

SOS Elms News



Newsletter No. 23, December 2009
SOS Elms Coalition, P.O. Box 1313, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 3N9
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President's Report

by Doug Mitchell

Hello and the best of the Season to all our loyal and supportive members. It's been a difficult but none the less interesting and productive year for the SOS Elms Coalition. Unfortunately, after a long and tedious process, we did not get funding from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment for our proposed projects this year. They have been our major funding agent for many years but it appears that future assistance may well not be forthcoming. Next year's submission will probably clarify, once and for all, what our expectations of them should be. At least the provincial report on Dutch Elm Disease (DED) for this year (page 3) concluded that Saskatoon, Prince Albert, North Battleford and Yorkton remain DED free.

Your Board of Directors continues to monitor and consult with Saskatoon authorities on the care and maintenance of city trees. Much is changing for Saskatoon and it is difficult for the administration to always give the trees the priority they deserve. This fall the City announced an exciting "New Plan for City Centre". Although it does not include the River Landing area, it has some very interesting proposals such as a civic square and bike routes. It seems that the publicity related to the Saskatoon visit last summer by the famous international urban planner Jan Gehl has had an impact! Meanwhile, we have been extremely diligent about the Gathercole Elms. They are a group of mature and majestic Elms still thriving on the South Downtown Development Site. SOS Elms made a presentation to the new City Council to impress upon them the importance of considering these elms as part of the development as a whole (see page 4).

2009 Gardenscape: We had our display at Saskatoon's Gardenscape "The Outdoor Living Show" again this year. It always proves to be an excellent opportunity to communicate the importance of trees to society and to emphasize to the community that their involvement is critical to the health of the urban forest. Gardenscape is held every year in the last week of March.

Thousands of people attend and we distribute many brochures and pamphlets. As display participants, we receive entrance tickets for our Booth Volunteers. If you're interested, you can see all the displays and shows at Gardenscape for free by working at our SOS Elms Booth for a few hours. Next spring's Gardenscape will be held March 26 - 28, 2010. If you would like to see Gardenscape plus help us out, please contact any Board Member (see page 8).

2009 SPLIT (Schools Plant Legacy in Trees): We remain involved with the SPLIT Program, a City of Saskatoon initiative which involves a particular Saskatoon grade school each year. Thanks go to Terri Smith, Urban Forestry - Parks Branch, City of Saskatoon for the following information.

W. P. Bate Community School participated in this year's Program, involving the students and community in planting 200 shrubs and 10 trees in front of the school. St. Michael Community School, located at 22-33rd St. East, is a particularly innovative school involved in many unique educational programs. It will be the SPLIT School for 2010. Grades 3-6 will participate in a program that uses a classroom garden as a means to learning about growing healthy food and serving the environment as well as the community. The grade 5/6 class will grow tomatoes in their classroom greenhouse. In the spring vegetables will be planted in an outdoor garden. Staff will tend to the garden throughout the summer. In the fall the students will harvest the garden and put on a lunch for the whole school.

Five experts will visit St. Michael School in March 2010 to present forestry related topics to the students. In April, a landscape architect will work with students to design an attractive and sustainable school landscape. In May, students will attend a Forestry Expo at the City Parks Branch yards where several groups, including SOS Elms, will set up displays and hand out information related to what the students have been studying. Various demonstrations, such as weed control and tree pruning will be given, and the students will have a tour of the City's green house.

Planting Day takes place in June. Students will participate in tree and shrub planting and enjoy entertainment, lunch and speeches by students, the Principal, City Councilors and others.

Funding, Memberships and the AGM: As noted on page 6, in September we had a large Garage Sale, which proved to be a highly successful fund raiser. Proceeds from that sale, plus the fees and generous donations from our members, have kept our budget in the black. We are dependent on your continued support - please renew your memberships and stay involved. We appreciate every single member and always need more. If there is anyone you think would be good addition to our organization feel free to invite them to join (see form on page 8). Everyone is welcome. Please note (see below) that our AGM for 2009-2010 will be held on 23 January 2010. We plan to have a guest speaker to enlighten us on arboreal challenges. We look forward to meeting you at the AGM!

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
SOS ELMS COALITION INC.
7:00 PM, Saturday 23 January 2010
Basement, St. James Anglican Church
Corner of 12th & Dufferin
Saskatoon SK**



