

Appeal Regarding the Urban Forester's decision on removal of a Cottonwood tree

20" Tree Located in the Right of Way on Crown Ct, Austin TX

What Complications Arise from Cottonwood Trees?

Joshua Wilke | July 1, 2019

Cottonwoods are a trouble-making tree for many reasons. They have those irritating seeds that float into every nook and cranny, and sticky buds that fall off everywhere. These buds are troublesome to get off of cars and will stain carpets yellow if tracked inside.

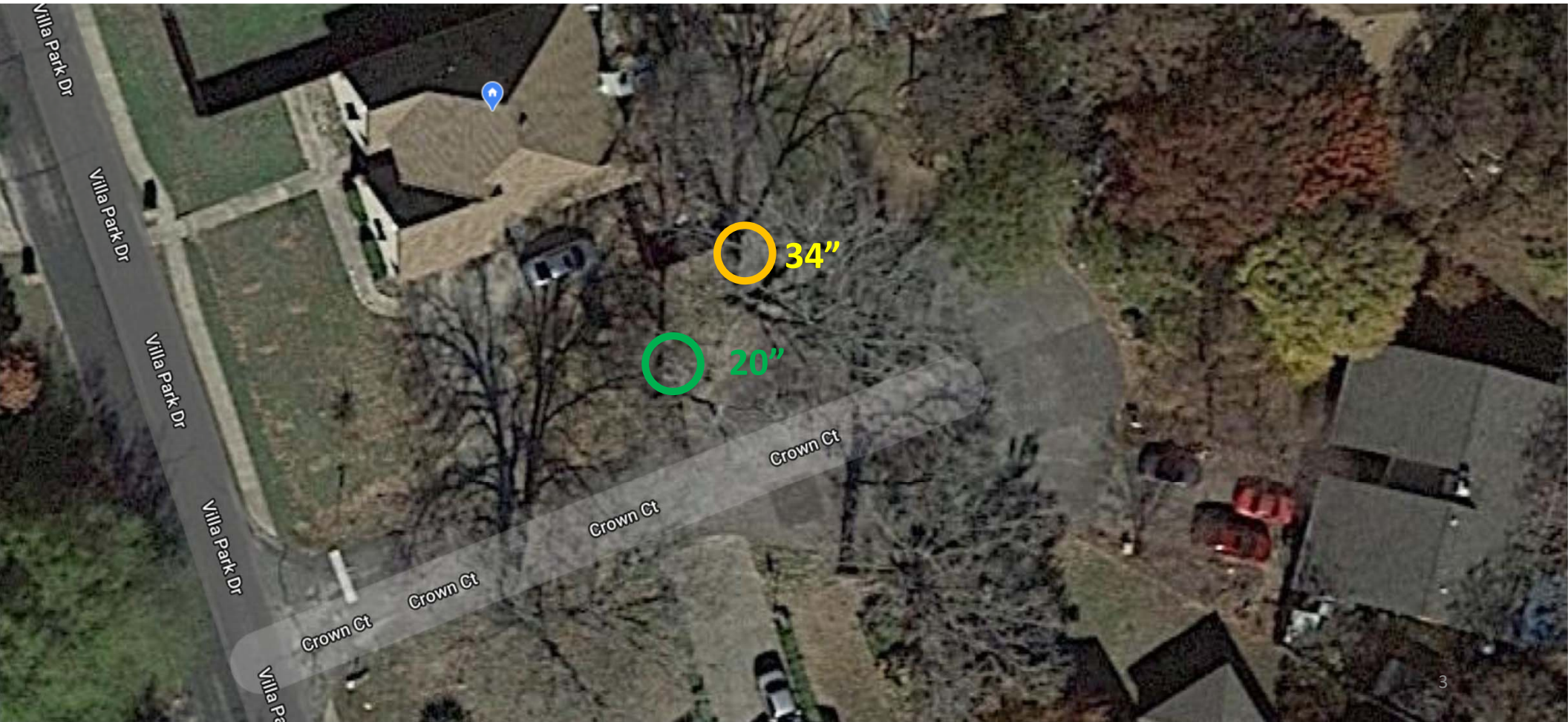
Even though they can practically grow all over the United States and in many environments, cottonwoods are not as resilient as they seem. They are a fast-growing species. In fact, they are the fastest growing trees in North America, growing 6 feet or more in height per year. This puts them at risk for having weaker, more porous wood than other types of trees. They have a propensity to be penetrated by infestations, to rot, and to break more easily. Because their weak wood is more likely than other trees to be diseased, rotten, or bug infested, they are more likely to die, break, and fall. The summer season is especially dangerous as it is a time when cottonwoods are growing too fast for their own good, thus making them more vulnerable to breakage.

