

# WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY TREE CARE POLICY

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the West Chester University Tree Care Policy is to identify the policies, procedures, and practices that are used in establishing, protecting, maintaining, and removing trees on the West Chester University campus. The overall goal of the plan is to ensure a safe, attractive, and sustainable campus urban forest. By remaining true to this purpose the first impression of potential students and visitors are more apt to be positive.

## RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT

West Chester University Grounds Department located within the Facilities Department under the direction of the Executive Director of Facilities Management.

## CAMPUS TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

West Chester University established a Campus Tree Advisory Committee in April of 2012. The representatives include at a minimum a student, faculty member, facility management staff member, and a representative from the Borough of West Chester or an adjoining Township. The terms of the representatives are two years with the possibility of renewal for an additional term. The Campus Tree Advisory Committee will review and provide input on tree-related activities and issues on campus at West Chester University. It will also serve as a liaison between the University and surrounding community with respect to tree-related issues.

## CAMPUS TREE CARE POLICIES

- A. PLANTING:** Tree planting has been and will continue to be a priority. Tree planting will stay at a rate higher than tree removal. The University aims at a 2:1 ratio for trees planted to trees removed. Our policy is to choose healthy nursery stock of diverse species composition that is site compatible and preferably native to the Northeast United States. A list of preferred tree species for planting is available.
- B. LANDSCAPING:**
  - 1. Tree mulching is accomplished every year for trees up to approximately 6" in diameter. Periodically, drip lines of larger trees and tree groupings are mulched to keep lawn maintenance equipment away. Mulching is accomplished with material that has been properly aged.
  - 2. Fertilization and Pest Management: Trees are treated for pest problems as needed and as funding allows. There is no regular tree fertilization beyond treatment received as a result of lawn fertilization.
- C. MAINTENANCE AND REMOVAL:**
  - 1. Despite the best efforts of the University, individual trees will decline and die. It is important to identify problems as they occur and take appropriate action. Trees that are unsafe whether due to structural defects or located near a target are considered hazards. A target is defined as a structure, roadway, sidewalk, or any area where people congregate.
  - 2. The University has a moral and legal obligation to regularly inspect for hazardous conditions and correct them in a timely manner. Failures to report and correct a problem may be considered negligent. Hazardous conditions will be continuously monitored throughout the year. Hazardous conditions are documented on an annual basis and trees are identified by the following terms: Need to be Removed, Need to be Pruned, and Trees to watch.

3. Hazardous conditions should be identified by a thorough visual inspection. Problems to identify are dead and hanging branches, cavities and rotten wood in the trunk, major seams and splits, v-crotches, leans, fungal fruiting bodies at the base, and broken or rotten roots. Insects and diseases should also be investigated. Hazards such as but not limited to these will be used to determine if a tree will need to be removed or pruned.

**D. MANAGING FOR CATASTROPHIC EVENTS:** Storm response and recovery are generally accomplished in-house. In a crisis, the first priority is to remove tree debris that blocks campus thoroughfares, disrupts campus operations, or poses hazards to the campus community. Once these critical needs are addressed, a prioritized recovery plan is implemented during which unsalvageable trees are systematically removed and salvageable trees are pruned to restore their health and structure. As funding permits, lost trees are strategically replaced to restore the structure and function of the campus urban forest in a reasonable time frame. During storm response and recovery, trees requiring specialized equipment not available in-house are addressed by outside contractor.

## **PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION**

### **A. CONSTRUCTION : PROTECTION ZONE AND DRIP LINE**

1. Protective fencing shall be erected prior to construction and remaining to project completion.
2. Tree fencing shall be a minimum of 4 foot high orange polyethylene laminar safety netting.
3. Posts shall be set 2 feet in ground made of durable metal "T" or approved equivalent.
4. Aeration before and after construction shall be done to area within the fencing and extending out 10 feet from exterior of fencing.
5. Storage of fuels, materials, or equipment within fenced area is **PROHIBITED**.

### **B. PROTECTION FROM DAILY MAINTENANCE**

1. Trees up to 6 inches in diameter will have a tree rings edged to outside the current drip line and mulched. This is to keep mowers and small equipment from coming in contact with the tree's base or root system.

## **GOALS and TARGETS**

- A.** It is a goal of West Chester University to follow the preceding guidelines as general policy. The benefits will be numerous and the aesthetics of the campus will be enhanced for generations to come.
1. Potential hazards will quickly be identified and removed.
  2. There will always be a constant influx of young trees of varied species.
  3. Good record keeping which will provide an excellent picture of the overall process.
  4. A tree inventory covering the core campus has been developed within the last 5 years. The ultimate goal being worked towards is to utilize this data for campus planning, tree inventory purposes, tree management, and academic exercises (read only access). Notify the Grounds Manager with needed updates.

## **TREE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT**

- A.** Assessment on low profile trees is performed via the Grounds Manager, Facilities Landscape Designer/Drafter, and a Faculty member (typically Biology/Forestry). Higher profile trees are assessed by an outside consultant (such as Shreiner Tree Care or Arader Tree Care). Enforcement of protection measures are performed by project managers and on-site engineers.

## **PROHIBITED PRACTICES**

- A. Bicycles may be parked only at bicycle racks, except when permission has been granted to keep a bicycle inside a campus building. No person is allowed to park a bicycle as follows: on a sidewalk, at a tree or post, on a lawn, next to a building, in a roadway, at a utility pole, light post, banister, parking meter, or other available structure. Bicycles in violation of this are removed by the Heavy Equipment Department in presence of a WCU Police Officer, confiscated, and stored by The Department of Public Safety.
- B. Vehicles are to be parked on paved surfaces only and not on lawn surfaces under the canopy of trees so as to not damage root zones.

## **DEFINITIONS**

- A. **Dead branches**: can be identified by dead or missing buds, loose or stripped bark, and possible presence of fungus. These branches are more likely to fall on a target. Insects and diseases may enter the tree through dead branches.
- B. **Dead hangers or Widow Makers**: are broken branches hanging in the crown of the tree. The hangers often are located at an unusual angle with dead leaves persisting on the branch. Hangers can fall at any time. The stub should be cut at the collar to minimize insect and disease infestation.
- C. **Cavities**: are holes in the trunk or major branches. They are the result of injury (fire, pruning, mechanical damage, etc.). Cavities form and enlarge by decay and microbial action. Cavities cause structural weakening and may lead to structural failure of the trunk or major branches.
- D. **Seams**: are radial separations of the bark (cracks) that have been closed by the growth of callus tissue. Seams are often associated with decay. They can be caused by temperature differences or rapid growth. There is some structural weakening as a result of seams.
- E. **Splits**: are cracks that have not healed over. They are related to seams and are caused by the same agents. Splits on opposite sides of the trunk almost always indicate rot. This condition always merits closer inspection as serious structural problems may be hidden.
- F. **V-crotches**: are the junction of the trunk and major branches that meet at a 'V'. They are weakly joined and prone to splitting and breaking. The larger the leaders grow the weight increases and the possibility of breakage also increases. Cabling is a common remedial action.
- G. **Edge trees**: are trees that grow along the border of wood lots. They are more subject to full exposure to the elements during storms. Regular inspections should be made if these trees are over a target, especially if they are on the edge of a disturbed site.

## **COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

The Tree Care Policy is viewable on the West Chester University website within The Facilities Division page. The tree protection guidelines listed in the Policy are to be communicated to project managers for inclusion into project specifications.