

# 2020 Evaluation of FPCP Landscaping Building and Grounds Committee September 2020

\* Updated January 2022

In 2019, the Building and Grounds Committee asked the Worship Committee and Session for a moratorium on planting any new trees until an assessment could determine if, or where, any space for tree planting was available. A report was published in 2020 but was revised in 2022 to reflect the impact of the Plymouth Tree Ordinance No. 2020-1 Chapter 34 Sec.34.1

The preliminary assessment results were not promising. We enlisted the help of Garrett Brun, an arborist who works for Expert Tree Service, Jeremy Christianson of Michigan Landscape Design who is a well-known and highly regarded local landscape designer.

- In 2019 the assessment concluded that there is no space available to plant additional trees and many of our trees (particularly the crabapple trees) were in distress and appeared to be dying.
- The remaining green space needs to be preserved for church related activities such as picnics and outdoor VBS activities (Attachment II).

Some of the FPCP larger trees are suffering from tree root girdling. The roots of the tree are growing over the top of other roots and choking the tree to death; essential nutrients are not able to reach upper branches and the branches die and become a hazard. Besides exposed tree roots crossing each other and visibly dead branches, another indication of root girdling is a flat surface on the tree trunk. These trees could last another 10-15 years but will need to be removed sooner if they become a hazard or eyesore.

- Over the years, some of the trees planted were not suitable for our area and died while others were too close to the building and other structures such as the shed and parking lot retaining walls.
- The arborist identified that our five remaining crabapple trees (originally six but one was damaged by a vehicle while parking) were suffering from an airborne fungus. One of the trees was dead and removed in 2019. Another tree died in early 2020 and was removed. That left three of the original six trees.
  - In 2020 the City of Plymouth agreed with our plan to remove the dying crabapple trees and replacing them with the serviceberry trees.
- An effort was made to save the remaining trees by spraying them at a cost of \$1500 annually, however, replacement species of that tree are no longer available and Building and Grounds concluded that the best choice was to remove the remaining trees and replace the trees with a tree that met our established criteria.
- During the survey of our west lot line (backing up to Harvey Street) we found that the area was overgrown with untended vegetation and large trees growing close to our elevated, rock retaining wall that supports our parking lot.

Since February of 2020, our B&G subcommittee and landscape designer have researched tree options to consider as replacements for the crabapple trees and the serviceberry tree was chosen. Our requirements for replacement trees were:

- Find a disease and insect-resistant low maintenance tree that is not “dirty” and does not shed fruit or debris that creates a slip hazard that must be removed from the sidewalk.
- The tree must meet the new City of Plymouth tree planting criteria
- The cost will be as minimal as possible since there is no dedicated budget and Building and Grounds volunteers will be doing the tree cutting and stump removal. The only cost is for the replacement of the crabapple trees and partial funding was provided by the Deacons in 2019 and again in 2020; cost savings from not spraying the crabapple trees also helped to offset the replacement cost of those trees

- Find a decorative tree that will not grow exceedingly large and threaten the structural integrity of the Church Street rock retaining wall
- Aesthetically pleasing branch structure in the winter and decorative seasonal colors

### **Other Concerns Discovered During Our Assessment**

The north and west parking lot walls are elevated and supported by walls which are not only decorative but serve a more important function as the primary support as the retaining wall. In June of 2020, the landscaping committee became aware that many undesirable scrub trees are growing along the edge of both sides of the wall; these trees pose a serious threat to the stability and structural integrity of the wall that supports our elevated parking lot. Approximately eighty feet of the northwest retaining wall is tiered; the lower retaining wall belongs to the owners of Kent Air Products who are the current owners living on Harvey Street.

Michigan Landscape Design (MLD), our professional landscaping consultant, has recommended removal of most of the trees along the west lot line wall to prevent further tree root damage as well as those lower trees whose trunks are building more pressure on the wall. MLD has suggested that the area can be mulch or re-populate that area with shrubs such as arborvitae, hydrangea, or lilac.

In September of 2020, the Building and Grounds Wednesday team began removing trees and brush along the west lot line that could be done safely. MLD has recommended that the trees be cut flush with the ground and do not grind the stumps to prevent damaging the wall. MLD has proposed replacing the trees with shrubs and gardens.

**Updated information.** In 2020 Building and Grounds members met with City of Plymouth Department of Municipal Services employees Greta Bolhuis and Adam Gerlach. Greta and Adam conducted a full survey and assessment of our trees. Of the thirty-six trees growing on FPCP property in 2020 only five trees were designated as heritage trees; the other trees were considered scrub trees and undesirable.

- The new ordinance has established specific areas where the City has input regarding the trees that can be planted; one such area is the easement between the sidewalk and the street. The City has also expanded its authority by including "Front Yards". *Front yard tree* means any tree located in the open space extending the full width of the lot, the depth of which is the minimum horizontal distance between the front lot line and the nearest point of the foundation of the main building (Attachment I). Because FPCP is located on a curved roadway, all of our property along Church Street is considered Front Yard and any trees planted or growing in this area is now covered by the city ordinance.
- Heritage Tree is any tree that meets the size and species requirements in the table provided by the City of Plymouth, or any tree not listed in the table that is eighteen inches Diameter Breast Height (DBH) or greater. *Diameter breast height (DBH)* means the diameter, in inches, of a tree measured at four and one-half feet above the existing grade
- Trees that are protected are six" DBH and greater in a front yard, and eighteen" DBH and greater anywhere on the property. The removal of a healthy living protected tree requires replacement, replacement can be accomplished through planting or payment into the tree fund.

The replacement ratio in the ordinance is 25%. The removal of a 6" DBH tree would require 1.5" DBH of replacement tree. The replacement trees can be any combination of sizes that add up to the replacement value. In addition, a combination of planting and payment into the tree fund to meet the replacement requirement is also allowed.

- Heritage trees require a permit from the City of Plymouth for removal and must be replaced or the landowner has the option to pay into the tree fund. The cost is \$150 per inch DBH (diameter breast height as measured 4.5 feet above grade). Conifer and multi stemmed trees such as our serviceberry trees planted in October of 2020 are typically measured by total height versus DBH. Replacement of these trees would be determined by using the American Standard for Nursery Stock with the concurrence of the City of Plymouth.

### **Conclusion**

The evaluation of our landscaping was initially focused on the question of identifying areas where additional trees could possibly be planted and what type of tree would be appropriate and flourish in that area. The Plymouth Tree Ordinance complicates matters further as most areas considered for tree planting fall into the area designated by the City as Front Yard and, at minimum, the City should be consulted regarding the planting of any trees in that area. Our recommendation is that no new trees should be planted anywhere on the grounds in the future unless there is an extensive review by FPCP and approval by the City of Plymouth. As we continued our analysis, it was only natural that our attention also began to focus on all aspects of the overall appearance of how our building architecture and the grounds landscaping complement each other as well as blend in with our surrounding community. The comprehensive evaluation included the health and appearance of trees, shrubs, gardens, sight lines, building structure and the appearance of FPCP at night. Our classic building architecture is virtually invisible at night. Building and Grounds has purchased and is seeking a contractor who will install the creative lighting options that, when illuminated, will accent the exterior architecture of our church, highlight our presence in the community, and complement our surrounding neighborhood.

Building and Grounds Landscaping Committee members:

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# ATTACHMENT I

The Area Between The Dotted Lines Is Designated By The City of Plymouth As Front Yard



