

Guidelines for Care and Protection of Trees and Shrubs

(Approved and Adopted December 2013)

Background. A very extensive planting plan was required as part of the approval process for the construction of Tollgate in the late 1970s. In addition to numerous shrubs, this planting plan specifically identified trees on the site that were to be preserved and specified about 125 new trees (for a total of approximately 175 trees) to provide both a significant canopy cover and to screen Tollgate from neighboring properties. These tree requirements, originally for building approval, still bind the Tollgate community. Tollgate is required to get a permit for any tree that is to be removed, and a new approved tree must be planted as replacement for any tree taken down. While Tollgate's planting requirements do impose certain costs to Tollgate, the trees of Tollgate also provide great benefit. The 175 trees currently within Tollgate include a wide variety of species, from small ornamental trees to a Pecan tree which has been identified by the Village Preservation and Improvement Society as a Noteworthy Tree and has been nominated by the City as a Specimen Tree. The trees of Tollgate not only provide us with a beautiful living environment, they create cooling green spaces, and contribute to the environment by removing carbon dioxide and adding oxygen to the atmosphere. The trees also absorb and slow storm water runoff, a particularly important function as the City struggles to manage the growing problem of storm water volumes.

Value of Landscape. Many residents of Tollgate were attracted to the community, in part, due to the unique beauty of the neighborhood. Tollgate is an attractive community, designed with grassy areas, planted with a wide variety of trees and shrubs, and maintained with care. Conservative estimates are that a well-tended landscape with mature, healthy trees adds as much as 10 to 15% to property values. The Tollgate community values this investment and seeks to ensure its protection. Tollgate's Covenants and By-Laws direct the Landscape Committee to oversee the care and maintenance of Tollgate's trees, shrubs and lawns. This document outlines the general guidelines for the care and protection of Tollgate trees and shrubs. The guidelines are based on horticultural science and reflect a commitment on the part of the Committee to provide practical and necessary care.

Overall Care. Trees and shrubs require regular care to maintain their health. Some trees and shrubs show signs of stress almost immediately and steps can be taken to restore their health; others seem to decline almost overnight with little or no warning. Many of the trees and shrubs in the community were planted during Tollgate's construction and will continue to need replacement over time as they fail. Oversight and proper maintenance are essential to protect these horticultural assets. To that end, Tollgate hires a landscape company to maintain the shrubs and grassy areas. In addition, Tollgate consults with a City licensed Arborist on an as needed basis and uses a licensed arborist for all tree work within Tollgate. The Landscape Committee oversees these contracts and performs some tasks, themselves. At times, the Committee also relies on homeowners to assist with some landscaping tasks, especially watering.

Watering. All plants require adequate water to grow and flourish: about one inch of rainfall per week is optimal.¹ Water is constantly lost through evaporation to the atmosphere. Summers in Northern Virginia can be particularly challenging with high temperatures and unpredictable rainfall. Some years there can be significant droughts and other years are unusually wet. Rain that comes down too rapidly is often lost to runoff and does not have time to soak into the soil and benefit the plants. While young plants and trees are particularly sensitive to lack of water, older established plantings are also damaged by drought conditions. A plant or tree that is water deprived can then also become more susceptible to pest damage and other non-recoverable conditions. Since Tollgate does not have an underground irrigation system, it is often necessary to ask individual homeowners to water the trees and plantings immediately surrounding their homes. As a general rule, during the months of greatest plant growth, April-October, if there is no significant rainfall for more than two weeks, the Committee asks that homeowners water. New trees and shrubs, in particular, need sufficient water for the first year or two to get established. The Committee periodically installs bags around the trunks of new trees to facilitate proper watering. Homeowners are asked to fill these bags at least once a week to ensure that these new plantings get off to a good start with healthy root formation and stabilization.

