

March 2022



The Castle Hills Reporter

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A bi-monthly newsletter for the residents of the City of Castle Hills published by Neighborhood News, Inc.

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR



Friends,

By the time you are reading this, hopefully we are well into our warm days of Spring. There is a lot going on around the City.

Power Outages and Trees

This winter, our electrical stability fared much better than last year. Albeit this weather event was only a fraction of Weather Event Uri was in 2021. We didn't have all the outages that we used to experience inside 410; specifically, the Honeysuckle, Towne Vue, and Twin Leaf area. This can be attributed to our working with CPS to get the trees trimmed in this area. While we all love our trees, if they are too close to power lines they can really wreak havoc with wind or ice. I apologize for the inconvenience that many of you all experienced when CPS was trimming trees but I hope we can all agree it was worth not losing power.

Now there were a handful of streets that were without power for a several hours. In talking to CPS Energy and their subcontractor on site, this was largely driven by ice on the power lines. It even resulted in them having to run a new power line across NW Military around Roletto and Prinz area, Castle Hills Police was quick to jump in and close NW Military briefly as they ran the new line across the street. It was good to see how quickly the CPS team mobilized and got everyone back online. If you are experiencing weather related problems (or any problems in general) please reach out to me or City Hall. For the latest information you can always check my "Castle Hills Mayor JR Trevino" Facebook page; with this last storm there were a couple of livestreams and people really seemed like to like the live updates. I will work to those going to keep you informed.

On the topic of trees, it looks like many of our beloved trees (including mine) need to be trimmed to ensure safe access for our Castle Hills Fire Department and our mutual aid partners. Please keep in mind, February 1st to June 1st we do not allow pruning in the City of Castle Hills. This is the riskiest time for Oak Wilt and we are doing what we can to avoid it wreaking havoc in our neighborhood. Oak Wilt treatment is very expensive and frequently not successful; often it is damage control to avoid the spread to healthy trees.

In seeing some our platform truck go down the streets, they have to be very careful of the low-lying branches which is why you often see them driving in a zigzag pattern. If it had been raining or is raining, it is even worse as they hang lower once they are saturated with water. Aside from avoiding costly damage to our City equipment, some of our mutual aid partners that are not as familiar with our streets may not feel comfortable driving down the streets causing them to park further away from the incident. Castle Hills code says that you must have 14 feet of clearance on the street and 12 feet of clearance above a sidewalk. By the time that you receive this reporter you will have plenty time to check your trees and put a plan together.

(Continued on page 3)



CITY COUNCIL

JR Trevino

Mayor

Joe Izbrand

Mayor Pro-Tem, Place 1

Frank Paul

Place 2

Kurt May

Place 3

Jack Joyce

Place 4

Douglas Gregory

Treasurer, Place 5

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(210) 293-9681

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James "Jim" Ladewig

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(210) 342-2341, ext. 217

Steven Zuniga

Police Chief

(210) 342-2341

Rick Harada

Public Works & Animal Control

Department Director

(210) 293-9676

ALL EMERGENCIES, EMT, FIRE & POLICE CALL 911

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Monthly Meetings

All meetings are held at City Hall unless otherwise posted.

City Council

2nd Tuesdays, 6:30 p.m.

Architectural Review Committee

1st Wednesday, 7:00pm

Upon Request

Board of Adjustment

4th Monday, 5:30 p.m.

Upon Request

Zoning Commission

1st Tuesday, 7:00pm

Upon Request

Crime Control & Prevention District

3rd Monday, 5:30pm

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(Continued from page 2)

Castle Hills Lofts

Many of you all have heard about the Castle Hills Lofts projects that is being discussed at NW Military and Winston Lane. There has been a lot of questions and comments. As you have come to expect from this Council, we are committed to *radical transparency* (credit to Graham Weston and the Rackspace Team) in all aspects of City government. As such, we have asked all parties involved to join us in facilitating a series of Townhalls meetings about the development. The Townhalls will be an opportunity for you to come and ensure Council hears your voice. Aside from the information being shared online, we went a step further to send out postcards about the Townhall meetings.

