

COLLINS VIEW article in SW News - October 2021

Tree Canopies and Heat Islands

Since Collins View emerged from this summer only a little scorched compared to other parts of the city, it's timely to talk about equity, esthetics, the quality of life, health and the increased density Residential Infill Project (RIP) push.

On June 28, PSU Professor Dr. Vivek Shandas measured the pavement at the intersection of Southeast Woodstock Boulevard and 92nd Avenue. It registered 180°, the air temperature 124°. [\[LINK\]](#). This is a heat island. Collins View, with its abundant contiguous tree cover, measured highs of 113° that day, 96° on July 29, 106° on Aug 12. Tree cover made the difference.

West of the Willamette River, 46% of the city has a tree canopy. East of the river, where 80% of Portlanders live, 20% is canopied. More people died from the June 2021 heat wave in Multnomah County than died from heat in the entire state of Oregon in the past 20 years. — July 2021 report

“Equity” does not mean accommodating to the lowest common denominator of health and quality of life. “Equity” does not mean having heat islands in our neighborhoods.

BUT: Tree demolitions - permitted or not - to enable more residential units on a piece of land is a persistent problem in Collins View and throughout southwest neighborhoods. In 2016, the Portland City Council passed an exemption for affordable housing developers to forgo paying the tree-whacking fee. New development replanting regulations achieve a fraction of the target canopy levels. Where is the equity in the equation that people living in low-income housing don't deserve the same health, quality of life and esthetics that tree and green cover provide?

SO:

- Designate “Heat Island” characteristics, like reduced tree canopies and reduced green cover, as unacceptable tactics in the RIP program.
- Prioritize and re-emphasize tree cover in the RIP process.
- Reframe the divisive accusations of neighborhoods’ “Entitlement” and “NIMBY” to become a conversation about residents stepping up to protect and improve equity and the quality of life and health for all who choose to live in Portland.

— Submitted by M. Read