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Tree lover plants seed for change
Sandy Springs group to foster conservation

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 09/20/07

A love of trees and a background in marketing inspired Nina Cramer to found Trees Sandy Springs, a nonprofit organization devoted to saving the urban forest.

The organization, formed this month, intends to educate homeowners, business leaders and developers about how to maintain trees. Cramer is recruiting a corps of volunteers to help with plantings, much like her inspiration, Trees Atlanta. A reporter sat down with her this week to talk trees.

Q: What is the mission of Trees Sandy Springs?

A: Our sole purpose is to protect and improve our urban environment by planting, conserving and maintaining trees in Sandy Springs. Another purpose is to educate people about the value of trees and the proper care for trees — proper pruning, mulching and watering.

Q: What's the biggest mistake people make about trees? Is it assuming they don't need care?

A: It would be neglect. In Sandy Springs, we have a lot of trees. It's the responsibility of the homeowner to have those trees assessed every three to five years by an arborist. That will tell them what trees should come down and if the trees need anything. It's like a report card on your trees. Sometimes trees need to be removed so the bigger, stronger trees can get more of the nutrients.

Q: Why does Sandy Springs need a trees organization?

A: Because of the development, you're going to see young trees that have been planted and there are no resources or staff from the city to maintain them. I just saw them dying. We are in an extraordinary, 100-year drought. This is going to continue in the Southeast. The first three to five years is critical. That's when they begin to establish a strong root system. And if they do not get the water they need, it can't happen. As many trees as we're losing, we've got to replant, and we've got to keep them alive.

Q: Are you raising money for plantings?

A: Yes. The money we raised this weekend [at the Sandy Springs Festival], every dollar is going into buying trees. This weekend we raised a little over \$700. Planting season is from October through February, so we're preparing for that. We'll find designated locations. We'll have to get permission, whether it's from the city, a business or a community. We will plant on the public rights of way, city parks and schools, businesses.

Q: Tell us about the trees in Sandy Springs. What's the existing stock?

A: We have what is known as an urban forest. We have a huge variety of trees. Some are well over 100, 150 years old.

Q: What is old-growth vs. new trees?

A: In our tree ordinance, they designate a landmark tree by the size of the tree. Anything considered an old-growth tree is something that is [at chest height] a diameter of 27 inches. But that depends on the species of the tree.

Q: What are your thoughts about the city's tree ordinance, which has been in place for almost a year? The pros and cons?

A: We need to have more incentives for developers to save more of the existing trees. Sandy Springs is undergoing massive development and redevelopment. It's everywhere. And so, we are losing a lot of our trees on a daily basis.

Q: What are some good things about the tree ordinance?

A: The boundary trees are more protected ... trees that are in buffers. The intention is to stop the clear cutting of a property by a private property owner. Our new ordinance does require the boundary trees in the buffer zones be protected. They have to apply for a permit to remove those.

Q: What are some of the gaps in the ordinance?


A: Right now, a protected tree is anything 18 inches in diameter, and up. That's a big tree. Eighty to 85 percent of the trees in Sandy Springs are unprotected.

Q: It might seem obvious, but maybe not. What are the benefits of trees?

A: Through photosynthesis, trees clean our air. They're great filters. A tree's root system filters the water that goes back into all of our source water, our streams and lakes. And trees are a huge balancer of the heat index. The old shade trees act like a reflector. If you walk from the shade into a forested area ... the temperature is 15 to 20 degrees cooler. They also provide wildlife habitat. And trees add value to a home. Mature trees can add 10 percent to 20 percent to the property value.

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