All this being said, I wanted to share a little bit about what this development is and what it could mean for Castle Hills. The proposed site, the large tract of land next to the car wash which has been undeveloped for as long as we can tell. The proposed development is 300 units with expectation of about 450 residents. There has been a lot of discussion around the amount of residents. On the positive side, there is some general conversations about the potential economic boost Castle Hills could see from sales tax in the neighboring shopping center. There has also been some talk of how it may help invigorate NW Military as a walkabout corridor. On the negative side, the big concern naturally is traffic, which is something of particular interest to me.

In 2017 I asked then City Attorney, Michael Brennan to put together a Traffic Impact Analysis ordinance for Council consideration. If my memory serves correctly, it was approved unanimously. The ordinance required developers, owners, and operators to complete a traffic impact analysis if there was a change in use or business. Aside from the obvious, this ordinance helped take out the emotional bias that we often experience as a concern for community. As Sergeant Joe Friday would say, it's "Just the facts." You may remember that this ordinance helped us show Basis Schools that their proposed development really didn't fit in Castle Hills. The same level of scrutiny will be applied to this development to assure that our community is not negatively impacted. We have even tasked the traffic engineers with expanding their survey areas to ensure that we protect our neighborhoods.

As I mentioned before, we are committed to radical transparency and this project is no exception. This project would be required to adhere to all aspects of building and environmental standards that any other project would have to adhere to in the City of Castle Hills, plus more given that the current project is a proposed partnership with the City of Castle Hills. The term for the project being proposed is a PFC, a public facility corporation. The project incorporates a tax abatement from the City for 75 years but in turn we end up getting reimbursed from the developer as laid out in the agreement. The amount we get reimbursed is about 25% of what the total tax bill would be for the project. In this case, the developer is expecting to make a \$65 million dollar investment which would have the total tax bill about \$1.2 million dollars. That City portion would be approximately \$300,000, annually. The property in its current condition adds \$7,859.99 to the City coffers each year.

The financial benefit to the City does come with a caveat; the property must have an "affordability" component to it. Now in my opinion and recent research, "affordable" is a very vague word and in this situation, this is no exception. In the affordability world, there are various ways to determine what is truly affordable. One of the basis's utilizes the AMI or Area Median Income. In San Antonio, the AMI is a \$74,100. From there, Cities, developers, and organizations can work to focus on a percentage of AMI. This particular project is proposing an AMI of 80% which puts us at about \$59,280. A person earning \$59,280 a year or ~\$29 per hour would be qualified as "low income." For perspective a Patrolman in the City of Castle Hills Police Department starts at off ~\$47,000 a year or ~\$23 per hour. The

developer has shared that there limitations as to how many people per unit and rental qualifications. In the City of San Antonio, they are working to target a lower AMI which in some cases can be down to 30% and this is often called "Extremely Low Income."

The windfall of money makes this seem like a good idea but this is uncharted territory for Castle Hills. As such, Council has held numerous meetings to ask questions and do our due diligence; and we aren't done yet. The Townhalls will surely net good comments, questions, and concerns that we will have to explore before we commit to anything. Part of the conversation about money should involve what we are going to do with it. Aside from our need for streets and drainage, Council should explore the ability to offer property tax relief. While it is too early to say if this will be a good fit for Castle Hills, seeing your City government at work, asking many questions to get as much information as it can before making decisions.

More Street Progress!

The last few reporters have included updates about the progress we have made on streets and drainage and this Reporter is no exception. In February, we had a bid opening for our 2021 Phase 2 Street Reconstruction Projects and the bids came in right were our City Engineers, Ardurra, had projected. Once they do their due diligence and determine which proposal they recommend, we should be breaking ground before Summer! The streets up for work this go around are **Wottlin** from Towne Vue to Antler, **Bluet** from Gladiola to Travertine, **Briarcliff** from Banyan to Lockhill Selma, and **Shalimar** from Bluet to Cotillion.

