

# EUGENE CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY



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## Work Session: Leaf Program Informational Update

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Meeting Date: September 16, 2009  
Department: Public Works  
[www.eugene-or.gov](http://www.eugene-or.gov)

Agenda Item: B  
Staff Contact: Jeff Lankston  
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### ISSUE STATEMENT

The council requested this work session to receive information about Eugene's annual leaf program, including a report from staff on what steps are being taken in response to safety concerns related to leaves being piled in bike lanes.

### BACKGROUND

Eugene's leaf program was established in the 1960s. Initially, the program's primary focus was flood prevention. Leaves were removed from the street so they wouldn't clog storm drains. In 1993, the City adopted a Comprehensive Stormwater Management Plan (CSWMP) in response to federal clean water requirements. CSWMP and subsequent National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits included leaf collection as a best management practice because leaves that are washed into local waterways decompose and consume oxygen in the water, a form of pollution called eutrophication. Eugene's current leaf program meets multiple stormwater objectives (preventing flooding and improving water quality).

Eugene is designated as a Tree City USA, in part because its urban forest includes more than 75,000 street trees. These trees shed leaves on the rights-of-way, and under the terms of the City's NPDES permit, a program must be in place to collect these leaves and prevent them from polluting local waterways. In addition, property owners traditionally have been allowed to place leaves into the streets for collection by City crews. The City has established guidelines for residents who choose this service option: only clean leaves are accepted (no sticks or other non-leaf debris), leaves should not be placed in the street until the weekend before the scheduled collection in that neighborhood, and leaves should be placed in a manner that does not obstruct bike or motor vehicle travel lanes. These safety tips have been provided to residents through news articles, television and newspaper advertisements, published brochures and on the internet. Many residents and commercial landscapers comply with the guidelines; some do not.

Over the past 10 years, program information materials also have urged residents to consider alternatives to placing leaves in the street. These materials emphasize the benefits of composting or mulching with leaves and alternative methods of leaf disposal, including giving them to neighbors or taking them to a recycling company such as Rexius or Lane Forest Products. Some residents have changed their habits in response to these suggestions. Overall, however, on-street leaf volumes have remained at a fairly constant level of about 16,000 cubic yards of leaves per year.

Eugene's current leaf program runs for three months of the year (November through January). Each season, leaves are collected twice on more than 470 centerline miles of improved streets, including approximately 66 miles of streets with curbside bike lanes adjacent to several thousand homes and businesses. More than 8,000 curb-miles of streets are swept annually in support of the leaf program. About 80% of collected leaves are delivered to residents and community gardens, and the rest are recycled by the City; no leaf material goes to landfill. Eighty-five percent of residents are aware of the leaf program, according to a stormwater survey conducted in May 2009.

### **Trends in the Program**

Three trends related to Eugene's leaf program are worth noting in this report:

- Leaf volumes are likely to increase in the future. This is due in part to successful efforts to plant street trees (through volunteer programs such as NeighborWoods and through subdivision development codes). At the same time, Eugene's urban forest and leaf canopy is maturing.
- Stormwater infrastructure and stormwater regulatory requirements continue to increase. The Public Works Department currently maintains 14,000 catch basins as part of the City's flood drainage system, and the number is increasing as development occurs. The seasonal leaf program is an integral part of the success Eugene has had in managing the system and eliminating major flooding incidents within the city. On the regulatory side, NPDES water quality requirements continue to become more stringent. To date, Eugene's leaf program has allowed the City to remain in compliance with those portions of the permit related to leaf pollution.
- The number of cyclists and on-street cycling facilities are increasing. Eugene currently has 113 centerline miles of designated bicycle routes and on-street bike lanes, including approximately 66 miles of curbside bike lanes. While there are no statistical data on bike crashes related to leaves in the street, there are reasonable concerns about debris/leaves forcing bicyclists into motorized vehicle travel lanes (particularly on streets with higher traffic volumes and speeds). These potential safety issues are compounded in the darker winter months when visibility is decreased. These factors have led the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) and other cycling advocacy groups such as Greater Eugene Area Riders (GEARS) to recommend actions to improve cycling safety.