2009 Saskatchewan DED Report
by Jeffery Gooliaff, Saskatchewan
Environment, Prince Albert, SK

- The Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment conducted an extensive DED management program once again in the 2009/10 budget year.
- The three main vectors for DED are movement between elms via interconnected root systems, elm bark beetles, and human causes (eg. firewood movement, poorly sanitized tree pruning tools).
- Of special note is the confirmation of the Banded Elm Bark Beetle (**BEBB**) in both Saskatoon and Regina in 2009.
- BEBB can be a primary killer (via mass attack) of elm trees and can fly vast distances. The Province has monitored BEBB movement using baited panel traps since 2007. The Ministry sent baited panel traps to 27 communities around the province in 2009.
- The Ministry has also provided research funding to University of Manitoba grad student Jonathan Veilleux to study BEBB ecology.
- There were 345 confirmed cases of DED in the Ministry's DED management area in 2009. This is a decrease from 462 confirmed cases in 2008.
- The Ministry manages buffer zones around the City of Regina, Moose Jaw and Estevan along with buffers surrounding Indian head, Fort Qu'Appelle, and Tisdale (cost-share).
- There was a decrease in DED cases in the Regina, Indian Head, Estevan, and Fort Qu'Appelle buffer in 2009 when compared to 2008.
- The Ministry also surveys 43 communities for DED infected elms.
- Choiceland and Torquay, SK were two new communities that had confirmed DED cases in 2009.
- Saskatoon, Prince Albert, North Battleford and Yorkton still remain DED free.
- DED is still thriving in its traditional area (Qu'Appelle, Souris, Red Deer, Carrot and Saskatchewan river valley systems)
- There are 42 communities that have signed cost-share contracts with the Ministry for the 2009/10 budget year.
- Cost-share communities use this program to enhance their own municipal DED programs.
- The transport and storage of elm firewood continues to be a problem in the province.
- For more information about the Ministry's DED management program please contact Jeff Gooliaff (306-953-2987) or jeffery.gooliaff@gov.sk.ca.





Former SOS Elms President Judith Benson making speech to save the Gathercole, with Building and elms in background, 12 June 2004, before demolition of the building.

Gathercole Elms – still standing

by Richard Kerbes

The Gathercole Elms proudly stand today, tall and healthy on Parcel Y of the Saskatoon South Downtown development site. Five years ago SOS Elms was involved in the unsuccessful community effort to save the historic Gathercole Building. However, our efforts since then have been a key to preserving the mature American Elms on that site. Ironically, the status of the Gathercole Elms has not changed in the intervening years, in spite of grand development plans for a Megaproject

which include a high rise hotel and condo complex. If carried out, those plans would have scarified the site, constructed huge buildings and planted little saplings to “replace” the magnificent old elms.

In 2004 we pointed out to City Council and administration that destruction of the existing mature elms would mean the public’s loss of the beauty and the environmental enhancement that those trees provide. The saplings in the development plans, if they survived, would take many decades to reach the size and condition of the trees which

already exist. American Elms are very long-lived, and if properly cared for they can grace South Downtown for another 200 years. We believed then, as now, that present and future generations of Saskatonians should enjoy the benefits and unique environment that only these large trees can provide. We concluded with a plea that the Gathercole area be designed so that the elms would be the focus, the heart, of a green space which would preserve their beauty and their heritage value.

This fall there was renewed hope that the elms might still be saved! The prospective developer of the site, Lake Placid of Calgary, admitted that it had failed in its efforts to raise the funds required to proceed with the project (as had the Remai Corporation in an earlier unsuccessful proposal). Accordingly, on November 16th we attended the first meeting of the new City Council and made an SOS Elms presentation, delivered by Cliff Speer, as follows:

Given: (1) the property is now back in public ownership, (2) the elms, fortunately, were protected during and after demolition of the Gathercole Building, and (3) five years and a lot of public money have been "lost" while Council has pursued development plans which would have obliterated the elms;

We respectfully urged Council to guarantee the preservation of the nine most prominent of the American Elms in whatever development is to be pursued. We asked that they look seriously at the current state of the Gathercole site as a chance to re-think how that site fits into the whole South Downtown Project. We urged them not to lose sight of the unique heritage value of those trees. It

is no exaggeration to say that they are priceless - they could not be replaced at ANY cost.

Television news coverage of Cliff making the presentation has given us some public feed-back and support, and may be related to three letters to the StarPhoenix supporting our position. I attended, as an observer, a special executive meeting of City Council on 23 November held to consider the options for the Gathercole site:

Option 1 - Mr. Lobsinger of Lake Placid Developments again tried very hard to persuade Council that he soon would have \$200 million in Lake Placid's bank account, ready to go on the much delayed Megaproject for Parcel Y. Most of the Councillors gave him quite a grilling on his excuses for the delay, which he blamed on the recent global financial melt down, and also on provincial legislation, which apparently caused the first delays in 2007. He claimed that if he had not had that delay he would have had the mega bucks in place before the US melt down. Council agreed NOT to give him another extension. However, His Worship the Mayor stated that the only way to get the Megaproject started in the near future would be to give Lobsinger the go ahead if he actually gets the financing soon.

Option 2 - to open the same proposed Megaproject to a new and lengthy bidding process was favoured by all Councillors except Charlie Clark. Interestingly, no one mentioned concerns I have heard elsewhere that there is already overcapacity in hotels in Saskatoon, especially downtown, e.g. construction of a new downtown Holiday

Inn is still on hold - it was supposed to go up several years ago on the site of the movie theatre torn down across from TCU Place.

