

Protecting trees during special events in parks

There was recent conversation on Facebook about vehicles parking on lawn areas under trees during the Festival of Jazz in Bushnell Park. I looked into what provisions are in the special events protocol that relate to this concern.

On the City of Hartford's web page for special event permits, one of the five goals for special event permits is "To protect our public assets, including our historic parks which have fragile ecosystems and significant irreplaceable features, including trees over a century old." It was heartening to see that articulated right up front.

The online application requires the event sponsor to submit "a site plan, which is drawn to scale." The requirements for the plan include a lengthy list of elements, but they don't include locations of trees.

In the **PARKS RIDER TO SPECIAL EVENTS PERMIT APPLICATION**, the following elements may be found:

- Driving vehicles off of designated park roadways, including on sidewalks and on grass, is not allowed without expressed written permission as part of the Special Event Permit.
- Vehicles shall not park under the dripline of any tree, within 50 feet of any playground, or in any areas not designated in an approved Special Event site plan for parking. If parking is authorized in a Special Event Permit to take place on grass, plywood shall be placed under vehicle tires to minimize damage to flora and fauna and compaction of soils.
- Loading and unloading of equipment should occur on the street wherever possible. If street-side loading is not possible, vehicles must park in approved, designated areas, ideally existing paved paths. Loading and unloading of vehicles within park boundaries but not in a parking lot may only occur for the smallest period of time the occupant(s) of such vehicle(s) reasonably require to load and unload such goods and materials.
- No more than 15 vehicles shall be allowed to park behind the Bushnell Park Pavilion Band Shell.

Special events permit applications are to be reviewed by numerous departments and officials, including the Department of Public Works.

In general, it seems that protections for trees are in place, but it appears that not all protections are fully implemented, and some could be strengthened. Here are some thoughts:

Given that park events often will be held in close proximity to trees, the scale drawing should include locations of trees and their driplines.

In addition to consultation with DPW, special event permits in parks could specify consultation with the City Forester. The permit application already requires consultation with and review by the Fire Marshal and charges a fee for that. Perhaps a fee could be charged for review by the City Forester. This could include one or more visits during the event.

It is unclear who is responsible for determining whether an event sponsor has conformed to permit requirements and it appears that there are frequent and numerous transgressions. Should the Special Events Coordinator be responsible for visiting each special event to assess compliance? Should it be a police responsibility? Should it be the Parking Authority?

The permit application indicates that fines may be levied if transgressions relate to parts of the zoning regulations. It's not clear what those would be. Perhaps HPA could issue parking tickets to people parking on lawn areas or under trees. The latter fines could go into the Hartford Tree Fund. Perhaps we need a specific ordinance making driving or parking on park lawns and/or under park trees illegal and subject to fines. Event permits could provide special exceptions. Of course, any discussion of new ordinances and fines brings up the question of who would be responsible for enforcement.

Event sponsors could be required to cordon off tree drip lines and post signs regarding parking prohibitions.

The requirement for protection of lawn areas when vehicles are allowed to cross them could be more specific. In particular, they could specify the thickness of the plywood.

Event or activity sponsors could be required to hire security personnel or off-duty police officers to direct and/or block traffic. If that process proved ineffective during one event, the sponsor might be required to pay for police security at future events. Special event or park use permit applications could be required to include security plans.

If parking in a park is permitted during an event or activity, perhaps there could be a number of special permits issued that would be required to be on display in vehicles.

The City could provide base maps indicating tree and drip line locations as a basis for event maps.

City staff might cordon off tree drip lines prior to events and event sponsors would be required to pay for their time if the event sponsors were unsuccessful in protecting trees during previous events.

Event sponsors might be required to provide shuttle transportation from offsite parking locations, particularly for people with limited mobility.

Event or activity sponsors who fail to follow requirements might be prohibited from using park space in later years or months. This could give real enforcement authority to special events or field use staff.

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