

City of Austin To Trim or Remove Neighborhood Trees

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Austin Energy is in the process of pruning and removing trees from near the electric lines in our neighborhood. They maintain the lines to ensure customers' safety and to maintain reliable electric service. At the same time, trees are very beneficial to our quality of life, health and property values, so they should be trimmed with great care. You have rights in this process and so do your large trees.

This information has been prepared for members of the North Shoal Creek Neighborhood Association so that they may understand the tree maintenance process and what they may do to ensure minimal harm to the trees on their property.

Austin Energy's current clearance requirement is 4 feet for slower growing trees and 8 feet for faster growing trees. They are currently on a 4- to 5-year cutting cycle. Pending the results of a tree regrowth rate study, Austin Energy may need to return to a property to obtain more clearance.

Before Austin Energy actually performs any work on the trees, they will attempt to contact each property owner who has trees that could be affected by the work. Austin Energy scheduled this notification to start May 18. Austin Energy contract notifiers and staff will work with each property owner to attempt to reach an agreement on the work to be performed on the property.

Austin Energy Notification Process

1. Contract notifiers evaluate each property to determine the proposed work.
2. If the property owner is not home during the evaluation, the notifiers will leave a door hanger at the residence that explains details of the proposed work, unless there is no house or structure.
3. The notifiers will attempt to contact property owners by telephone to discuss the proposed work.
4. If the property owner still cannot be contacted, Austin Energy will send a certified letter containing a copy of the proposed work to be done.

Your Rights

During this process, each property owner can request the following actions from Austin Energy and its contract personnel:

- An onsite meeting with a contractor representative to review the proposed tree work
- An onsite meeting with an Austin Energy employee to discuss the proposed tree work
- A third party to be present during the meetings
- Modifications to the proposed tree work
- No removal of trees from your property
- That you be present when the tree work is performed
- A written work plan (Vegetation Work Plan, VWP) documenting the final plan for your property
- Pricing on potential electric system modification to minimize or reduce tree work
- Possible tree replacements for your individual property and for the neighborhood. **Note:** Larger trees provide more benefits and monetary value to your property than a small replacement seedling or sapling tree.

Austin Energy is available to answer any of your questions or concerns about the proposed tree work. If you or any of your neighbors have any questions or concerns, contact Craig Stoughton at 505-7546 or Ray Henning at 322-6930.

Note: Trees measuring over 19 inches in diameter are protected by the City of Austin and you must obtain individual permits before removal. You can check out the City's policies on the web at:

http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/trees/preserve_code.htm

Austin Energy spends about \$10 million annually on tree trimming and removal. The city is currently under a \$60 million and a concurrent \$15 million 5-year contract for tree cutting. The previous 5-year contract was for \$40 million. A 2007 city audit concluded that Austin Energy's measurements do not show that this program decreases power outages. The audit noted that other factors such as animals, weather and unknown causes affect power reliability independent of the cutting program.

Austin Energy has studied the cost effectiveness of alternative ways to keep power lines and trees apart. They have studied putting power lines underground and on taller poles.

How Trees Benefit Our Neighborhood

You have the right to stand up for and protect your trees. This is a wonderful thing to do as our neighborhood's urban forest adds to the charm and improves our neighborhood and quality of life. The City of Austin recognizes the importance of trees through its Environmental Board and Urban Forestry Board.

Trees are beneficial in the following ways:

- Help create relaxing and peaceful neighborhoods.
- Increase property values.
- Reduce energy consumption by providing shade to cool buildings, thereby reducing the chances for electrical brownouts and blackouts.
- Help offset the urban heat island effect. Urban neighborhoods with mature trees can be up to 11 degrees cooler than neighborhoods without trees [San Francisco Tree Council].
- Provide a buffer between neighborhoods and commercial areas.
- Reduce the pollutant load in a city's air. Large trees remove 60-70 times more pollution than small trees [San Francisco Tree Council].
- Reduce the unhealthy effects of ground-level ozone.
- Provide a barrier to urban noise such as traffic.
- Provide a barrier to wind.