

# *St. John's Episcopal Church*

415 South Lexington Street Arlington, Virginia 22204

January 28, 2019

Julie Lee  
President  
Glencarlyn Citizens' Association

Dear Ms. Lee

I would like to start off with an apology on behalf of St. John's for creating a significant level of concern in the Glencarlyn neighborhood as a result of our cutting back of the oak tree near the intersection of Lexington and 4th St. S. on Friday, January 25. As a good neighbor in Glencarlyn, when we reached the decision to have it removed last month, we should have let the community know what was planned.

St. John's has valued this large oak tree as part of the canopy over our grounds for many decades. However, over the years, its health has deteriorated. During the past couple of years, we have had several concerns raised by neighbors about the condition of the tree and the likelihood of large limbs or the tree falling and causing injury or creating damage to homes or power lines. These concerns were magnified by the violent windstorm experienced in Arlington last spring and other major storms in the past year. Given our fondness for the tree, we really didn't want to do anything, but in response to the concerns raised, both from the perspective of our church's liability and being a good neighbor, we undertook steps to assess and address this risk.

What we clearly missed doing during our discussions was verifying the exact location of the tree. Everyone involved in discussing the condition of the tree had always assumed that it was on St. John's property.

The letter which we sent to the county staff today by email is below. It explains in more detail the process leading up to the work being done on the tree. We will work with them to address any additional actions which they would like us to do.

Thank you and the residents of Glencarlyn for your interest in working to keep our community a wonderful place to live.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ann Barker", with a small cross-like mark at the end of the line.

Rev. Ann Barker  
Rector

# *St. John's Episcopal Church*

415 South Lexington Street Arlington, Virginia 22204

January 28, 2019

Vincent Verweij  
Acting Urban Forest Manager

Alonso Abugattas  
Natural Resources Manager  
Department of Parks and Recreation

Dear Sirs:

This letter is to address the issue of the cutting back of the twin stem pin oak tree at St. John's Episcopal Church near the intersection of Lexington and 4th St. S. on Friday, January 25. We want to start off with an apology for our error in taking action without fully researching the location of the tree.

St. John's has valued this large oak tree as part of the canopy over our grounds for many decades. We recognize that it is one of the tallest in the neighborhood and was an important part of the tree canopy in Glencarlyn. However, over the years, its health has deteriorated. During the past couple of years, we have had several concerns raised by neighbors about the condition of the tree and the likelihood of large limbs or the tree falling and causing injury or creating damage to homes or power lines. These concerns were magnified by the violent windstorm experienced in Arlington last spring and other major storms in the past year. Given our fondness for the tree, we really didn't want to do anything, but in response to the concerns raised, both from the perspective of our church's liability and being a good neighbor, we had arborists examine the tree to determine its health. They reported the following.

## **Bartlett Tree Service**

Written Assessment of the twin stem pin oak on May 30, 2018

This tree is dying and has a large hollow are (sic) in the main stem.

Pruning will help reduce the risk of falling debris.

Verbal Assessment on a subsequent visit in late December 2018

The tree was dying and rotting from the inside. Recommend removal.

## **J.L. Tree Service**

Assessment of pin oak on December 7, 2018

Significant die back/decay - Recommend Removal

One of the members of our congregation who had been very strongly opposed to removal was satisfied that the recommendation to remove the tree was the right one.

Based on these recommendations, we determined it was in the best interest to remove the tree, even though we are operating on an extremely tight budget. We sought quotes from contractors for prices substantially lower than the ones given by those had done the assessments during the fall and winter of 2018/2019 and selected one to do the work. We understand from some neighbors that the crew may not have been as professional as they could have been.

What we clearly missed doing during our discussions was verifying the exact location of the tree. Everyone involved in discussing the condition of the tree had always assumed that it was on St. John's property. Prior to the upgrade of 4th street several years ago, which included installing a sidewalk on the north side and concrete curbs on both sides, the tree was farther from the road bed. Unfortunately, the long-held notion that the tree was St. John's continued during our discussions of what should be done with the tree. If we had thoughtfully looked at the size of the curb bump out for the tree, it should have triggered a reassessment of our thinking.

After concerns were raised on Friday, January 25 by Glencarlyn residents, we examined the location of the tree. Looking at the county's interactive map of the property lines with an aerial image overlay, it appears that a significant portion of the tree is on county property.

If St. John's had even the slightest idea that any part of the tree was on county land, we would have asked the county to take responsibility for the tree maintenance and the responsibility of the risk to the neighbors. This would have saved St. John's several thousand dollars of extremely tight resources.

We hope that this letter explains that although we exercised due diligence in the assessment of the condition of the tree before reluctantly deciding on its removal, we incorrectly relied on a long-held assumption of our ownership and responsibility. We understand that one of your staff visited the site while the crew was cutting the tree back on January 25 and stopped the work. Given that, we are planning no additional work on the tree. The crew chief of the tree company indicated that there are a several branches which will leaf this spring.

Again, our apologies for our error. We would like to work with you to do whatever we can to help maintain a healthy tree canopy in the Glencarlyn community.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Ann B. Barker", followed by a small plus sign.

Rev. Ann Barker  
Rector