

1333 N.W. Eastman Parkway | Gresham, OR 97030

To: Eric Schmidt, Interim City Manager  
From: Joe Walsh, Director of Neighborhood Livability and Community Services  
Re: Emergency tree removal from Southwest Community Park/Shaul Woods  
Date: February 20, 2024

The purpose of this memo is to summarize the tree health issues and subsequent tree removal in Southwest Community Park – particularly in the southern portion of the park known as Shaul Woods.

#### Background

In late 2021, the City purchased 7.88 acres of private property known as Shaul Woods, saving it from a planned housing development following months of community advocacy. Prior to the purchase, City staff provided the public and City Council with a due diligence report that outlined known issues with the overall health of the forest on that property, including suspected infection with Laminated Root Rot. The City purchased the property knowing the risks involved and has been working since then to clean up the property and assess the tree health issues.

#### Level 1 Tree Risk Assessment

In 2023, the City commissioned a Level 1 Tree Risk Assessment from a private arboricultural consultant company called Teragan & Associates. That report showed that most of the 327 trees assessed were in fair or poor structural condition, and about 42% of the trees were considered at high risk for failure within the next 5 years. Out of 327 trees, 17 were rated as “clearly indicating symptoms of laminated root rot”, while another 197 trees were categorized as “maybe indicating symptoms of laminated root rot”. As stated in the report, “Laminated Root Rot is extremely difficult to detect ... and otherwise seemingly healthy trees can be infected with the pathogen.”

Given the complexity of diagnosing Laminated Root Rot with certainty, one recommendation provided by the consultant was to remove all trees within striking distance of nearby properties within the study area. The City initially declined that route, opting instead for a more nuanced and phased approach that would remove only the highest risk trees first, with additional tree removal to follow as necessary. Since the Level 1 Tree Risk Assessment was released, the City had been working to scope and finalize this phased approach for removal.

#### Severe Weather Event of January 2024

The severe weather event in January of this year led to the failure of at least 30 trees, including seemingly healthy trees, some of which damaged neighboring homes. As one example of healthy tree failure - the tree that fell on the house at 590 SW Hartley was tree #108 in the report. This tree did not show signs of Laminated Root Rot, was labeled low risk, rated in good health, and was not scheduled for removal. Additionally, staff noted several instances of a “domino effect”, whereby one falling tree would cause the toppling of several other trees due to the close proximity of trees in the Shaul property.

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Emergency Response

In a meeting shortly after the severe weather event, staff from Parks and Natural Resources concluded that an expedited removal of all trees within striking distance was warranted in the area that has shown the highest overall risk factors and repeated tree failures. This decision is not intended to set a precedent for removal of all trees on public land that are within striking distance of properties or structures. Rather, this decision was reached based on a combination of factors unique to the specific circumstances including:

- Prevalence of at least three different types of fungal infections including Laminated Root Rot, Velvet Top Fungus, and Red Ring Rot. Laminated Root Rot is of particular concern as it can cause whole tree failure on trees without any obvious visual symptoms and has demonstrated an unpredictable, widespread distribution on this site.
- Difficulty of effectively monitoring the progression of Laminated Root Rot infection in an individual tree.
- Multiple failures of seemingly healthy trees.
- Proximity of homes to the trees at high risk of failure.
- Exposure of the stand to winds from all directions, particularly from strong east winds and evidence of widespread wind damage in crown of trees creating opportunities for stem decay there.
- Level 1 Tree Risk Assessment findings showing more than 200 trees near homes at high risk of failure within a five-year period.
- Independent arborist recommendation to remove trees within striking distance of neighboring properties due to the culmination of risk factors.

In conclusion, staff made the determination that a phased approach was no longer feasible given the widespread failure of trees on this property, the combination of circumstances listed above, and the risk to the health and safety of neighboring residents. As such, staff took immediate action in late January 2024 to expedite the removal of all remaining high risk trees, and work began on February 9, 2024.

Sincerely,



Joe Walsh  
Director of Neighborhood Livability and Community Services