



Bird Bath Initiative

June 7, 2021

Another environmental enthusiast and I were discussing birds, bats, butterflies and bees as well as native shrubs and, of course, trees. I mentioned that tree trunk stumps, while not the bane of my existence, were certainly a pet peeve. She described placing a bird bath on top of a tree trunk stump on her property years ago. Over an extended period of time, the persistent dampness disintegrated the wood and the insects did the rest. Lacking the luxury of time, I started researching removal methods which might be more expeditious. An internet search is always bound to produce a range of results and this one was no different. Setting the tree trunk stump on fire was, in my view, the most dangerous option; drilling holes and pouring potassium nitrate into them the most toxic. Eventually, I consulted a forester and was assured that grinding it down would be the safest and most efficacious method, albeit relatively expensive.

The Bird Bath Initiative (BBI) is a program designed to remove tree trunk stumps from city sidewalks and to replace them with new and thriving trees. Because of the current moratorium on tree planting on city sidewalks, availing ourselves of existing tree pits may be our only viable option. The removal of tree trunk stumps serves several purposes including 1. eliminating a blight throughout our city, 2. reducing a fire hazard (note the many cigarette butts thrown near the tree stump in photo), 3. eradicating a trip hazard (an elderly neighbor almost fell over this tree stump which has many jagged edges), 4. clearing an impediment to street parking (passenger-side doors may be blocked), 5. allowing for the planting of new trees. Given that there are 541 (and counting) identified tree trunk stumps in the city, the opportunity is significant!

Note: If you thought this story would be about birds, you were right for where would the birds be without trees. Indeed, where would any of us be.

The Bird Bath Initiative consists of six components:

1. identifying tree trunk stump locations
2. securing Dig Safe approval for new planting
3. securing resident approval & agreement to participate in tree maintenance (watering: quantity, frequency, duration)
4. removing tree trunk stumps
5. planting new trees
6. monitoring & maintaining (pruning, watering) tree development

Liz McKinley, our City Arborist, has over the course of the past three years virtually completed the first step! Todd Gildersleeve, DCR Urban Forester, recommends grinding down tree trunk stumps as the safest and most effective removal process. Presumably, having once been cleared for planting, these tree sites are likely to receive Dig Safe approval for new planting. Likewise, I anticipate that residents will welcome the removal of tree trunk stumps and the planting of new trees. This work, as well as the monitoring and maintenance of new trees, could best be achieved by a well-coordinated collaboration among experienced arborists, foresters and contractors, committed city officials and trained, dedicated paid volunteers. As with any vital infrastructure project, a significant infusion of capital is essential.