During our regularly scheduled February meeting we had our City Financial Advisor discuss the possibility of borrowing more money to do even more street improvements. As you might have expected, their recommendation was to do it sooner rather later. Given what the Federal Reserve has said and what we have seen in the market, the historically low interest rates are on the way out. That means that now is the time for us to explore funding additional projects. As mentioned in the last Reporter, we have made GREAT progress, but we still have more to go. I am confident that with this next round of reconstruction work we can address all streets that are classified in "Poor" condition in Castle Hills.

The progress that we have made at the City is in large part due to the bold leadership of City Council but it would not be possible were it not for the people that we have at the City of Castle Hills. While we are sourcing the best qualified bidders for these projects, it really takes the whole City staff to coordinate, administer, oversee, and get the work done. Thank you to the Castle Hills team for being the best. I look forward to warmer weather and seeing you all at our Official Fiesta event, Castle Hills Fiesta April 2nd, 2022!

JR Treviño, Mayor
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MESSAGE FROM THE CITY MANAGER

By Ryan D. Rapelye, City Manager

Last month, was my four-year anniversary as City Manager for the City of Castle Hills. I want to take the time to thank City Council past and present for providing me this opportunity. I would also like to thank our City staff, I am fortunate to do this job and work with our employees who serve this community. I appreciate all they do for organization on a daily basis, especially during the difficult times over the past few years. The City of Castle Hills has wonderful employees who work to assist our residents and with customer service being paramount.

Over the last four years, I am very pleased with the accomplishments of City Council and City staff, this has never been more apparent than the last two years due to the working relationship established between City Council, City Manager and City staff work who have worked collectively together in the best interests of the community. We have made tremendous strides in our infrastructure, overall city services and greatly improved the culture and working environment of the organization. We have been able to prioritize the needs of our First Responders, stabilize our sanitation services by ensuring we generate the necessary revenue to operate annually including the ability to put processes in place to protect our Public Work employees when conducting these services as well as introduction of a new compensation structure for the Public Works Department in the FY 2022 Adopted Budget.

As City Manager, I am in the process of revamping the City's organizational chart to ensure we have identified all functions including communication and roles/responsibilities within our organization. I continue to work with City Council on short and long-term goals for the City to address infrastructure and quality of life projects, and ensure we retain and attract the best employees for our organization. We have moved the organization in a positive direction, changed the culture, and improved the stability of the organization for City staff and the residents we serve.

As part of our efforts, we have identified areas which need to be addressed internally and externally for the organization.

Internally, we are working on what I think is a vital communication project and integral to our customer service process. Our current phone system is antiquated and has been in place for over fifteen

years. The current phone system does not provide adequate support when contacting City hall due to the structure and messaging capabilities. We are in the process of migrating to a phone system which will provide a number of new features. These news feature will include new telephone handsets, VoIP (voice over internet protocol) phone lines, a virtual "switchboard", better voicemail box capabilities including an email and smartphone notification feature when a voicemail is received, web interface to respond to voicemails, establishment of a new non-emergency phone number and utilizing the existing non-emergency phone number as a (new) auto-attended call-routing switchboard and an intra-department routing feature in addition to unlimited long distance calling.

In addition to our internal improvements, an assessment has been made of our aged Information Technology (IT) environment. Our consultant has developed a multi-year plan to address IT concerns. The solutions are prioritized, based on urgency of need and availability of funds. In this aspect, we are also modernizing our IT security posture. Addressing these needs and implementing required solutions will allow staff to optimize delivery of services to the public, ensures a safe and secure IT backbone and also create a solid base for future scalability.

We will continue to take the steps to improve our communication platform including the launch of a brand-new City website within the next two months, enhancement of our social media presence, and working to raise the bar on overall information dissemination as it relates to the city. This translates to being more transparent thus keeping our community informed regarding emergency situations, events, projects, and City related services. As part of the new website, we are looking at incorporating the capability to do online permitting services, we hope to have this implemented soon after we launch the new website.

