

KRISTEN L. ATHA
Director

THE CITY OF
COLUMBUS
ANDREW J. GINTHER, MAYOR

DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC UTILITIES

April 27, 2023

Dear Neighbor:

As many reservoir residents are aware, the City of Columbus, Division of Water has been implementing the updated standards associated with the revised Land Stewardship Program. In the last year the Watershed Management staff provided on-site assistance and guidance on a variety of dock designs, new and updated access agreements, and stewardship issues of varying complexity. However, the City has also had the unfortunate challenge of enforcing the consequences of inadvertent property damage. Tree removal and other unpermitted maintenance of city-owned property continues to be an issue, which is both costly and unpleasant for all involved.

The City's land stewardship program emphasizes the protection of native trees and shrubs, and any unauthorized trimming or removal is prohibited by the terms of the land stewardship agreement and Columbus City Code. Trees of all size play an important role in shoreline health, erosion protection, and contribute to reservoir water quality. The City's reservoirs provide drinking water supplies for 1.4 million people in central Ohio. Trees which are damaged or removed are assessed on a per-inch basis, with some unauthorized removals costing thousands of dollars. The City's past damage assessment rate of \$100 per inch is being updated to align with Columbus' tree canopy preservation goals. The new assessment rate, while still under review, is expected to increase substantially.

Please be aware that beyond the monetary damages, restitution for tree damage requires replanting and will render the neighboring property ineligible for participation in the land stewardship program. Extensive restoration projects may require the city to reseed an area, install straw wattle, and may necessitate the installation of a temporary fence to ensure the area recovers. Unauthorized maintenance of City property may result in a loss of a permitted dock or other access granted through the stewardship program, and jeopardize program eligibility for current and future owners of the associated contiguous property.

The best advice the City continues to give to anyone considering landscape maintenance or projects in the vicinity of the property line is to perform a licensed survey to accurately determine property lines. The City has placed green property markers to provide a visual guide; however, on occasion markers are missing or may have been moved, so a professional survey by a licensed surveyor would be advisable ahead of any maintenance. Watershed Management's Land Stewardship staff are very willing to answer questions and assist neighbors in an effort to avoid costly mistakes and harm to City property. Please take a moment to review the enclosed list of common questions and answers relevant to city trees and property line determinations. For all additional questions, please contact our staff via email landstewardship@columbus.gov, phone 614-645-1721, or reference our web site at <https://landstewardshipcolumbus.com>.

Sincerely,



John G. Newsome, Administrator
Columbus Division of Water



FAQs on Property Line Determinations and Tree Issues

Reservoir neighbors often have questions about trees and city property. Please see answers below to common questions. Residents may also call the city's Watershed Management office for clarification or to discuss unique property concerns. Helping neighbors avoid inadvertent damage is in everyone's best interest, so if in doubt or in need of assistance, please call 614-645-1721 or email landstewardship@columbus.gov.

How can I determine the location of the city property line?

Property lines can be determined and field marked by a licensed professional surveyor. Before any project that involves erecting a structure, removing vegetation or other potential impact to city property, it is advisable to avoid mistakes by performing a survey to delineate the property boundary.

Can I just estimate the location of the property line using the county auditor's online maps?

County GIS maps posted online can be helpful guides but may contain erroneous information. If you do not have a previous survey that located property lines and wish to perform work near a property boundary, the online GIS maps may not be accurate enough to avoid errors.

There are green markers that say "City of Columbus Property" - do these mark the property line?

The City of Columbus performed a property boundary survey at all reservoirs and installed green markers to assist neighbors in recognizing the existence of city-owned property. However, the green markers are not survey points and occasionally these markers are damaged or moved without the city's knowledge. Please use them only as a guide; they may not be 100% accurate.

I inadvertently removed some trees and brush from city property – now what?

Upon discovering cut trees or unauthorized vegetation removal, city staff will assess the damage, inventory the number of trees/bushes removed, and note their size and species. Property owners will then receive a notice and a damage assessment. In the past, any tree 0.5" and larger has been assessed at a value of \$100 per inch; however, the city is reevaluating this cost and expects the valuation to increase significantly to align the loss with the true costs of the damage and replacement. In addition to the financial consequences of tree removal, the associated property/landowner will also be subject to a cancellation of their Land Stewardship License Agreement and Dock Permit. Stewardship program and dock eligibility will be suspended for one year or longer, corresponding to the severity of damage. Removal of trees and brush can contribute to shoreline erosion, therefore trees will be replanted and measures, such as sediment control or perimeter fencing, may be used until the city property restoration is complete.

"But it was an accident" or "My landscaper made a mistake."

Unfortunately accidents do happen, however, property owners are still liable for damage to city property and should ensure any contractors or service personnel are aware of the city property line.

What should do if I have concerns about a dying or unhealthy tree on city property?

If a city tree looks unhealthy or you have concerns about storm damage, disease, or other potential hazards, please contact the city for assistance **before** performing any work. The city can assess the situation, request assistance from an ISA-certified arborist if needed, and determine a course of action.

I would like a view of the reservoir. How do I get one?

Through the city's land stewardship program, some properties may be eligible to create or maintain a filtered view corridor. Please contact the Watershed Management office at 614-645-1721 or by email landstewardship@columbus.gov to receive approval before performing any new or maintenance trimming.