

Tree removal plan for Baltimore Grand Prix criticized

by Christian Schaffer, *ABC2News.com*, August 2, 2011

Preparations for the Baltimore Grand Prix this Labor Day weekend are causing some controversy. A report published this week stated that 136 trees were being removed or replaced along the race route. This week, to make room for the grandstand that will overlook start / finish line on Pratt Street, several trees were removed from the plaza behind the Federal Courthouse.

But city officials say the tree removal process has actually been going on for more than a year -- they also say it involves a lot fewer trees than was originally reported.

Still, people who don't want to see the loss of those trees downtown are getting organized. "I think that there was a lot of decisions made behind closed doors, without the benefit of public input, that would have been better decisions if there had been more public scrutiny and discussion," said David Troy, who started an on-line petition, trying to stop the removal of any more trees. "We really just need more trees in our downtown to create a more livable, more human kind of city and I think that's the kind of city that people want in Baltimore."

Councilman William Cole -- who's been a strong supporter of the Grand Prix plan -- says the actual number of trees being removed or relocated is fewer than 50. He also says the process has been going on for years.

"Tree removal on Pratt Street started several years ago, long before the Grand Prix when they started taking down berms to make Pratt Street more pedestrian-friendly," said the Councilman, a Democrat who represents the City's 11th District, which encompasses many downtown neighborhoods.

Councilman Cole says many of the trees have been moved to other locations downtown, and others will be replaced by trees in large planters -- so they can be moved for the next four years of scheduled Grand Prix races.

"The net result is going to be more trees downtown not less and that was the goal all along," he said.

David Troy says he's not opposed to the Grand Prix -- but he says regardless of the numbers, there's no replacement for mature trees lining Baltimore's signature downtown street. "I think the thing that disturbs me the most is the idea of looking at a bunch of trees in planters. That's not the kind of city that I want to look in that looks temporary it looks makeshift," he said.

Councilman Cole said the city's sustainability coordinator has endorsed the tree relocation plan.

As of Tuesday night, David Troy's petition had more than 350 on-line signatures.