Externally, we continue to address and prioritize our infrastructure needs related to streets and drainage following the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). City Council has started the process to issue the next round of Certificates of Obligations (CO)s to tackle the remaining streets which require full-depth/reconstruction. We will plan to take the steps necessary to implement aspects of the Commons Master Plan which has identified a number of amenities related to quality-of-life issues. The amenities proposed include adding a playscape, shade structure and a small splash pad. We are in the process of identifying potential ways to improve City Hall to make it more efficient and functional for how we conduct business and activities within this facility. Developing potential long-term plans to address the needs of City Hall and identify funding down the road to ensure the vitality of this building.

As I have mentioned in previous articles, this is a team effort, City Council, City Manager and City staff working collectively to put the needs of our residents and this community first on how we operate City services and plan accordingly for the future. As we approach budget season, we will look at how this City can position itself to retain and attract employees for the City of Castle Hills. This will be done by reviewing our city's compensation and retirement program to ensure we are competitive among surrounding cities especially as it relates to our employees

Please contact me at rrapelye@castlehills-tx.gov or at the office at 210.293.9673 if you have any questions on projects or need assistance with services from the City of Castle Hills.

"The statements and facts contained in newsletter articles from the Mayor and City Council Members are their own personal views and should not be considered official city sponsored statements or facts and should not be relied upon as such."

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COUNCIL COMMENTS



JOE IZBRAND

PLACE 1
Mayor Pro-Tem

Dear Neighbors,

It has been a privilege to represent you in Place 1 on the Castle Hills City Council for the past two-plus years and to serve as Mayor Pro Tem during this time. With the timeframe for filing as a candidate in the upcoming May city election concluded and the Place 1 race uncontested, I am honored to have the opportunity to continue serving as your voice on the city council.

When I first ran for council, I committed to work tirelessly to protect property values, preserve our neighborhoods, support responsible growth, and foster greater communication with the community.

Because of your support, we have been able to accomplish a great deal in the past two years. This includes consistently producing balanced budgets and putting new fiscal policies in place to ensure the city's financial well-being; launching an aggressive street maintenance and improvement program that is making significant headway in addressing long-neglected infrastructure issues; securing additional

funding through the issuance of certificates of obligation at the lowest of interest rates to further accelerate the road work; and establishing a telephone, text and email communications system to keep our community informed in the event of an emergency.

I am also proud to have led efforts to bring home vaccinations to our elderly residents during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, implement a ban on any future digital billboards along our highways, and put more stop signs and speed limit signs in place to make our neighborhoods safer.

And when it comes to the safety of our community, I actively supported creating the position of a traffic control police officer to address speeders in our neighborhoods and on our major roadways, and championed certification pay for our firefighters who pursue additional training and skills so they can be more responsive to emergencies.

Now, looking ahead, one priority will be to ensure we have the resources in place to recruit and retain the highest caliber of police officers and, once they have completed their years of public service, provide them with a strong retirement program.

We should raise our financial support to their retirement program from 1.5 times their annual contribution to two times their contribution. The preponderance of area municipalities already offer this incentive and, if we don't become competitive, we will risk losing our officers to other departments and find it very difficult to recruit new officers.

These are the men and women who put their lives on the line for us every day. They deserve to be recognized for their bravery and rewarded for their vigilance with the knowledge that "we have their backs."

While increasing the contribution will likewise increase our city budget, failing to do so will have an even more detrimental impact on our safety.

(Continued on page 6)

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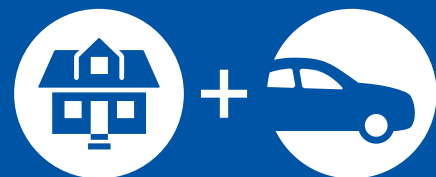
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(Continued from page 5)

Shortly after the new city council is sworn-in following the May election, we will begin budget planning for 2023. I intend to actively advocate for this increase and look forward to working with my council colleagues to find the fiscally responsible way of paying for this proposal.

Please join me in recognizing the significant contributions each and every city employee makes to our community. We are fortunate to have outstanding individuals working on our behalf in administration, courts, fire, police, and public works.

