

It's 'Tree Time'

Winchester Program Promotes Tree Health Around Power Lines

by Preston Knight, SVEC Writer

Winchester City Arborist Jennifer Jenkins and Scott Sorrels, Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative's vegetation management supervisor, spent a November morning knocking on select doors to promote a new program and hit the jackpot on their last stop.

"It must be tree time," the resident said as he answered, adding that he was expecting a visit after reading about the initiative in the *Winchester Star*.

Yes, Winchester, it is "tree time," and the beauty of residential neighborhoods and reliability of their electric service stand to improve.

The Right-Tree-Right-Place tree canopy program represents a partnership among the city, cooperative and Reading Landscapes to remove overly mature, declining trees that threaten power lines and replace them with more appropriate, lower-growing options. The program is voluntary for residents who have trees in the city-owned public right-of-way that have been selected for the program.

Historically, to ensure that these taller trees do not interfere with power lines, they must be cut in such a way that leaves a less-than-desirable look, sometimes similar to a U-shape that's akin to goal posts on a football field. This is unhealthy for the tree, but necessary so electric service is not affected.

These trees are extremely difficult to prune as access to the top-most limbs is restricted. When combined with ground-pruning efforts to maintain clearance for vehicles, tree canopies become misshapen and often hang heavily over residences and buildings.

Right-Tree-Right-Place is a solution that's the best of both worlds.

"We want trees to be able to live healthy lives and, frankly, act like trees, but the fact is when they are planted in a restricted space under power lines, they are forced to grow unnaturally," Sorrels said. "Trees growing into power lines is a huge problem that can easily be avoided by planting the right type of low-growing species underneath them.



Winchester City Arborist Jennifer Jenkins and Scott Sorrels, SVEC's vegetation management supervisor, went door-to-door in November to promote the new Right-Tree-Right-Place program. Below: These "U-shape" cuts are a result of the wrong tree planted underneath power lines. By planting a lower-growing species of tree, power lines are not threatened and Winchester's tree canopy will have an improved look.

We're excited that the city recognizes the importance of this, and the response from residents has been very positive so far."

How It Works

After identifying and assessing trees that present conflicts with electric lines, representatives from the cooperative and/or Jenkins, on behalf of the city, will meet with homeowners to discuss options for tree replacement. The cooperative's contractor will remove the targeted trees and the city will collect the fallen branches. Reading Landscapes, which is based in Winchester, will then replant the appropriate tree in the best location.

It's important to note that there is no guarantee of replanting if underground utilities are found during the removal process.

"The benefit for city residents is sustainable tree canopy," Jenkins said. "There are many areas in the city of Winchester that are suffering from rapid tree decline due to several compounding issues that include improper tree selection, even aged tree canopies of single species, harsh growing environments and past pruning efforts aimed at maintaining required utility-line clearance. As a result, a number of our streets contain a declining tree canopy. Trees are no longer vigorous and most have large deadwood in their canopies."

By replacing trees with more appropriate ones, the need for line-clearance pruning in the future is eliminated.

"Long-term this results in a healthy, safe and sustainable tree canopy," Jenkins said.

Sorrels and Tom McCampbell, the cooperative's vegetation management coordinator for the Winchester District, approached the city in the spring with the idea of the program. There are currently 35 tree removals on Winchester's list.

Through the program, the city is also able to replant trees in select spaces where they were removed previously, while the cooperative is making contact about replanting trees with a handful of Frederick County residents just outside Winchester limits.

"There are so many benefits to residents and our member-owners," Sorrels said. "This program will have a lasting impact."

For more information, please visit svec.coop.



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