

A chance to preserve the canopy

With the introduction of a Tree Preservation Ordinance for city-sponsored projects, City Council President Rebecca Noecker has a unique opportunity to build a broad coalition to protect St. Paul's urban forest. As noted in the ordinance, trees benefit the public by providing critical functions that include purifying the air, reducing the urban heat island effect, helping to manage storm water, and providing shade and beauty to the city. At present St. Paul's tree canopy cover is approximately 33 percent. This is low compared to the top 10 capital cities whose tree canopies range from 78% (Charleston, West Virginia) to 46% (Augusta, Maine). We can't afford to lose what we currently have.



At a community forum Feb. 10, citizens voiced several strong objections to the ordinance as written, saying this is St. Paul's first tree preservation ordinance for city projects and we want to "get this right." Citizens noted 1) the ordinance lacks effective enforcement, 2) as currently written it does not comply with the Minnesota environmental rights act, and 3) it defines protection as the replacement of mature, stately trees with saplings. The latter is not preservation, especially given the city's track record of not maintaining newly planted saplings.

Community members disagreed very strongly with Noecker's plan to draft specific rules separately, asserting it is essential that enforceable rules and regulations become an integral part of the ordinance. We are calling for the involvement of a citizens' task force as part of what should be a democratic process to ensure our valuable trees are actually protected.

— Marilyn Bach, St. Paul The writer is a member of Save Our Street, a citizens group formed to protect Summit Avenue.