They are a significant part of what makes Castle Hills a great place to live, and we all appreciate their hard work and dedication.

As always, your thoughts on this and any other city matters are welcomed. Please join me at www.facebook.com/izbrandplace1.



KURT MAY
PLACE 3

At the time of this publication, the City Council will have conducted two Special Council meetings for the purpose of conducting a question/answer workshop for citizens. These workshops were designed for citizens to ask questions directly to developers of a potential private investment apartment complex that is being considered by the City Council. Now the direction of this consideration shifts to how the Council responds to the proposal, addressing suggestions or questions of citizens, and weighing the long-term benefits and impacts to the City of Castle Hills.

All members of the Council are interested in hearing from citizens. What is most helpful in our consideration is hearing from citizens who are informed as to the particulars of the proposal, and what specific reasons for a citizen's opinions either in support or in opposition. I can be reached by email listed below, or by phone.

Some of the known factors regarding this proposal are as follows:

- Castle Hills has scarce availability for future increases in available residential housing.
- This proposal provides for participation and oversight of the

maintenance and standards of the building by the City Council during the period of any tax abatement.

- The tax abatement for this residential proposal will be counter-balanced by guaranteed financial benefits to the City that roughly equal any taxes that would have been received on a commercial development.
- The site location for the proposed upscale loft apartments is the outer northwest boundary of Castle Hills, within less than a one-mile radius of numerous existing apartment complexes in San Antonio.
- These proposed loft apartment units are not subsidized housing.
- This is a private capital development project that requires no financial contribution by the City.

In addition to reviewing this business proposal, the Castle Hills Business Association continues its work to benefit and expand the number of businesses within our city limits. Our meetings and mixers have established an abiding commitment that the city leaders will work together with business owners for economic development and maintaining our desirable residential neighborhoods. Our message is simple: Castle Hills is a welcoming business friendly environment that values our unique residential neighborhoods. If you would like to be part of the Castle Hills Business Association, we would encourage you to step forward and take on a supportive or leadership role. It will be my privilege to continue work with Councilman Jack Joyce to further develop the Castle Hills Business Association.

As always, I look forward to hearing from you.



JACK JOYCE
PLACE 4

Friends and Neighbors,

It is time to reflect on my first two years of council service to our City. It has been extremely rewarding to represent your interests as a member of city council. Perhaps the most rewarding is to be part of a council that works together with a sense of collaboration and cooperation, which enables us to be very productive. During the last two years we approved approximately \$3 million of street repair and \$3 million of drainage improvements, while approving \$8.3 million in certificates of obligation for more street and drainage improvement in the coming years. There are still needs in this area; but I am confident that we will continue to work together to make substantial progress to meet those needs.

Also very rewarding is working with the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee and the many citizens who participated in the comprehensive planning process. Looking over the various phases of the effort, we had roughly 240 surveys returned, approximately 200 participate in the speakers' forums (Zoom), and about 75 at the live (and Zoom) community workshops. It was great to hear from so many who really care about our City, and who really want to see Castle Hills thrive and be even more beautiful and livable than we are today.

(Continued on page 7)



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Similarly it has been great to work with the leadership team of the Castle Hills Business Association, especially Councilman May who has been a great help from day one. It has been my pleasure to lead that group and help make Castle Hills businesses be more successful and better connect to our various citizen organizations. We look forward to further growth and continuing as a valuable asset for our businesses.

Going forward, I would like to focus on:

- Driving sensible economic development to encourage more investment in our community.
- Incorporating comprehensive plan recommendations into the Capital Improvement Plan.
- Updating the Zoning and Tree ordinances to keep them in touch with current needs and industry standards.
- Continuing improvement to streets and drainage.
- Engaging the non-taxable entities to explore ways to help one another.

