

City Code Chatter (CCC) — Caring for the trees in the yard is important for safety

Written by Chris Lee

Trees, shrubs and plants. Things of beauty to many. Trees provide shade, privacy and that little extra something to the yard. Shrubs, flowers and plants do the same.

Trees have been around forever. Most towns throughout the United States have those trees that have been around longer than the towns themselves. These are the trees that are capable of providing shade to an entire lot. Unfortunately, it is the job of the land/homeowner to maintain and care for those trees.

This week's City Code Chatter will focus on the ordinance dealing with the tree board and regulations.

According to city ordinance, in order to remove a tree off personal property, one must acquire a license from the city if a tree removal service is not used.

The ordinance reads, "it shall be unlawful for any person to engage in the business of cutting, trimming, pruning, removing, spraying or otherwise treating trees, shrubs or vines within the city without first procuring a license therefore from the city."

Code Enforcement officer Dawn Worley said she doesn't get too tied up with people pruning their trees. As long as the limbs aren't going to fall on a house or someone in the street, she is OK with it.

"I'd prefer people take care of things as opposed to not taking care of it," she said.

She stresses people need to use caution if it is close to a power line or a neighbor's home. If so, someone could be hurt or property could become damaged.

Safety is the big player in this. Overhanging trees pose a threat to vehicles and pedestrians using the streets, sidewalks and alleys.

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The City of Holyoke has a tree board. Members include citizens and residents of the city appointed by the mayor and approved by the city council. Worley said in the past the board has gone around town marking dead trees but recently not much has been done with the addition of her position.

“It’s kind of fallen on to my plate as far as trying to get some of it managed,” she said.

Worley said the process in which a resident receives notice about a problem is a little different than other ordinances. The tree board is supposed to make the initial contact with the resident. Once Worley gives a notice either written or verbally, a 30-day period begins in which the issue needs to be resolved.

She said there are two individuals in the area who are licensed for tree removal and care. If a resident chooses to tackle the task themselves, they take on the liability issues involved. The removal services are good about working with people, Worley said.

“They’ll give you a good idea of what it will cost and then you can decide,” she said.

If an extension is needed beyond the 30-day grace period, Worley asks she be notified. If it is something not posing a safety threat she is OK with it.

Another issue with trees on personal property comes for vehicles traveling down the street. Trees and shrubs on street corners are in violation of city code if they block or obstruct the clear view at an intersection. According to the ordinance, “a clear view is defined as 150 feet in both directions of the intersecting road from a point of 10 feet from the beginning of the intersection.”

Residents with questions regarding pruning may contact Worley.

Worley said she has been working with Linda Langelo of the Extension Office, with regards to appropriate pruning techniques. Langelo is also a member of the tree board.

“She has given me a ton of information,” Worley said.

Worley also said Langelo is willing to provide a seminar or small class to teach people or explain the proper techniques of pruning and caring for trees.

Sidewalks are another issue with regards to trees or shrubs. If a tree limb or shrub hangs onto or into a sidewalk, it is the owner’s responsibility to see that the obstruction gets cleared. Roots growing under a sidewalk to the point where cracks are formed pose a problem as well.

Worley said Langelo is a great resource for information regarding what type of trees to plant in certain places throughout the yard.

Property line stretches all the way to the alley

Alleys are seen throughout the entire town. Many people have backyard fences and assume their responsibility stops at the fence. If there is space between the fence and the edge of the alley, it is the owner’s responsibility to care for that space.

If questions arise of where property lines begin and end, Worley encourages people to contact the city or county assessor.

Ways to keep weeds or unwanted plants from overtaking the area behind the fence is to lay down weed barrier, plant flowers or spray the weeds.

Worley said any type of plant that spreads will help eliminate weeds from overtaking that area.

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“I’ve seen a lot of alleys that aren’t being maintained this year,” she said. “Just kind of a reminder to people to take care of the alley.”

Worley encourages anyone with questions regarding city ordinances or rules to contact her at the Police Department. Messages can be left for her at 854-2342 or her voice mail at the Comm Center at 854-2244.

Those interested in seeing a code discussed or explored in future CCC articles should contact the Enterprise office at 854-2811.