



**CITY OF KIRKLAND**  
Department of Public Works  
123 Fifth Avenue, Kirkland, WA 98033 425.587.3800  
www.ci.kirkland.wa.us

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**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** David Ramsay, City Manager  
**From:** Daryl Grigsby, Public Works Director  
**Date:** August 13, 2009  
**Subject:** DRAFT RESPONSE LETTER TO MR. PAT HARRIS RE: CITY STREET TREES

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council authorize Mayor James Lauinger to sign a letter as presented or modified responding to Mr. Pat Harris.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:

On July 29, 2009, a letter was received at the City, addressed to the Kirkland City Council, and authored by Mr. Pat Harris. In the letter, Mr. Harris expressed concerns regarding the irrigation and care for City street trees.

July 28, 2009

Kirkland City Council  
125 5<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Kirkland, WA 98033

Kirkland City Council,

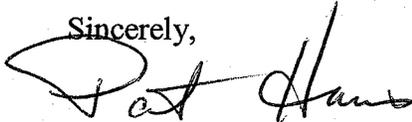
The City of Kirkland's decision not to irrigate streetscapes and parks is killing both newly planted and mature trees, along with the other adjacent landscaping. In a summer when there isn't a regional water shortage and our area is experiencing record temperatures, this is just a bone headed decision. There were other ways to save general funds. How about cut back on summer concerts in the park, or reduce even further the contributions to community events? You can always add back concerts next summer, but you can't replace mature trees as easily.

As a recognized Tree City USA, the city is demonstrating incredibly poor stewardship of a valuable resource. The "in your face" citizen decision not to water may save on water bills, but it will cost the city in respect to tree removal, stump grinding, tree replacement and tree monitoring. This was a penny wise, pound foolish decision. To add insult this decision, I am starting to see tree bags put on street trees that have already died. So, the city is paying for the labor to water dead trees. Makes sense to me.

I have called the City already and spoke with Wendy who assists with managing the street tree inventory. She said her budget has been slashed and she has an inadequate budget and staff to take care of the trees. Kirkland should take itself off the Tree City USA designation as long as they don't publicly finance and support a public street tree program. I pointed out to Wendy that I am seeing dead street trees throughout the city, and she was aware of many of the trees that I brought to her attention. Awareness is at least a start.

It is so ironic that the City of Kirkland has a tree ordinance that forces property owners to protect trees on their private property, while the city goes about killing trees on public right of ways and in our parks. It's also ironic that the City of Kirkland can't afford to water and given the incredibly high water rates that businesses and citizen's pay in Kirkland, it's almost understandable. Our participation in the Cascade Water Alliance has insured ever increasing water cost and now the Council wants to increase the utility taxes. Start watering the street trees and now park trees before even more are dead.

Sincerely,



Pat Harris  
427 Slater Street South  
Kirkland, WA 98033

RECEIVED

JUL 23 2009

CITY OF KIRKLAND  
CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE

September 1, 2009

**D R A F T**

Mr. Pat Harris  
427 Slater Street South  
Kirkland, Washington 98033

Subject: CITY STREET TREES

Dear Mr. Harris,

Thank you for your letter to the Kirkland City Council regarding concerns with the irrigation and health of City street trees. In a period of declining resources, it is important for us to hear from citizens about their priorities for City services.

As a part of ongoing challenges with the 2009-10 budget, the Public Works Department was compelled to develop more than \$1,000,000 worth of reductions in service levels and expenditures. In addition, the Department was also asked to find \$500,000 more in order to permanently fund critical programs that were previously only funded on an annual basis which the community and Council deemed too important to be cut from the budget. Both of these actions were taken to address the City's overall General Fund shortfall. As you can imagine, they have required difficult decisions and trade-offs.

One program that has experienced significant reductions is the Public Grounds seasonal staff, their supplies, and their associated irrigation budget. One of this work group's principal work objectives is the care of the City's tree inventory. As a result of funding reductions, Public Works was required to take a thorough look at the program's operations and processes. As your letter points out, street trees are a significant amenity and an important City priority. Because of this, it was decided to irrigate public spaces where it was critical for the survival of street trees and landscape materials and that grass areas for the most part are not being irrigated. While the overall irrigation has been dramatically reduced, every attempt to maintain our street tree inventory is underway including the addition of environmentally conscious individual water bags. Staff has been filling them weekly dependent on the ambient temperature but even with our limited resources, we attempt to maximize the lifespan and health of our tree inventory with creative, sustainable and available options.

A significant part of the City Arborist's work program is to monitor the health of the street tree inventory. We agree with your observations and have found that some trees are experiencing defoliation due to stressful conditions, but analysis of their branches and trunks indicate that they are still alive. It has also been our experience that each year the City loses trees to vehicle collisions, insects, disease or other trauma, and those are consequences of owning and maintaining an urban canopy. The City has approximately 21,000 street trees and, as you correctly point out, they are a stated priority of the City. However, as you know this has been an unusually hot summer. That heat, combined with the reduction in seasonal staff and utilities budgets, has required our staff to be diligent and creative in fulfilling their duties.

We welcome your input and if you have specific locations of concern, please contact Wendy Kremer at (425) 587-3908.

Sincerely,

Kirkland City Council

By: James L. Lauinger, Mayor

Cc: Daryl Grigsby, Public Works Director  
Wendy Kremer, Public Grounds Supervisor  
Deb Powers, City Arborist