



Issues Brief

City of Yakima e-Newsletter

✦ Yakima Seeking "Tree City USA" Status

Ellensburg was the first, and Yakima hopes to be the next, Tree City USA community in Washington State. The Yakima City Council has endorsed the idea and the application process to earn the special recognition is underway.

Yakima officials are optimistic that the City can meet the necessary requirements to become a Tree City USA community. Those standards include establishing an arborist position to oversee a Tree Care Board, adopting a tree care ordinance, spending at least \$2.00 per capita annually on trees, and holding an annual Arbor Day celebration.

Yakima already has an arborist on staff, is spending nearly \$5.50 per capita annual on trees, and the Yakima Arboretum holds an annual Arbor Day observance. City staff is now in the process of developing a tree care ordinance, which will include establishment of a Tree Care Board.

The new tree standards would only apply to public property, but it's hoped the effort will encourage private property owners to take more interest in tree care.

The environmental benefits of healthy trees are many, including cleaner air, reducing energy costs, improving stormwater management and better erosion control. Trees also can improve community pride, boost property values and even help reduce crime.

But, planting the wrong type of trees or the lack of proper maintenance can result in damaged sidewalks, safety concerns and the need to remove dead or dying trees.

The Tree City USA program is sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources Urban and Community Forestry Program.

There are more than 3,400 Tree City USA communities across the nation, with 88 located in Washington State. Ellensburg was the first for the Evergreen State in 1983 and Yakima hopes to join the list in 2017.



Many Yakima streets are lined with beautiful, mature trees that add to the ambience of neighborhoods. The City of Yakima is pursuing "Tree City USA" status to help illustrate its commitment to preserving trees.

✦ Another Irrigation Season Coming to an End on October 14th

When the first white pioneers arrived in the Yakima Valley in the mid 1800s, what they saw was an endless expanse of high desert. Sagebrush, bunchgrass, and thistle dominated the landscape. Shafts of ancient basalt sprang from soil that was a mix of volcanic ash and glacial deposits.

At first, the land in the Yakima Valley seemed best suited for raising cattle and other livestock. In fact, that is exactly how most early settlers scratched out an existence . growing herds of not just cattle but sheep, goats, chicken, etc.

But while those who trekked west to the Yakima Valley to make a new home saw terrain mostly consisting of various shades of brown, they also saw great potential. They believed the soil in the area was perfectly suited to create an agricultural mecca that could rival those found anywhere else in the U.S. or, for that matter, the world. To accomplish that lofty goal, our ancestors needed one crucial ingredient . water.

The earliest known experiment with irrigation in the Yakima Valley is believed to have taken place in 1864 when water was diverted from Ahtanum Creek to help grow a few acres of crops for the Catholic mission nearby. After achieving some success, private canal companies began to form to bring water to more and more land. But the late 1800s, irrigation had proven its worth in unlocking the agricultural bounty of the Yakima Valley.



This undated photograph shows ongoing construction of an early irrigation canal in the Yakima Valley. Today, water is delivered by such canals to more than 460,000 acres of land in the region. Irrigation has been the key to making the Yakima Valley one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world.

After a few years of lobbying the federal government, leaders from the Yakima Valley convinced Congress to study, and ultimately begin to build in 1905, a network of canals and other delivery system to turn the region into what its earliest settlers had envisioned . an agricultural powerhouse.

Over the many decades that followed, irrigation systems in the Yakima area were expanded and refined. Today, the irrigated lands within what came to be known as the Yakima Project total more than 460,000 acres, including lawns and gardens in the city of Yakima.

Friday, October 14th marks the end of another irrigation season for the vast majority of the residential and business customers served by the City

of Yakima's irrigation system. That's the day that the system operated by the City's Water/Irrigation Division will be shut off until next spring.

The few other irrigation system in the area that operate independently from City systems will also be shutting down over the next few weeks.

The City's Water & Irrigation Division encourages customers to go through the process of winterizing their own irrigation systems before the water stops flowing on October 14th.

The City of Yakima has operated irrigation systems since the early 1900s. The system that now exists to deliver water to customers in Yakima actually consists of 66 individual, smaller systems that were consolidated almost 20 years ago into a single utility. Through that utility, the City currently provides water to about 11,000 customers.

Changes Made as Homeless Encampment Population Grows

Since a homeless encampment was moved from its original location near 6th Street and Chestnut Avenue in mid-July to City of Yakima-owned property adjacent to 3rd Street and Walnut Street, the number of people staying there has grown from about 30 to about 80 or more on any given day.

In response to that growth, the City of Yakima has taken several steps, in cooperation with local non-profit service providers, to best meet the basic needs and ensure the safety of people staying in the encampment.

More portable toilets were brought in a few weeks after the encampment was moved to its current location and larger dumpsters were placed at the site. Recently, rules governing behavior at the encampment were stiffened.

With the assistance of non-profit service providers and in cooperation with the City, the original group of people staying at the encampment created a set of rules. However, as the number of people staying at the encampment grew, some people staying there weren't specifically aware of the rules while others were not following them.

Earlier this month, the original rules were updated and strengthened. The revised rules include a requirement that anyone staying at the encampment must register with the City and that all of their belongings, including tents or other shelters, must fit within a single stall assigned to each person staying at the encampment. The revised rules also require any pets to be leashed at all times, establish quiet hours between 11:00 pm and 6:00 am, do not allow anyone under the age of 18 in the encampment, and prohibit the use of drugs or alcohol, violent behavior, or any illegal activity in the encampment.

The revised rules also include a statement that the encampment will close on November 15th and that, "the City reserves the right to dismantle the camp at any time if it deems it necessary or appropriate."

Efforts are continuing to finding housing for some of the people now staying in the encampment. Using grant funding from the Yakima Valley Conference of Governments, Yakima Neighborhood Health Services ("YNHS") is operating a "master lease" program that YNHS ultimately expects to provide housing for up to about 30 people from the encampment.

The City is also actively working with other local non-profits to identify additional housing options that may be available.

Additionally, the City has provided information aimed at encouraging community members interested in making donations of food, clothing, water, etc. to appropriate sites rather than at the encampment itself. To ensure that donations are properly sorted and distributed, they should only be dropped off at YNHS' The Depot (602 E. Yakima Avenue), the Salvation Army (9 S. 6th Avenue), the Union Gospel Mission (1300 N. 1st Street), or Rod's House (200 S. Naches) so they can be sorted and properly distributed.



The City of Yakima, along with local non-profit service providers, have taken several steps to ensure the basic needs of people staying in a homeless encampment meet and that they are safe.