Mulching. Most of Tollgate's trees have significant mulch beds surrounding their trunks. These beds help the soil retain moisture and discourage other plants that would compete with the tree for water. For this reason, the Committee is no longer installing small plants in mulch beds close to the trunks of the trees, and asks that homeowners refrain from planting in these beds. In some areas within Tollgate there are plants in mulch beds that should be removed, but this removal could harm the tree roots and so the plants are being left alone. Most of the shrubs surrounding the homes of Tollgate also have mulch beds. The mulch beds for both trees and shrubs are replaced each spring. Special attention is given to ensure that the mulch is properly installed to prevent "volcano" mulching, an unhealthy practice where the mulch is mounded too high around the base of the tree. Mulch layers should ideally be two to three inches in depth.² A few species of plants should not be mulched, or have mulch placed too close to them, and these areas are treated appropriately and weeded as necessary.

Pruning. Proper pruning not only enhances the appearance of trees and shrubs, it is an important factor in promoting and maintaining plant health. There are both correct ways and times to prune trees and shrubs³. The pruning of our trees and shrubs is managed by the Landscape Committee and appropriate contractors. The Committee does not encourage pruning by individual homeowners. Some homeowners are, however, quite familiar with trees and like to prune small dead branches from the plantings in their yards. The Committee asks that any homeowner who intends to prune, please consult with the Committee before any pruning is done. All homeowners can request pruning that they believe is necessary by contacting the Landscape Committee.

^{1,2} *A Landscaping Guide for Homeowners Associations*. Virginia Cooperative Extension.
<http://www.pwcgov.org/government/dept/vce/Documents/HOA%20Manual%20-%20Final%202012.pdf>

³ *Pruning Calendars and Guides for Trees and Shrubs (various documents)*, Virginia Cooperative Extension: Trees, Shrubs, and Groundcovers, <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/category/trees-shrubs-groundcovers.html>

Tree Removal. Even with the best of care, some trees become unstable, severely damaged or die and need to be removed. As mentioned previously, Tollgate must get a permit from the City for any tree that needs to be removed. Tollgate works very closely with the City Arborist and is required to use a company, licensed by the City, for all tree removal. In the case of healthy trees that, for a variety of reasons (size, appearance, location etc.) are being considered for removal, the Landscape Committee carefully follows the Guidelines developed for such situations. The **Guidelines for the Discretionary Removal of Trees** were approved by the Board and can be found on Tollgate's web site⁴.

Tree Replacement. Any tree that is to be planted in Tollgate must be approved by the City Arborist. Tollgate is obligated to plant a tree for any tree that is removed. In some situations, a replacement tree is not planted at the exact site of the previous tree, but is planted in another suitable location within Tollgate. The head of the Tree Committee consults with the homeowners closest to where the tree is to be planted to decide what type of tree will be planted. Consideration is given to the space available, the relationship to nearby trees and structures, the amount of soil moisture, the amount of sunlight, the overall appearance of the tree within Tollgate, and the cost of the tree. The City has a list of recommended trees from which to choose, and the Committee tries to maintain a variety of species (e.g., large canopy, understory, flowering, evergreen, etc.). Once there is agreement on the type of tree to be planted, the head of the Tree Committee usually goes to the nursery and hand selects the tree.

Most trees within Tollgate are planted by the nursery where the tree was purchased. On rare occasions, a tree may be transplanted by Committee members and/or individual homeowners. With all trees, care is taken to ensure that the root ball of the tree is properly loosened and planted at the correct height, in an effort to prevent a condition known as root girdling.

Other Considerations. Different species of trees have different root structures and characteristics, but generally speaking, tree roots are usually quite close to the surface. Most roots are less than 12-18" deep. Damage to tree roots can be very costly to the health of the tree, so digging in the mulch beds or under the "drip line" of trees should be avoided whenever possible.

The living tissue of a tree is just under the bark layer and damage to this tissue can affect the health of the tree by providing a source of entry for parasites or other pests that can weaken the tree and cause its decline, or by interfering with the necessary transport of fluids from the trunk to the branches. A tree's bark can be damaged without any immediate sign of injury. Trees can be damaged by a rope or wire that is tied tightly around the trunk or a branch. For this reason, ropes or wires should not be attached to trees for extended periods without consulting the Landscape Committee. There are a few trees in Tollgate where wires have been placed to stabilize the tree, these trees are carefully watched and the wires will be removed when appropriate.

⁴ *Guidelines for Discretionary Replacement of Trees.* Tollgate Way Homeowners Association.
<http://tollgateway.org/landscape/Tree%20removal%20guidelines%20-%20summary.pdf>