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Group asks businesses to give trees a chance

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Like a lot of Detroit retailers, Dillon Antoin likes the idea of trees being planted up and down the street to beautify his district. He just doesn't want any planted right in front of his store.

"Sitting right in front of my building, when a tree grows, it's going to cover my building," Antoin, a partner in the Metro PCS Unlimited Wireless store at 7301 E. Jefferson, said last week. Trees, he said, will block his signs and deter potential customers from finding his shop.

Shopkeeper resistance has created some unexpected angst as the nonprofit Greening of Detroit organization embarks on one of its most ambitious beautification drives in its 20-year history. Beginning last Saturday, Greening of Detroit began planting 540 shade trees along East Jefferson Avenue from downtown Detroit to the Grosse Pointe Park border.

The plantings, done by Greening staff and dozens of volunteers, will continue on coming Saturdays and be finished next spring.

Paul Bairley, head of urban forestry programs for Greening of Detroit, said shopkeepers often object to trees being planted in front of their stores out of fear their business will suffer. He called such concerns short-sighted.

"They just don't understand the true positive value of trees in noise abatement and cooling effects and property value improvements and oxygen production," he said. "All these things make their businesses more attractive and retain and attract residents in the first place."

Not long ago, an unknown person cut down several mature trees along East Jefferson near Newport, a few blocks from Alter Road. Nobody was caught, but a local party store owner agreed to replant other trees in their place.

Bairley's advice to shopkeepers: "Try to be patient with trees blocking your signs for a few years. We can prune to try to alleviate that, but try to be accepting of these trees and give them a chance."

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