



## *The Right Tree in The Right Place... at the Right Time*

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2011 November 9

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The beautiful new Alamosa City Complex is open for business and city personnel are settling in. Outside, a fair amount of landscaping is in. Does planting trees and shrubs during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of October in Alamosa seem absurd to you? It did to the Alamosa Tree Board.

In August, the tree board requested planting be postponed until spring of 2012. Apparently due to contractual obligations, the trees needed to be planted this fall, according to City Manager Nathan Cherpeski. He did add that they come with a year warranty.

The landscapers swooped into Alamosa on Monday, Oct. 17, and “mobilized out for the year on October 21,” responded Cherpeski in an email. As Chairwoman of the Tree Board I was invited to inspect the trees and shrubs before they were planted. Unfortunately, I was driving home from California and missed the opportunity but was pleased to be included. Not all of the 63 trees were planted in October. The landscapers are scheduled to return in late February or early March. So why couldn't all the landscaping be done then?

The landscaping plan for the City Complex wasn't a last minute afterthought. I reviewed the original landscaping plan in February 2010 and made several recommendations which were incorporated into the final plan.

For example, White Locust (*robinia pseudoacacia*) were plotted in parking areas. While they are tolerant of salt and heat and can perform well in dry soils they have THORNS. They were replaced with people friendly Autumn Purple Ash and Bur Oak.

Further, the first plan had a row of 7 Locusts. In this day and age I don't think any professional arborists would plant 7 trees of the same species in a row. There at least two good reasons. 1) Planting a lot of trees of the same species near one another greatly increases the possibility of a disease or insect wiping them all out, and 2) planting a lot of trees of one species at the same time means they will all need to be replaced at the same time. Species diversity and future succession planting considerations are highly recommended.

The original tree palette had only 6 species while the final had a healthier mix of 10 species. I suggested replacing Southwest White Pine (I've never seen one in the San Luis Valley) with native Ponderosa Pine. And while Aspens are native to our area you need to be very careful where you place them. An Aspen wants to be a grove and is not suitable for a small bed by a building as originally planned. Besides their

tendency to sucker rampantly, they are affected by numerous insects and diseases according to Colorado State University Extension. This tree is short lived in the urban landscape according to them and I agree.

The latest landscaping plan only left Aspens in the circle bed in front of the complex. Looked good on paper, but the plan didn't show the flagpoles! Cherpeski had the Aspens moved to an area that will have bark mulch as ground cover. That might be OK. Unfortunately, the roving Aspen trees were planted with their wire baskets and burlap intact, according to Salomon Archuleta of the Alamosa Parks Department. During proper planting the burlap and wire needs to be carefully cut away from the root ball sides and top so the roots can spread. Remember, tree roots are mostly in the top 18 – 24 inches of soil.

The landscaping plan seems to omit building features such as eaves and roofing specifics. Two Canada Red Chokecherries are planted on the north side of the building just at the edge of the eaves and under roof edges where ice and snow (should we have any) will slide on top of them. Doesn't sound healthy for life and limb. Chances are the trees will survive the 1-year warranty period, but they won't thrive in their current location.

There a few empty holes around the complex waiting for trees. Hopefully, the holes will be enlarged before the new trees are planted. Holes should be a minimum of 2 times the diameter of the root ball. I'll try to be onsite this spring when the landscapers return.

What's the take home message from this? When considering tree planting think carefully about tree location in relation to nearby buildings. Consider how the tiny new tree will look in 20 or 60 years hence. Different species have differing mature sizes. And consider planting trees in Alamosa earlier in the season! For more information on Alamosa tree planting and care, visit [AlamosaTrees.net](http://AlamosaTrees.net).

*"To exist as a nation, to prosper as a state, and to live as a people, we must have trees."* Theodore Roosevelt