City of Birmingham
A Walkable Community

MEMORANDUM

Department of Public Services

DATE: **October 16, 2014**

TO: **Joseph A. Valentine, City Manager**

FROM: **Lauren A. Wood, Director of Public Services**

SUBJECT: **Staff Report – Holiday Tree Status Update**

This serves as an update since the September 24, 2014 staff report on the progress with the tree. The goal during the evaluation and research this year is to attempt reduce the nuisance tripping of the GFCI outlet, due to wet or moist conditions. In the ongoing effort to find the best way to keep the tree on as long as possible every day from mid-November through mid-February, several modifications have been made to the tree.

The modifications made have all been in an effort to keep the tree as dry as possible for as long as possible; otherwise, as a safety measure the GFCI outlet turns the power off to the tree during wet weather. We have re-wired new lights onto the tree in order to reduce the total number of outlets from roughly 300 down to about 20 outlets. This will significantly reduce the areas for which water can enter the electrical components on the tree. Also, we will be applying a special waterproof spray to the connections to further reduce the chances of moisture getting in the wiring. The GFCI serves as a safety mechanism, so despite all of the efforts to maximize the chances of the tree staying on, outages cannot be eliminated.

There is no way to override the GFCI; it is doing what it is supposed to do. It is not the fault of the tree. Once the wiring gets wet, it will shut off until it dries out.

In addition, all of the tests and modifications made to the tree, these have been vetted with other City departments for brainstorming purposes. Also, the work plan was presented to the Principal Shopping District Maintenance Committee and they agreed with the action plan.

DPS staff has had discussions with two representatives from the Cincinnati Zoo, who also have 35' Giant Everest Tree from the same manufacturer. The tree is a very big deal for them and they; too, have a tree lighting ceremony. In fact, they are on their second tree from the same vendor. They are very happy with the tree. They have made some modifications as well to the tree. However, they now are no longer using a GFCI outlet. It is not a requirement under certain conditions. The location of our tree requires the use of a GFCI outlet.