### **Financial Considerations**

Funding for Eugene's leaf program comes primarily from stormwater user fees. The program costs about \$400,000 a year to operate, including 6,500 person hours, equipment, and recycling fees. This does not include the cost of street sweeping, which provides multiple benefits to the stormwater program and, therefore, is not considered exclusively a leaf program expense.

### **Enforcement Considerations**

The Eugene Code does not specifically mention the disposal of leaves in the street. However, several sections of the Eugene Code could be interpreted as pertaining to leaf disposal. Chapter 5, Section 130, addresses the safety concern expressed by some cyclists:

Obstructing Streets. (1) Except as authorized by the City and in a manner prescribed by the City and except as provided in section 4.855, no person shall obstruct the free movement of vehicles or pedestrians using the streets.

Similar references to public safety and freedom from obstructions can be found in chapters 4 and 6 of the code. Chapter 6 makes it clear that "(t)he person responsible shall be liable for injury, damage or loss to

person or property caused by the negligent failure to abate any nuisance described in this code.” Chapter 6 also provides a nuisance abatement process that includes a noticing requirement, a period of time for the nuisance to be dealt with by the property owner, and the steps the City must follow if it wishes to abate a nuisance and bill the property owner. Because of the amount of time required for this process and the lack of staff resources to actively enforce nuisance abatement related to leaves in the street, the Public Works Department traditionally has cleaned up piles of leaves that are blocking bike or motor vehicle travel lanes as soon as possible after a complaint is received.

### **Operational Enhancements**

For the past several years, the Public Works Department has deployed additional equipment and staff to clear obstructions in bike lanes. In 2009, the Public Works Department has proposed the following operational enhancements:

- Assign a night shift priority to sweeping and maintaining bike lanes on arterials and collectors.
- Add a senior maintenance worker to the day shift with a major focus on bike lane maintenance.
- Prioritize bike lane leaf pickup based on a list of problem areas reported by bicycle riders/groups.
- Develop a “Leaf Season Priority Bike Lane Route Map” that would identify main corridors on which to concentrate leaf pickup efforts.
- Purchase an additional leaf vacuum at a cost of approximately \$25,000 and assign an additional dump truck and a two-person seasonal crew to the leaf pickup program. The additional vacuum equipment would concentrate on leaf pickup on priority bike lane routes.
- Do not promote piling leaves in bike lanes. A diagram that previously had been used to show how to windrow leaves in bike lanes has been removed. Messages from Public Works will include the statement “Please do not pile leaves in bike lanes – it’s not safe!”
- Make it easier for residents, including cyclists, to report leaves in bike lanes. An online “leaf reporter,” similar to the online “pothole reporter,” will be operational by mid-October.
- Create a website where citizens can view a map showing where and when collections crews have been on designated bike routes. This service will help cyclists plan their routes on any given day.

### **Timing**

The 2009 program is scheduled to begin in early November. Public Works staff will continue to work with BPAC and other cycling groups to refine the priority bike route map. Prior to the start of the 2009 leaf program, Public Works will prepare and distribute information consistent with the proposed operational enhancements cited above.

### **RELATED COUNCIL GOALS AND POLICIES**

- The council’s Sustainability Initiative encourages broad sustainable practices. The leaf program promotes sustainability by keeping leaves out of the landfill, delivering leaves to residents and keeping waterways clean and healthy. Operational enhancements will further improve cycling safety, in keeping with the sustainable objectives of alternate modes of transportation.
- Eugene’s Pedestrian and Bicycle Strategic Plan seeks to “(r)e-examine and consider making changes to City’s leaf disposal program.” Through community conversations and opportunities such as this council work session, the Public Works Department is constantly re-examining the leaf program and making adaptive management changes such the operational enhancements proposed for 2009.

- Eugene's environmental policies include an NPDES permit commitment to conduct annual curbside pickup of leaves on all City streets to prevent plugging catch basins or leaves being discharged into local receiving waters.

### **COUNCIL OPTIONS**

This work session is being provided to the council as an informational item, and no action is requested.

### **CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION**

This work session is being provided to the council as an informational item. The City Manager is not recommending any policy changes at this time.

### **SUGGESTED MOTIONS**

This work session is being provided to the council as an informational item, and no action is requested.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

None.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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