

Treat trees

Avoid hassles and ensure good-looking landscapes by staying aware of municipal tree ordinances

BY MIKE FITZPATRICK

right

Municipal tree preservation ordinances are a relatively new reality in the landscaping industry. All types and sizes of projects are affected — everything from simple landscaping on existing residential properties to huge subdivisions and commercial construction projects. As cities and suburbs continue to expand, homes and offices are being built in natural, wooded areas. Unfortunately, construction in these areas can cause extreme damage to trees, diminishing not only the land value but also its aesthetic appeal.

Growing popularity

People recognize that trees add value to residential and commercial property, and that's why tree preservation ordinances are also becoming increasingly popular.

Most real estate agents agree that a property with mature, healthy landscaping and trees can sometimes sell for 20% more. Mature trees are also an aesthetic asset because they make a property look stately and established. People enjoy having trees around them because they provide inviting shade and make an area more livable. And trees provide obvious environmental benefits such as absorbing pollution,



Home sites that contain mature trees command higher prices.

reducing land erosion, maintaining the water table and providing habitats and food for birds and other wildlife. If placed correctly, trees can even save on energy costs by helping cool or heat a building.

Assuring compliance

Tree preservation ordinances are designed to prevent tree loss and reduce damage during development, replace trees

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Saving natural areas with mature trees is good for communities.

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that are lost during construction, plant trees where none occurred previously, and maintain preserved trees after construction on residential and commercial property. Unfortunately, tree preservation ordinances vary from community to community, which can make it difficult and time consuming for you to assure compliance. The best way to approach this problem is to check with the municipality's forestry department before you begin landscape renovation on a site.

Since the majority of tree preservation ordinances require you to perform a tree inventory and prepare a preservation plan before beginning work on a site, it's worthwhile to hire a certified arborist to perform this inventory. The arborist can determine the species and size and number of trees, as well as which trees are healthy or diseased and what care they may need. Include a certified arborist in your planning meetings with the property owners and architect to ensure that the tree preservation plan is effective and practical.

After the municipality approves the plan and you have the appropriate permits, be sure the site workers know which trees need to be saved by marking the trees and explaining why the trees and their critical root zones are to be protected.

One complex project

In a recent project at Middlefork Farm, a planned housing development located north of Chicago, arborists not only had to follow the municipality ordinances but also the preservation requests of the property owners. While working with the developer and the government agencies, a tree

preservation plan was designed to provide an ideal residential community with an established neighborhood feel. Century-old oaks and hickories reside on the site, but since the trees hadn't received care for at least 15 years, many were being choked by invasive buckthorn, which had grown as high as 30 feet.

A significant challenge during the project was minimizing damage to the sensitive root zones of the site's 100-year-old oaks. During renovation or construction projects, the root zone is the part of the tree most often damaged. There are three primary factors that result in long-term damage to tree roots: soil compaction from machinery and materials, grade changes, and severed roots from improper trenching and excavating.

Have weekly field meetings

During the Middlefork Farm renovation project, a certified arborist participated in weekly field meetings with all contractors and equipment operators. The meetings helped the site workers understand the extensive root zones and how to preserve them. The workers also learned the appropriate techniques to protect the trees during construction, including how to fence off the area around the critical root zone and how to conduct supplemental watering, mulching and fertilization that will promote root growth.

To prevent soil compaction around the critical root zones, the certified arborist helped plan in advance all the construction roads, parking places, and equipment and material storage areas.

Where majestic oaks were once barely visible, there are now scenic woods, wetlands, fledgling savanna plants and more wildlife at Middlefork Farm. The work on the site has given the trees the greatest chance for long-term survival.

But the tree preservation work doesn't stop there. Now that the project is complete, it's necessary to monitor tree health continuously and implement complete ongoing tree care, including fertilization, mulching and pruning. Middlefork Farm is now more ecologically balanced and scenic than it has been in decades. Residents are willing to pay a premium for the beautiful surroundings, and have the satisfaction of knowing they live in a place that's a model for balancing development and tree and land preservation.

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