

Removal of ROW trees for The Evergreen School improvements

Over the past few days, the City has heard concerns from residents in the Parkwood neighborhood about the removal of six significant trees along Meridian Avenue as part of The Evergreen School improvements. The tree removals were necessary in order to accommodate the new student drop-off/pick-up area (DO/PU) for the school and the required frontage improvements, such as curbs and sidewalks. Even though six trees were removed, because of the size of the trees, the City's regulations require that Evergreen provide 15 replacement trees.

Traffic congestion and student safety were the two biggest concerns expressed by neighbors at the neighborhood meeting held by Evergreen on January 9, 2014, and during the SEPA comment period for the project. Neighbors stated that during drop-off and pick-up times, traffic backs up along Meridian causing congestion. They also expressed concerns about students entering traffic lanes to get in and out of vehicles. Understandably, student safety was a big consideration in designing the new DO/PU area.

Evergreen's design was also influenced by the City's Transportation Master Plan (TMP). The TMP designates Meridian Ave. N. for a conversion to a 3-lane cross section (two travel lanes and a center turning lane) in the future. Future conversion to this cross-section will eliminate on-street parking along Evergreen's frontage, which had been used as the DO/PU area. In order to continue to have drop-offs and pick-ups on Meridian in the future, a new DO/PU area needed to be built, which necessitated relocating the curb line to the west outside Meridian's travel lanes. The trees stood in the area that will become the new DO/PU area.

While losing significant trees is unfortunate, sometimes it is necessary in order to address other important issues. In the current instance, ensuring student safety was a key consideration in designing Evergreen's frontage improvements. It is important to remember that anytime a tree is removed from the right-of-way, it must be replaced with a new tree, or trees depending on the size. Under the City's tree replacement policies, the six trees that have been removed to accommodate the new DO/PU area will be replaced with 15 new trees.

Another concern that has been raised regarding the tree removal has been the issue of notice. Unfortunately, with development projects such as the Evergreen improvements, notice and neighbors' chance to comment on the design and plans often occur long before any action actually takes place. Evergreen started their process in December 2013. They held their neighborhood meeting, as required, on January 9, 2014. The SEPA review and comment period occurred March 11 to May 7, 2014. Notices for the meeting and for the SEPA comment period were sent out as required by law. It was then almost a year before actual construction began.

To help address neighbors' concerns about notice, the City will be reviewing ways to ensure property owners provide more notice to neighbors when trees will be removed from the right-of-way.

If you have any questions you can contact Engineering Manager Bob Earl at (206) 801-2479 or bearl@shorelinewa.gov.