With respect to the proposed apartment project, there are a number of potential advantages, such as increased population which could spur further investment in the City; but I will not support it until the following questions are answered to my satisfaction:

- In return for the tax abatement, the developer promises to pay the City at least as much in various payments over the life of the project. What assurances do we have that these will be paid and what happens to these payments in an economic downturn? Can a future tenant negotiate his way out of these payments?
- Is there an "out" clause where the City can withdraw from the project if it does not pan out as promised?
- Would the 400 or so new residents impact the response time of our police and fire departments?
- Can the City afford to add yet another non-taxable property to its tax rolls?
- How does the average Castle Hills taxpayer benefit from this project?
- Would an analysis of opportunity cost suggest that the City would actually lose money over the 75-year tax abatement period?
- Could future litigation seriously threaten our finances?

Please feel free to contact me with any thoughts and ideas you may have.

Jack Joyce
jjoyce@castlehills-tx.gov
 210-827-7222



**DOUGLAS
GREGORY**
 PLACE 5, TREASURER

Your City Council continues to wrestle with a proposal by a developer as to whether or not to build a four-story apartment building in Castle Hills. Recently, two interesting assumptions have been shared by the developer:

1. In order to value the potential property tax loss to the City over 75 years, the developer assumes that property values will grow only 1% per year.
2. Banks will not loan the developer money unless Castle Hills forgoes collecting property tax on this apartment building for 75 years.

First, a 1% growth valuation produces a low-ball figure of around \$43 million in savings to the developer and a consequential loss to taxpayers. If a conservative 3% figure is used (has your house grown at least 15% in the last 5 years?), the estimated tax loss balloons to \$130 million... a huge hole to dig out from.

Second, the Council was told that banks would not loan the developer money if the 75-year tax exemption was reduced. Only when Castle Hills taxpayers' backstop this \$130 million burden for the next 75 years, might banks consider this investment. Why should we take this risk?

(Continued on page 8)

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(Continued from page 7)

Castle Hills is at a crossroads. Either the taxpayer backstops a development aimed at creating “workforce housing” with a 75-year pass on paying property taxes or we continue the significant improvements seen throughout the City that are now underway for our long-term benefit, with little or no downside risk or tax loss.

I will say you have to give the developer credit for daring. If a developer came to Castle Hills and proposed a four-story apartment complex in which at least half of the renters were of low-income (“workforce”), there would be a city-wide uproar. However, now comes a developer saying the above but also requires a \$130 million property tax exemption for 75 years. At the same time, the developer promises to return some of our lost property tax income (our own money when received) through a cut in the profits of any future sale of the building and a cut in the rental income of the building, consequently having the effect of making the City a low-income landlord. This is the rebranding of Castle Hills, what we will be known for. All to be “Progressive”. Astonishing.



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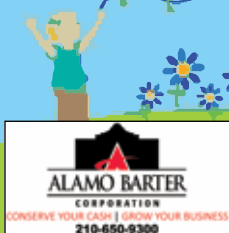
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Spring is nearing and we hope that 2022 has gotten off to a great start for each of you! It is our goal to provide citizens, businesses, and visitors the highest quality of service. As such, we place a premium on effective community partnerships and continually evaluate these partnerships. In doing so, we have come to recognize that many residents are still hesitant to contact us upon observing something suspicious. A common sentiment being “we did not want to bother you all”, or “we know you are too busy.” Although true, we are busy, we do not want anyone to feel as though this a good reason for not reporting something. Our officers embrace these calls and welcome the opportunity to serve our community.

It is no secret that residents are more familiar with their respective areas within our community and maintain a vested interest in the safety and wellbeing of those areas. This attribute alone allows for our residents to be the first to recognize when something is amiss. You all are the eyes and ears when we are not present and a key component in facilitating police awareness. As such, it has never been more important, encouraged, and easy for residents to report suspicious activity.

A simple phone call here greatly compliments our efforts in this arena. Through timely and accurate reporting, we increase the likelihood for police action whether it be a field contact, deterred criminal activity, or an arrest. Please do not report suspicious activity by use of the online form “Suspicious Circumstances NON-Emergency” or by calling your Council member, City Manager or Mayor as these only delays response. Help us help you.....make the call!

Thank you and stay safe.

