Policy to Inspect Trees on Private Property

1.0 Purpose

The following policy addresses how the Department of Public Works will handle potential disease, infestation or hazards that may endanger persons or property stemming from trees on private property.

2.0 Policy Details

A healthy urban forest improves quality of life for the residents of Stoughton. Trees and other plants provide many environmental benefits, but also carry inherent risks. Management of these risks helps to ensure the safety and well-being of the residents of the City. The City periodically inspects all City-owned trees and performs necessary work to reduce risk. Occasionally a resident or employee will report a potential tree on private property that may pose a risk to the general public or property. This policy provides the steps which will be taken to address these reports.

3.0 Procedures

Whenever a potential hazard tree or shrub is reported, the Director of Public Works or their designee shall inspect the property to determine if the tree or shrub is indeed a nuisance as defined in Ordinance 58-12.

If the tree cannot be thoroughly inspected from public property, an attempt shall be made to contact the property owner by knocking at the front door of the home and receiving permission to enter the property to conduct the inspection. If there is no answer at the door a letter may be sent to the property owner asking for permission to enter the property.

If permission is not granted, a warrant must be obtained from the Municipal Court to enter a property.

Once permission has been granted (or a warrant has been secured), the Director of Public Works, or their designee shall perform an inspection of the tree in question to determine whether the tree is diseased, infested or likely to endanger persons. If a potential hazard is confirmed, the Basic Tree Risk Assessment Form (a publication of the International Society of Arboriculture) should be used to evaluate the tree and to document findings. A copy of the most recent Tree Risk Assessment Manual shall be kept on file at Public Works for review and training.

If a nuisance is confirmed and is likely to cause the spread of disease or infestation or endanger persons, ordinance 58-12 shall be referenced to cause the abatement of the hazard. The property owner shall be served with a notice to mitigate the hazard. Mitigation measures may include, but are not limited to trimming, partial removal, full tree removal or treatment for disease or insect infestation. The timeframe for mitigation shall be in accordance with Section 58-12(b)(1) of the City of Stoughton Code of Ordinances. All costs for mitigation shall be borne by the property owner.

4.0 Supporting Documentation

- Ord 58-12 (This will be added later)
- Tree Risk assessment (This will be added later)