

**A Tree's Worth**  
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I guess I'm what you'd call a 'tree hugger'. But I didn't always used to be that way. There was a time I rarely even noticed trees unless I was looking for a shady spot to escape the heat of the summer sun. So I understand how people can take them for granted. But then I began to have a deeper appreciation for nature itself and the cycle of life that we're all connected to. I became aware of the value of trees and all they do for us. I noticed the beautiful chartreuse color of the leaves when they first emerged in the spring. I noticed the sound of the wind passing through their leaves on a summer's day. And I realized how similar they are to us. How they eat, drink, breathe and even 'sleep'. How they grow, adapt, heal, and even how they die. But when they don't die a natural death but instead are removed as a result of human decision making, we 'tree huggers' always ask ourselves, "was the decision made thoroughly or hastily?" Do the decision makers realize all the benefits of the trees they're taking down? How many of their abundant benefits could *you* list if you were asked? How much would *you* say a tree is worth? The answer to these questions might depend on what perspective you're looking at it from.

If you're a homeowner, you might value your trees for the money they save you in heating and cooling costs, the increase in your property value, the screening they provide between you and your neighbor or the shade they cast for your summer party guests.

If you're a 'health nut' or a naturalist, you might relish the fact that they clean the air by absorbing odors and pollution, and provide protection against cancer-causing UV rays. You might enjoy trees for the homes they provide for the birds you love to watch and that eat all those pesky insects, or just because of their beauty.

From a city's perspective, the benefits are almost too numerous to list. Trees slow down traffic, provide shade relief from concrete, glass, brick and asphalt, give people a sense of community and connectedness, add beauty to parks, reduce violence and crime and increase retail sales, just to name a few.

Trees provide us with food like avacados, apples and almonds. We rely on them for building materials for houses, decks and chairs, and everyday essentials from toothpicks to tables.

But the biggest benefactor of trees is our planet itself, where their value is truly immeasurable. They improve soil by adding organic matter from dropped leaves and dead roots, making them an integral part of the soil food web. They prevent water pollution and soil erosion and increase atmospheric moisture. Trees combat climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), removing and storing the carbon while releasing the oxygen back into the air. And remember that cycle of life I mentioned? Well, we literally could not live without trees; they produce the very oxygen we need to survive. One acre of mature trees produces enough oxygen for 18 people annually. And this is just a fraction of all the benefits trees provide.

Recently, amid much controversy, 11 acres of woodland in Buffalo was clear-cut to prepare the sight for solar panels. And, it seems, the next set of trees on the chopping block

are five to six large, mature oak trees in Settler's Park in Hanover. The trees are being removed to make room for a ball field that would accommodate 16U leagues and although most folks are not against the addition of a field, they *are* asking themselves and the city council, "why this location" *and* "at what cost?" This project is moving forward but also not without controversy as the Hanover City Council decided the Settler's Park redesign wasn't deemed important enough for a public hearing and many Hanover residents are just now becoming aware of this tremendous loss to Settler's Park. These trees have lived in Hanover before the city even existed and, in fact, this park was built in its current location because of these trees. Currently, under their dense canopy of dark, glossy green leaves, people enjoy their presence during family reunions, children's story-time, Girl Scout camps and much more. *Many* residents believe they should remain standing simply for their historic value to the city, much like Hanover's historic bridge.

Also of note is the fact that the only other trees in this area of Settler's Park are green ash which, unless human intelligence and a miracle of nature collide, will eventually succumb to the relentless emerald ash borer, currently found in 12 Minnesota counties (the closest location to these parts being the east side of Medicine Lake in Plymouth). How ironic it would be to willingly remove these trees, lose the rest to a voracious insect, then be left with a treeless park that was built around the very trees that are now gone forever.

Not many mature oak stands remain in Minnesota to quietly whisper of their history or for our children to stand in awe of. The saving grace in the Settler's Park oaks story is that six 135-185 year old oak trees will be left, and *hopefully* survive, to eat, drink and breathe another day, to lavish on us their countless benefits and beauty, and to remain as a landmark in the history of 'The Little City on the Crow River'.

So what do you think? Are trees as dispensable as you once thought? I hope not. But *I'm* still concerned. I'm concerned that kids are growing up these days without an appreciation not only for trees but for nature itself. For the amazing renewal and cycle of life that exists in every living thing. The connection of one living thing to another, and another, including us. Our connection to the earth, to the soil, to the sun. Who's teaching our children to respect nature and that we have been entrusted in the care of this planet, everything in it and on it. If not us, then who?