

February 13, 2006

Downers Grove Village Council
801 Burlington
Downers Grove, IL 60515

Honorable Council Members:

I am the Community Trees Advocate for The Morton Arboretum. My role is to share the knowledge and resources of the Arboretum to assist communities in planting, preserving and caring for trees. In the 3 years since the inception of this position, I have worked with more than 80 communities and have a broad perspective of the urban forest and its management. I also served on Mayor Richard M. Daley's staff at the beginning of his administration to establish Chicago's greening program. I am an arborist certified by the International Society of Arboriculture for the past 18 years.

I have visited the site of the proposed Nelson Meadow subdivision, evaluated the remaining trees and reviewed the plans for development. I am aware that many mature trees were removed prior to plan approval by the Village. These trees would have provided a significant buffer to soften the impact of this proposed large-scale development.

The existing neighborhood has wide lawns, mature trees, and an open feel that is becoming rare in suburban neighborhoods. The landscapes reflect residents' great pride in their properties. They have clearly expressed the great value they place on the mature trees. Extra efforts should be made to preserve the remaining buffer trees on the west, east and south borders of the property to protect the character of the neighborhood.

The trees along the walking path on the east are threatened by the construction of a water main and culvert. This grove contains some large, healthy trees, as well as some in decline and some that are dead. Dead, declining, and unsound trees, and trees with poor form should be removed. There is only one tree assessed to be in "poor" condition according to the developer's survey. I noted three additional trees not included in the survey - one black walnut in fair condition and 2 black cherries in poor condition.

However, there are at least 12 healthy trees with trunk diameters (dbh- diameter breast high) of 18" or greater. It would take decades for any young replacement trees to achieve this size. Other trees of smaller diameter are also in good shape and worth saving.

Most of these trees are black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) a strong, adaptable, native tree. Though some arborists do not favor this tree, it has many desirable features. Besides its great adaptability to difficult growing conditions, the wood is extremely durable; it bears attractive, fragrant flowers in early summer. The Manual of Woody Landscape Plants (*Michael Dirr, 1998*) states, "The Europeans have grown, appreciated and selected superior forms of this tree while Americans treated it as some pedestrian weed. In truth, it often makes, in the best forms, a handsome tree." Beaver Creek nursery has introduced a local, superior selection of the black locust, called 'Chicago Blues.'

If the street and underground infrastructure can be built outside of the *critical root zone*, these trees will survive and function in the landscape until newly planted trees can become well established. *The International Society of Arboriculture defines the critical root zone as the area in which the loss, disturbance, or damage to any roots will adversely affect the tree's long-term health and structural stability.* This zone around the tree is estimated to be a circle with a radius equivalent to 1 foot for every inch of trunk diameter. Therefore, an 18" dbh tree would require a zone of protection extending 18 feet in all directions from the trunk.

Two silver maples on the east border of the property are the only street trees along that 330-foot stretch of parkway. The plans indicate that construction of the proposed retention pond will encroach the critical root zone of these trees. As nearby grade changes and added soil moisture will likely have an adverse impact on the trees, protecting the critical root zone becomes even more important.

Along the south border of the property is a row of mature black walnuts. These trees are in good condition and 6 of them are 18" in diameter or greater. Walnut trees are long-lived, have strong wood, but are sensitive to disturbance. Great care must be taken to avoid any digging, filling, or otherwise disturbing the critical root zone - in this case *a circle extending at least 18 feet in all directions from the trunk.* Construction of the detention pond, as proposed, will most likely disturb the critical root zone.

Trees that are to be planted to replace those lost along the south border of the property, and trees to be planted as the new landscaping for the development will not become effective in the landscape for many years. Carefully preserving the mature trees will preserve the environmental and aesthetic functions of the trees for the benefit of the neighbors and new residents of the Nelson Meadow development.

I would gladly assist the village and the developer in drafting plans and implementing tree protections measures, if that is desired. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of our Downers Grove members and concerned neighbors.

Sincerely,



Edith Makra
Community Trees Advocate