

MEMORANDUM



TO: VICTOR CARDENAS, CITY MANAGER
FROM: JEFFRY HERCZEG, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS
SUBJECT: SIDEWALK PROGRAM TREE REMOVAL
DATE: JULY 23, 2026

The Department of Public Works in cooperation with the Mobility Committee and City Council worked to create a Neighborhood Sidewalk Program (NSP) to address deflections and deterioration of sidewalk panels in residential neighborhoods throughout the city ([more information here](#)).

This program is a courtesy to the residents, who by ordinance, are responsible to maintain [sidewalks](#) in a proper state of repair. The intent of the city program is to unburden residents with the financial responsibility and bring the residential non-motorized network up to the acceptable Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. Generally, most communities assess the property owners for repairs adjacent to their parcel. Since the city can create programs on a large scale, volume prices are lower (versus homeowner solicited), and the program can be managed and inspected by staff per city standards.

This year's NSP program consists of 17 subdivisions and includes 2,982 Sidewalk panels to be replaced, totaling over 15,754 feet of sidewalk. These repairs are spread over 600 plus addresses amongst the 17 subdivisions. 788 trees were identified as impacting the sidewalks included in these repairs, comprising a total of 1,218 panels and 6,300 feet of sidewalk.

As discussed throughout the creation of the program, trees are responsible for between 50% and 80% of the panel deflections in the network, depending on a particular subdivision and the tree species. Consequently, the program includes right-of-way (ROW) and the occasional private tree removals.

Why are tree removals necessary? In the 1970's, 80's and 90's when Novi saw a surge in residential development, trees too large for rights-of-way were planted (or left in place) because infrastructure was smaller and different, and planning lacked modern arboricultural data. Immediate environmental and aesthetic needs were prioritized over good arboriculture practices. Or, fast and large growing trees were often used in places where they would eventually become problematic.

In general, large and fast-growing species should not be planted near sewer lines, sidewalks, roads or other critical infrastructure. These include (but are not limited to) silver and Norway maple, Siberian elm, dawn redwood, London planetree, honey locust, and some red oak species. This is commonly referred to as **“wrong tree, wrong place”**.

Novi's infrastructure has both aged and grown exponentially in the last 30-40 years. Urban landscapes, like a residential landscape, have a service life and are not exempt from an ever-changing environment. Over a 30-year time, the average homeowner may have renewed or refreshed their landscape several times. The urban forest is no different except for the sheer scale the city is charged to maintain (tree inventory ~40,000).

Did staff evaluate alternatives? Yes. Root pruning is the preferred alternative and is executed when applicable. If a tree is in good health and poses no other risks than a deflected panel, root pruning is part of the program. However, excessive root pruning can damage trees and make them susceptible to uprooting, and therefore, can't be used in every instance.

How do staff decide what stays and what goes? The first step was a city-wide condition assessment and creation of a geo-database in 2025. Staff work closely with a consulting engineering firm to analyze the condition assessment and create specifications and bid documents for the Neighborhood Sidewalk Program.

Next, the city Arborist ([ISA Arborist](#), and tree risk assessment or [TRAQ credentialed](#)) and a staff Engineering Technician evaluated all the sidewalk locations and found 788 locations where trees were identified as impacting the sidewalks. The forester was asked to evaluate the locations where tree removals were thought to be likely due to the amount of adjacent concrete work. Staff identified 188 locations which resulted in 129 recommendations for removal. Out of all trees involved in sidewalk repairs identified in this year's NSP **removals make up 16 percent and the remaining 84 percent were saved utilizing root pruning or preserving the tree in place**. When trees are **wrong tree, wrong place**, and/or fail in other **categorical risk assessments** they are added to the removal list. This is a thoughtful and data-based decision-making process which staff stand behind.

For example, the Westridge Downs opposition to tree removals is based on a total of 17 trees, (7 of which are Norway Maples) out of more than 100 street trees in the subdivision. These 17 are also in conflict with other critical infrastructure (water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer, and the road - exhibits below) which could interfere with future maintenance operations. Seven of the identified trees had existing health concerns and would be candidates for removal regardless of the sidewalk program. Alternatively, root pruning was deemed appropriate in 13 locations where roots were impacting the sidewalk, where the health of the tree was not in jeopardy.

An aerial photograph of a residential neighborhood with numerous houses and trees. Yellow dots are placed on several lots, likely indicating specific points of interest or survey locations. The streets shown are Westridge Ln, Galway Dr, and Westridge Ln (repeated on the right side). Lot numbers are visible throughout the area, such as 43768, 43756, 43740, 43724, 43694, 43678, 43662, 43646, 43630, 43614, 43600, 43586, 43564, 43548, 43504, 43444, 43427, 43443, 43525, 43541, 43557, 43573, 43589, 43705, 43721, 43737, 43769, 43785, 43827, 43845, 43824, 43808, 43792, 43780, 43764, 43732, 43716, 43700, 43584, 43568, 43552, 43536, 43629, 43647, 43663, 43681, 43699, 43717, 43735, 43753, 43780, 43792, 43768, 43756, 43740, 43724, 43694, 43678, 43662, 43646, 43630, 43614, 43600, 43586, 43564, 43548, 43504, 43444, 43427, 43443, 43525, 43541, 43557, 43573, 43589, 43705, 43721, 43737, 43769, 43785, 43827, 43845. A black circle is drawn around a group of lots near the intersection of Westridge Ln and Galway Dr, specifically around lot 43614 and 43629.

3

Suggestions to use alternative materials, realignment, or concrete grinding are **not feasible for a program this comprehensive**. Creating an “a la carte” or negotiable program for city owned assets would be more expensive, is not efficient and would not meet ADA standards. Also, introducing other materials (rubber, ramps, mats etc.) would create numerous issues with ongoing maintenance specific to each location.

How are removals communicated to residents? Through experience with previous projects, the most effective manner of resident contact is a physical knock on the door accompanied by a door hanger 3-4 weeks before the program mobilizes and when sites are being marked by Engineering. This is done in tandem with a letter from Community Relations to impacted property owners.

Additional notifications via yard signs, social media/website, flyers etc. speaking to the NSP more broadly, follow the above process.

Does the city replace the trees? Yes. Staff replaces the tree being removed with a well-suited species for the site, unless the resident requests that a tree not be replanted OR major site conflicts (infrastructure, inadequate planting space, severe sight distance impacts) make replacement inappropriate. If the latter, attempts are made to relocate the planting site and replace the tree elsewhere in the ROW adjacent to the impacted address.

Staff understand the value of the urban forest and take appropriate consideration when deciding the best way to manage assets now and for the future. Resident concerns for tree removals are passionate, real and worthy of discussion, and staff have been fully responsive. Tree removal decisions are not taken lightly and are made in accordance with best arboricultural best practices. Ultimately the trees are **city assets, in city ROW**. The decision to remove the trees should be made by City Council and staff, who work in the best interest and consider the long-term maintenance of all the city's critical infrastructure.