

October 12, 2020

Seminary hill association

Dear Mayor Wilson and Members of City Council,

The Seminary Hill Association wishes to add our support to the letter from the Seminary Ridge Civic Association dated October 4, 2020 regarding the proactive removal of 376 Bradford pear trees, which equates to 53% of their neighborhood tree canopy, over the next few years.

This is obviously a drastic action, and coming on the heels of the plan to destroy 270 trees for the Taylor Run stream restoration project, seems to be something akin to a war on trees in Alexandria. While we understand that some of the pear trees are not in prime condition, we would also ask where the ongoing maintenance of these trees has been over the past few decades. In reading about these trees, it is clear that in order to survive in good condition, pruning is necessary every 5 or so years. Residents report that no such planned pruning has been done thereby creating a situation where they are susceptible to damage through breakage.

This is despite the fact that City Council had approved the 2009 Urban Forestry Master Plan recommendation to establish a block-by-block pruning of the City's approximately 17,000 public street trees. Instead, pruning that was done was only at the request of neighborhood residents who were aware of the need to do so. Has the City considered a robust pruning for these trees as an alternative to removal? This is an especially important consideration as the funding that was finally approved twelve years later in FY2021 to specifically implement the Master Plan's 2009 recommendation for the "block-by-block pruning program" is now being used instead for the block-by-block removal of 376 trees. We should all be ashamed that this is happening in what we call Eco-City Alexandria.

As distressing as this removal plan is, equally distressing is the fact that the details of this plan were learned when a resident saw this matter as an item on the September 17th meeting of the Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities Commission. The Seminary Ridge Civic Association had been assured by city staff that any plan for the trees would be thoroughly vetted with the civic association and neighborhood residents before any action was taken. Such notification of plans and meetings have not happened, and are not scheduled.

The plan for the Bradford pear trees is yet again another example of a pattern where city staff moves forward to create “draft” plans that are presented to residents for their input only AFTER they are basically in final form, making it almost impossible for residents to have any meaningful chance to make substantive changes. This is currently happening with the Taylor Run, Strawberry Run, and Lucky Run stream restoration projects where residents have been presented with plans that are 90% complete, and must scramble to try to suggest any modifications or alternatives that can receive any serious consideration.

We join with Seminary Ridge Civic Association in asking that any plans regarding the pear trees in the Seminary Ridge neighborhood be placed on hold until appropriate meetings can be held with the community to discuss alternatives and answer legitimate questions about the wisdom of taking such drastic action to decimate the tree canopy in one neighborhood.

Thank you for your consideration of the request made by the Seminary Hill Civic Association and now endorsed by the Board of the Seminary Hill Association.

Sincerely,

The Board of the Seminary Hill Association