Option 3 - to abandon plans for the Megaproject, was supported only by Charlie Clark. It is encouraging to see that he remains true to his commitments. Who knows, maybe the Council will eventually come around if they again fail to get realistic results from Options 1 or 2.... In any case, our only hope of saving the Gathercole elms is if Parcel Y can be subdivided and a large piece with the elms saved as public space, free from concrete and construction.

If you or your friends want the Gathercole elms to live, please let the Mayor and Council know, and write a letter to the Editor of the StarPhoenix.



Row of six of the Gathercole Elms, 19 September 2009, still there five years after the Gathercole building was demolished



Fundraising Garage Sale

by Rae Hearn

On Saturday September 12th, we had an SOS Elms garage sale at Doug Mitchell and Rae Hearn's home. Precipitated because we did not receive a grant from the provincial government this year, the sale gave our organization a boost both financially and socially. Members were invited to donate suitable items and to drop by, meet with any board members that could be in attendance, and have a cup of coffee and a goodie. It was a beautiful day and we were lucky enough to bring in about \$700. Not bad considering most of our items were priced at less than \$5. Thank you to all who contributed and attended. It was fun, and we had an opportunity to let people know what our group is about. We hope that in the spring we can have another social event that could bring us together and be a bit of fun as well. Perhaps we could plant some trees! Any ideas or offers of assistance, please call Rae at 244-3082. Best wishes for the New Year...



The Curse of My Urban Forest

By Cliff Speer

The urban forest isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Take my place for example. Some well intentioned parks planner of the past planted fast growing hybrid poplars to quickly green up the park next door. The wretched things now tower over my house, blocking out the warming sun, forcing the furnace to run even in the dead of summer. Now this is quite the opposite of what we normally expect of shade trees - to reduce our air conditioning costs, not to increase our heating costs.

Special to the poplars, of course, are root runners that snake across the park, killing the grass and extending their tentacles into my garden. I've had to give up my green thumb aspirations as no veggies can compete with these massive moisture hogs.

The poplars rain down tons of leaves each fall, smothering my yard. But my biggest beef comes in spring when the buds drop their sticky, sap-filled shells everywhere. The sap gets tracked indoors and the shells stick to everything. Not a pretty sight.

Then there are my own apple trees - four of them, attracting worms and dropping rotten apples on my lawn. One is pushing over my fence and after some head scratching, I borrowed a winch and managed to re-position the offending limb with a cable and turnbuckle, all in an effort to avoid traumatic pruning and save my fence from destruction!

The big Manitoba maple in my back yard spreads its limbs over the house begging for constant pruning as it sweeps the grit off the asphalt shingles into the eaves troughs. At the edge of the garden, the Nanking cherries take turns presenting dead stalks for pruning each spring.

Need I mention the chokecherry and saskatoon shrubs that have grown into tall trees and are now dying of old age. Limbing, pruning and cutting firewood for my neighbor's airtight stove has become my annual spring and fall vocation. I have 4 buck saws, 2 pruning saws, 2 pruning loppers, and one chain saw, an invaluable helpmate, which finally gave up the ghost this fall after many years of faithful service.

And don't get me started on the elms - three gigantic suckers that shower a blanket of tiny seeds over house and yard each spring, clogging eaves troughs and sprouting a new miniature forest to take over my lawn. And yet they are so irresistibly beautiful...

And so the question arises: why do I put up with all this abuse from trees? Is it because I am suffering from a pathological codependency with my abusers? Do such afflictions extend to the world of human-tree relationships? I'm loathe to admit it, but if the truth be known - I can't live without my trees!

I'm afraid the curse of my urban forest is deep-rooted and unshakable!

**SOS Elms Coalition Inc.
Board of Directors**

President: Doug Mitchell	244-3082
Vice-President: Linda Moskalyk	934-7156
Treasurer: Cliff Speer	653-5693
Secretary: Rae Hearn	244-3082
Membership: Rae Hearn	244-3082
Web Site: Paddy Tutty	665-0864
Newsletter: Richard Kerbes	653-4209

Members at large:	
Gary Bortolotti	665-3457
Betty Millar	373-2533
Michael Millar	373-2533

This newsletter edited by Richard Kerbes and
Kathy Meeres



YES! I WANT TO JOIN SOS ELMS!

<http://www.soselms.org>

- \$10.00 Annual membership per household
- \$_____ Donation
- \$_____ Total - (tax receipt will be mailed to you)
Money order or cheque enclosed
(Payable to SOS Elms Coalition)
- Yes! I wish to help out as a volunteer



Name _____

E-mail (optional) _____

Address _____

Postal Code _____ Telephone _____

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No town can fail of beauty, though its walks were gutters and its houses hovels, if venerable trees make magnificent colonnades along its streets. ~Henry Ward Beecher, Proverbs, 1887