Dispatch Non-Emergency Line: (210) 342-2341

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Castle Hills Fire Department

By Chief Jim Ladewig

TREE GROWTH

During the next couple of months, you may be noticing green ribbon tied to tree branches hanging over the roadway. The firefighters will be out canvassing the city and marking tree limbs that hang low enough to impede the passage of fire apparatus responding to an emergency incident. Our Platform 109 is a 100ft aerial apparatus that would be needed at a structure fire or rescue situation. The Platform is 13ft 6 inches high from the street to top edge of the bucket. It is very important that this apparatus be able to respond to all the homes within our city and to do so without causing costly damage to the apparatus. A clearance of at least 14ft high with a width of 8 ft is needed down the center of the street to guarantee this apparatus accessibility to all of our residents. Maintaining these clearances will also ensure any mutual aid fire department apparatus responding to assist our department, will be able to make it to the location.

Besides allowing access for apparatus to our residents, keeping these trees trimmed will help prevent the spread of oak wilt or oak decline to the trees. There are times that a large moving or delivery truck will travel down our streets leaving behind broken branches laying in the roadway. Mostly these limbs are small and of little effect to the health of the oak trees. But at times these limbs are quite large and leave a large open wound to the tree, allowing the tree to be susceptible to oak decline. Since most of these occurrences go unnoticed and unreported, the damage to the tree does not get treated to prevent infection. Keeping the trees trimmed back to these standards will help reduce these incidents.

The firefighters will be out identifying and marking the trees that do not meet these standards. Starting in June, approx. 30 days before tree trimming is allowed to begin, notices will be placed on the doors of the residents where trees have been identified needing to be trimmed. Instructions will be listed on the notice on the standards that the trees need to be trimmed to and the time frame in which the trimming needs to be completed. There will also be contact numbers on the notice if you have any questions or need any additional information. Thank you for your cooperation and everyone have a great Spring.



SPRING



Word Search

Search for the twelve Spring themed words below.

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Get Your Garden Ready for Spring Planting

By Sharon Reynolds, Neighborhood News Staff Writer

Beautiful Spring days are forthcoming, so it's time to get outside and get your garden ready. I don't know about you, but I love to spend time outside and spring provides the perfect backdrop to ease my stress while bonding with nature. Follow these tips to make sure your garden is ready for spring planting.

First things First - Prepping Your Tools

Since it's still too early to plant delicate seedlings, now is a great time to get those garden tools ready.

- **Gas-powered Equipment** – time to change the oil and spark plugs to ensure your tools are ready when you are.
- **Pruning Equipment** – if any of your pruning tools have rust on them, use steel wool to remove it. If you are so inclined you can also sharpen your tools with a sharpening stone and add a light layer of oil to prevent future rust.
- **Digging Tools** – break any handles lately? If your shovel or other digging tools have a broken handle, consider replacing the handle instead of buying a whole new tool. Be sure to wash off any old dirt or debris from your tools and rust-proof them by spraying a light layer of oil on them.

Getting Your Garden Ready for Planting

- **Pull Weeds** – during the winter, all sorts of different weed varieties pop up in our gardens. Now is the perfect time to pull them out since the ground is still soft from the winter season. It's important to get them out before they go to seed. Once they go to seed, any gust of wind will blow the seeds all over your yard and create a plethora of weed families throughout your lawn.

- **Remove Dead Plants** – pull out any plants that have died over the winter season. If your garden includes ornamental grasses, those should be cut down to about 4 inches high.
- **Removing Leaves** – Remove leaves from flower beds and lawn to ensure plants and grass get the necessary sunlight to thrive.

These are just a few tips to get your garden ready for spring planting. With beautiful weather ahead, enjoy your time outside as the renewal of plant life begins.

Resources:

- *Michigan State University. Weed Seed Banks.* https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/weed_seedbank_dynamics_e2717
- *Modern Farmer. Get your garden ready for spring checklist.* <https://modernfarmer.com/2018/09/get-your-garden-ready-for-spring-a-checklist/>

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