Because they grow so easily and quickly in many places, their root systems are likely to spread where they shouldn't and tear underground things, like pipes, apart. They also are a major culprit in the destruction of wetlands and retaining ponds.

<https://www.skyhightreeremoval.com/2019/07/01/what-complications-arise-from-cottonwood-trees/>

SUBJECT TREE & LOCATION

Crown Ct, Austin TX



34" Tree and 20" Tree damaging property owner's pipes

- Property owner provided repair documents and pictures of pipe damage caused by these trees and their roots to the Urban Forester.
- Large roots from both trees are on my water line. My pipes have been damaged multiple times.
- Urban Forester was immediately dismissive of these facts.

Killander, Lisa <Lisa.Killander@austintexas.gov>
To: Patrick Fulker <patrick.fulker@gmail.com>

Sun, May 24, 2020 at 1:18 PM

Patrick,

You seem to believe the trees are actively destroying your water line and that is simply not the case. As I stated in a previous email, the roots will grow towards a leak in the water pipe and can then cause the flow within the pipe to be impeded. These tree roots are not crushing or cracking your waterline. If they were then you would have had ongoing repairs starting after you moved in and throughout the past 14 years that you have lived in your home. You can bring this matter up to your district councilman. They will reach out for my response and I will give the same response I have given you. I am sorry you feel these trees are suddenly a detriment to your property.



34" Tree – roots visibly bending water valves on the surface. Urban Forester was not persuaded with this fact.



Root was excavated
by Austin Water –
Roots are clearly
destroying pipes.





**Large root from
20" Cottonwood
tree over my
water main.**



**Large root from
20" Cottonwood
tree over my
water main.
Yellow line
indicates
approximate
location of water
line.**

URBAN FORESTER RE-ASSESSMENT OF SITUATION:

- Property owner had to seek assistance from Austin Water to have the roots near the water meter excavated.
- Excavation of the roots clearly indicated that the tree was damaging my pipes.
- After city council and Austin Water involvement, Urban Forester agreed to re-assess my situation.
- Urban Forester re-assessed the situation and provided their response.

From: Killander, Lisa
Sent: Tuesday, September 1, 2020 5:20 PM
To: Mars, Keith
Cc: Robinson, John; Kistner, Shane; Jones, Michael; McMillan, Scott
Subject: Cottonwood at 13213 Villa Park Drive
Attachments: Cottonwood at 13213 Villa Park drive.jpg; Cottonwood root and waterline view.jpg

Mr. Mars,

Public Works Forestry has reviewed the latest information regarding the citizen's request to remove a 34" diameter Cottonwood at 13213 Villa Park Road. This tree poses no risk to pedestrians or vehicles but after the root zone was water excavated by Austin Water staff at the request of the resident it was obvious the extent to which the support roots of this cottonwood are impacting and will continue to impact the water lines to this address as well as the adjacent home whose tap is located in the same place. Please see pictures attached. Austin Water's Pipeline Maintenance Superintendent, Mile Alvis provided Forestry staff with the cost to relocate the two taps being impacted. Given this cost or costs of future water line/tap repairs it has been decided that these costs to the City exceed the benefits that this tree provides to a few homes within this cul-de-sac.

Hence this large cottonwood will be remove by Public Works Forestry as scheduling allows. The removal of the smaller cottonwood located on this property cannot be justified using the same criteria used for the larger cottonwood and hence it's removal will not take place at this time. I want to thank Mr. Fulker for his efforts in helping the City understand more clearly the issues with this particular cottonwood that unfortunately developed near the taps for two houses.

URBAN FORESTER'S DECISION:

- Urban Forester agreed to remove the 34" tree but not the 20" tree.
- No additional documentation or explanation was given to support their decision on the 20" tree, except for the previous e-mail.
- The Urban Forester mentioned excavating the roots of the 20" tree to be certain but chose not to do so before making their decision.
- The same criteria can and should be used to justify and remove the 20" tree.

URBAN FORESTER'S CRITERIA TO REMOVE TREE

- Urban Forester stated that the cost to relocate the water main exceeds the value of the 34" tree.
- This is also true for the 20" tree.
- Both trees' roots are on my water line that has been damaged multiple times and will continue to cause damage to my pipes.
- Urban Forester inquired with Mr. Alvis at Austin Water and was told that this 20" tree will most likely continue to cause me problems.

