread 40 to 60 feet at maturity, and may be utilized for its strong root structure for securing river banks, etc. The existing river birch trees’ strong, rapidly growing root structure has created cracks and has raised concrete in areas causing a safety concern and has also affected plaza electricity (nearby underground utilities) in recent years.



(Above) Existing river birch tree roots lift concrete and underground utilities in the Public Safety Building Plaza.

City Arborists and Harrisonburg’s Public Tree Advisory Board agree that removal and replacement of the river birch trees, accompanying installation of restored concrete satisfying ADA accessibility standards, is necessary to avoid future hazardous situations.

Staff focuses on being proactive and mindful when choosing newly installed urban trees to avoid potential tree struggle, tree decay, and destruction to City infrastructure.

Looking forward, raised planter boxes will be installed in the plaza so that newly planted trees may grow without damaging infrastructure. The Harrisonburg community may look forward to viewing *Cladrastis kentuckea* “American Yellowwood” trees as replacement trees in the plaza, chosen for their urban friendly growth habits, root structure, beautiful aesthetically pleasing white flowers in the Spring, and vibrant yellow-orange leaves in the Fall. This selection will also continue the theme of already planted aesthetically pleasing yellowwoods found in other locations of Harrisonburg’s downtown.



(Above) Cladrastis kentuckea “American Yellowwood” tree’s springtime bloom and Fall foliage color.

As the City progresses through its Urban Forestry Plan, the community is encouraged and welcome to speak with staff about “Right Tree, Right Place” and tree species selection. The community is also encouraged to take part in enhancing Harrisonburg’s tree canopy by participating in the City’s HCAP (Turf to Trees) program where residents may apply to be reimbursed for planting trees in their own yard, from a specific species selection list.

For more information about the City’s HCAP program, visit www.harrisonburgva.gov/hcap.

For more information about Harrisonburg’s Urban Forestry Program, visit www.harrisonburgva.gov/urban-forestry-program.

For more information on “Right Tree, Right Place” visit the Arbor Day Foundation webpage www.arboday.org/trees/righttreeandplace/.

*The **City of Harrisonburg** is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 54,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is available online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.*

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