

DRAFT

Tree Inspection, Accountability, and Reporting Concerns

Tree inspectors now answer to Construction Dept. and lost their connection to the city arborist because direct supervision has been transferred to the Construction Division.

The City Arborist develops, coordinates, and implements citywide urban forest regulatory policies, procedures, and programs and is the responsible party and the expert resource for staff. Management and oversight are crucial. The City arborist is also the connection to the community. City of Austin code 25-8-623 states, “the city arborist shall inspect trees.” Community Tree Preservation Division had a tree-oriented staff that connected them to the community. This is City of Austin policy.

Experienced tree inspectors are now tasked with erosion control and sedimentation review and trees are no longer a priority.

Trees are no longer the priority and focus, creating a drop in the level of service to trees and diluted the effectiveness of the city arborist program. Development is the major reason for yearly tree decline.

Citizen violation reports are sent to the construction dept.

Loss of faith with the community and connection to the City Arborist office.
Change in established policy.

Response time: adding layers

Lack of understanding of tree survival issue and active violations. Loss of urgency. Safety issues. Adding layers to response time kills trees. Trees are alive and living breathing infrastructure. Rapid response to problem resolution is critical.

All tree inspectors assessing trees need certification and training.

Training is critical. Knowledge of code and recognizing tree impacts are critical for tree survival.

Recommendations:

Address code 25-8-623 by restoring inspection oversight to the city arborist and prioritizing trees and sustainability. Only qualified tree inspectors should inspect trees.

Re-establish the link for citizens reporting tree concerns to the city arborist office by returning oversight for tree inspections to the city arborist office.

Develop an immediate response chain for urgent tree violations/safety issues/inspections which should take top priority. Define tree safety issues by a qualified tree inspector. Restore direct supervision and allow the city arborist to speak directly to tree inspectors.

Establish training guidelines for tree inspectors through the city arborist's office including ISA tree risk assessment.

Require the city arborist be involved in hiring of new tree inspectors, and have a role in writing job descriptions and performance reviews.

Provide the Environmental Commission quarterly spreadsheets tracking tree violations/removals, inspections/results.

Allow tree inspectors to inspect commercial sites monthly.

Consider community outreach by hosting sessions with stakeholders. Provide timely responses and follow up with results such as emails from the city arborists.