

Sweet gum ball mitigation – October 2019

Our neighborhood has many sweet gum trees. Each spring, the “gum balls” they produce are numerous and can be hazardous to pedestrians and bicyclists if left on sidewalks and streets.

The Wornall Homestead Homes Association Board was asked to investigate options, and to consider using Homes Association funds to mitigate this annual hazard. This is a summary of that investigation, and the resulting decision.

Questions considered:

Q: Can residents pay for removal of trees in the public right of way?

A: KCMO policy is not to permit removal of live healthy trees. The city removes many trees annually and is losing too much tree canopy from the removal of ash trees to allow removal of healthy trees.

Q: Can a resident request removal if the tree is adjacent to a sidewalk being replaced through the GO bond program, or to a sidewalk being replaced privately?

A: Whether a GO bond or private sidewalk replacement, residents can request a tree removal permit via the 311 Call Center. The city will inspect the site to determine the health and condition of the tree, and assess if the tree must be removed to make a lasting sidewalk repair. Preference is always to save the tree, but if that is not possible, a removal permit will be granted.

Q: Is there an effective treatment to stop production of the balls?

A: Treatments can be applied each year in late summer for impact the following spring, resulting in a 60%-80% reduction in gum ball production.

Q: How much is the annual treatment?

A: Treatments from local providers cost about \$9 per diameter inch, so approximately \$350 per year for a typical tree in our neighborhood.

Summary:

- Widespread tree removal is not a viable option.
- Annual treatments are expensive, and do not eliminate all gum balls and their associated hazard.
- As with sidewalk snow removal, clearing the gum balls is the responsibility of each homeowner.

Thus, the Board can take no action on behalf of the entire Wornall Homestead Homes Association.

WHAT SHOULD HOMEOWNERS DO?

Please *do remove the gum balls* (and leaves, and lawn clippings and sticks) from the sidewalk.

Please *do not blow debris into the street*, as that will clog the storm sewers!

Consider coordinating with your neighbors to secure a discounted rate for a pick-up service. Some local landscape companies (including the company that maintains our neighborhood landscaping: Envision Lawn and Tree) provide a discount for multiple houses. Material still must be gathered for pickup.

Thank you for doing your part to keep the sidewalks and streets clear for the enjoyment of all!