From: Killander, Lisa

Sent: Tuesday, August 25, 2020 8:24 AM

To: Alvis, Mike <Mike.Alvis@austintexas.gov>

Cc: Morrow, Scott <Scott.Morrow@austintexas.gov>; Rotramel, Naomi <Naomi.Rotramel@austintexas.gov>; Mars, Keith <Keith.Mars@austintexas.gov>; Robinson, John <John.Robinson@austintexas.gov>; Boswell, David <David.Boswell@austintexas.gov>

Subject: RE: 13213 Villa Park Dr.

Mike,

Thank you for sharing these with me. I will doing a formal assessment on this tree on wed. Did you excavate only one of the two cottonwoods in the ROW adjacent to Mr. Fulker's property? What is your opinion regarding the other cottonwood nearby and its ability to entangle the water system and potentially damage to the waterlines? Thank you.

Lisa Killander

City of Austin
Public Works Department
Office of the City Engineer
Urban Forestry Manager
Certified Arborist TX 3735-A

Lisa asks Mike Alvis of Austin Water about the 20" tree and whether it is affecting my pipes.

Alvis, Mike <Mike.Alvis@austintexas.gov>

Oct 2, 2020, 11:14 AM



to me ▾

Morning Patrick,

I was asked if I exposed both root systems and what my thoughts were about the second (smaller) tree and the possibilities of root intrusion through past experience. I expressed that I wasn't an arborist but, it has been my experience in excavations that we find root systems generally take the path of least resistance and that trench lines for water & wastewater systems can filter and hold ground water in the bedding material. This acts as an attractant for roots systems as they seek moisture. I mentioned again that this wasn't my area of expertise as I'm not an arborist. She thanked me for my input and help with this and stated she would be making a site visit to investigate the area in question. She asked if I could leave the excavated area open for their review. I agreed and requested they notify me when their investigation was complete so I could have the excavation backfilled.

I know we discussed leaving the area exposed until work was complete. Has that happened yet? No rush, I just want to ensure it is addressed.

Michael Alvis

Pipeline Maintenance Superintendent

City of Austin | Austin Water, Distribution System Services

512-972-1182 | C: 512-879-7747

Mike Alvis replies that, in his experience, tree roots like to follow trench lines and are attracted to them. This suggests that future issues are likely.

COST TO RELOCATE WATER METER

- Michael Alvis from Austin water provided costs to relocate the water meters affected by the trees. This only reflects the cost to the City and does not include the thousands of dollars that the property owners would also have to pay for their waterlines.
- 13213 Villa Park. Dr.
- Relocate service = \$2k
- Street cut = \$6K
-
- Abandon Existing Service @ main = \$1K
- Street cut = \$6K
-
- 8802 Crown Ct.
- Relocate service = \$2K
- Street Cut - \$6K
-
- Total estimate = \$23K

**Cost to relocate just my
water meter is \$15k**

The Austin Environmental Criteria Manual – Section 3.5.4 states how to value a Tree

A standard formula of one caliper inch of replacement value is equivalent to \$200.00, or \$75 for certified affordable developments and placed into the UFRF. (NOTE: This option is not intended to facilitate the excessive removal of trees.) Trees have varying values based upon numerous tree and site conditions (see ECM [3.5.1](#)). The following mitigation rates apply for medium valued trees; however the City Arborist may raise or reduce these rates for high or low valued trees:

- greater than 19 inches diameter and located in Appendix F - 100%

20" x \$200.00 x 100% = \$4,000.00

34" x \$200.00 x 100% = \$6,800.00

20" Tree Value Vs Meter Replacement Costs

- The 20" tree does not appear to be affecting my neighbor's water line, but its roots are over my pipes that have sustained multiple breaks and will most likely continue to do so.
- The cost on the City to relocate just my water meter is \$15k. This exceeds the 20" tree's value of \$4k by almost 400%. The costs to the city alone warrants removal of this tree.
- This is the exact same criteria used by the Urban Forester to warrant removal of the 34" tree.
- I request that the same criteria used to warrant removal of the 34" tree simply be applied to the 20" tree as well.

SOLUTIONS TO MY ISSUE

- The Urban Forester wishes to preserve this 20" tree.
- The Urban Forester states that I cannot cut the roots. Doing so would damage the tree and I would be liable for any damage.
- Relocating the water line is the only solution I know of to preserve the tree, but the costs to do so vs. the tree's value is not the most prudent use of City resources. It would also cost me thousands of dollars, also likely in excess of the tree's value.
- No solutions to this issue are currently being offered.
- I ask the Commission to please grant removal of this tree in order to resolve this matter.