

RE: PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF PUBLIC TREES
SUBJ: NYC SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY FURTHER IMPACTS RARE WYCH
ELM IN DOWNTOWN FLUSHING

Tuesday, July 15, 2008

A full year has passed since **Councilman John Liu** and **Assemblywoman Ellen Young** sponsored a Tree Rally at the Board of Education site for the New Early Childhood Development School, PS 244 on Franklin Avenue, Flushing (Times Ledger July 12, 2007: Liu Rallies to Save Elm Tree). Following the blatant removal of the publicly owned 100-year old large canopied European Copperleaf Beech of this former estate (Spring 2007), concerned citizens and the local reporters rallied at this **BOE School Construction Authority (SCA)** project urging the SCA to fully protect another large heritage tree at this school site- the **rare Wych Elm** (*Ulmus glabra*) that inhabits a curbside tree pit.

In their reply to the rally, the **SCA Community and Government Relations Officer Deborah Perry** as well as **SCA representative William Bridgemohan** assured the community that the SCA project had no intention of negatively impact this street tree and would provide the protection needed.

The concern for the health of this rare tree has been the damage that occurs upon an unprotected wide-spreading root zone in the presence of construction. Large shade trees and their tree roots rarely survive the repeated impacts by heavy equipment that compact soils, suffocate and/or mutilate tree roots. With proper planning and professional input such construction impacts could easily be avoided. However without a NYC DPR Forestry mandated **Tree and Landscape Protection Plan** for this tree root protection has been left to novice and indifferent SCA engineers and their contractors who are clueless about tree protection. As we well know, the aboveground wooden protection fence around a tree trunk is only a diversion to the more important protection requirements for extensive below-ground roots.

The drumbeat for public construction projects across our community in the presence of valuable and often irreplaceable public trees continues unimpeded to the detriment of those trees. Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe who has jurisdiction over curbside city trees has stated that the **protection of urban trees** is taken with the utmost seriousness. More recently in the Daily News, Mayor Bloomberg described his "**New Steps Forward for a Greener, Greater City**"- identifying trees as a means to fight global warming, filter air-pollutants, beautify parks and improve the general quality of life. Yet as observed at this SCA project, the protection of valuable urban trees in a greener, greater city is still business as usual- Construction first, Ribbon Cutting and Accolades second and Worry about the Damn Trees Later. Many should find this absolutely appalling.

It is very clear that until enforceable laws are enacted that fully protect public trees, **rouge municipal agencies and their representatives** such as the NYC SCA will continue with their indifference during construction projects inhabited by large trees. I and others urge the citizenry, our elected officials and others to take immediate action against the SCA menace (and other agencies) who lie about protecting vital public trees and then proceed with their destruction.

The photos reveal:



Concrete sidewalk adjacent to the Wych Elm has been recently removed exposing unprotected root inhabited soils to the damaging effects of construction operations (7/2008).



The former location of the European Copperleaf Beech (the hole in the foreground) and the rare Wych Elm to the rear of the photo (6/2007).

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