



SUBCOMMITTEE AGENDA REPORT

City Council

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SUBJECT:

COUNCIL TREE SUBCOMMITTEE INFORMATIONAL REPORT

There are three primary documents which provide guidance to the City's management of its Urban Forest. Chapter 15.02 of the Encinitas Municipal Code contains the Municipal Tree Ordinance (2011-04), a copy of which is included as Attachment 1. The City Council also adopted a Council Policy (No. C027), titled "Urban Forest Management Program". This Policy contains: A Policy Statement; Urban Forest definitions; the Goals of the Urban Forest Management Program; Methods to be used in managing the Urban Forest; Requirements to Develop an Administrative Manual Procedure; Trees of Community Significance; and, a "Tree City USA" requirement. The Policy is included as Attachment 2. The third primary document used is the Urban Forest Management Program Administrative Manual Procedures, which is one of the requirements of the Council Policy discussed above. This Manual is intended to be the staff's "How To" manual to implement the Council's Policy. The Manual was last updated in February 2012 and is in the process of being updated. The latest update has temporarily been placed on hold pending the results of the Council Tree Subcommittee recommendations. The Manual is included as Attachment 3.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Council Subcommittee with information regarding the City's practices and programs regarding the maintenance of trees for which the City is responsible. The maintenance of trees is a complex issue which currently involves numerous departments and personnel throughout the City. In addition to the field maintenance issues, which are managed by the Public Works and Parks & Recreation Departments, other tree-related issues involve the Engineering, Planning & Building and the Information Technology Departments as well as other departments in the City organization. The intent of the report is to detail the current practices regarding tree maintenance and is divided into functional areas to describe the issues and practices associated with those areas. Within the report are consolidated sections indicating what practices work well and where improvements to the current practices have been identified.

PUBLIC WORKS

A. Background:

The Department is responsible for maintaining trees in the street right-of-way, except for trees in landscaped medians and streetscapes, which are maintained by the Park and Recreation Department.

In 1988, Golden Coast Environmental Services, Inc. provided the City a Street Tree Management Plan. The goals of the plan were to develop an effective tree maintenance program and to provide options to minimize costs. The project included the first inventory of street trees in the City.

In 2003, the City contracted with West Coast Arborists, Inc. to provide an updated street tree plan. The objective was to review and improve the existing program and provide a planting/replanting "master plan," and establish a street tree palette.

In 2007, a second major effort was conducted to inventory street trees using GPS to more accurately account for the inventory.

In 2013, the City initiated another update to the Street Tree Master Plan. The goal of this effort was to evaluate the current program, document the City's street tree urban forest resources and identify goals for preservation, enhancement and restoration.

B. Current Program:

The Department is responsible for maintaining approximately 9,600 trees. The majority of work is performed by contract. The work consists of routine pruning, planting, removal, stump grinding, inventorying, and arborist report services. City forces perform minor tree related work such as trimming for view obstruction, planting, and removal of small trees and volunteer seedlings.

The City maintains a Geographic Information System (GIS) database of street trees. The database provides details such as tree location, species, height, maintenance information, etc.

The current street tree maintenance program is designed to achieve a balance between street tree maintenance needs and budgetary considerations. There are three (3) major elements that make up the program; they are pruning, planting and removal.

1. Pruning:

The current best practice for municipal agencies is to maintain street trees on a routine cycle. Therefore the program goals are to inspect and prune, as needed, 2,000 trees each year and to do this by area, which provides the most efficient use of City resources. The current cycle takes approximately 5 years to complete and at that time every street tree the City maintains will have been inspected.

Performing systematic tree maintenance by area reduces emergency maintenance, helps reduce liability problems (such as dead or weak branches falling), reduces tree mortality, assure every tree is inspected on a cycle, and improves the health and value of trees over the long-term.

2. Planting:

The program strives to plant trees pro-actively and as part of the replacement requirements when a street tree is removed. Pro-active planting occurs as part of special projects, such as Arbor Day. Replacement planting occurs when a street tree has been removed. A list of these trees is kept and tracked to assure replacement requirements are met.

Street trees are selected from the street tree palette that was developed by considering trees known to perform well in our general climate conditions, predominant soil types in our area and for species known to be tolerant of urban forest conditions (i.e., compacted soils, limited space, removal of organic material, top soils, etc.).

Typically, citizens are provided three choices from the palette to pick from when a tree is to be planted in front of their property. Staff also considers special requests, not part of the palette, but that may still be an acceptable alternative.

3. Removal:

Unfortunately, trees have to be removed for a number of reasons such as reaching the end of their life cycle, disease, causing infrastructure damage and a host of other problems. When a tree is required to be removed, a notification procedure is followed. The tree to be removed gets posted with a sign, a notice is placed on the City's website, and door hanger notices are placed at properties in the immediate vicinity of the tree. When the tree is removed, the removal is tracked and a replacement tree is planted. Arborist reports are provided for trees that are recommended for removal or for trees that appear to need more professional assessment to determine whether or not the tree can be saved. If the signs are obvious that the tree needs to be removed, i.e., the tree is dead, no report is needed.

C. Funding:

Funding for street tree maintenance is provided through the General Fund. The current budget for FY 2013-2014 is \$150,000. The historical budgeting for this funding is:

\$108,000 - pruning
\$ 20,000 - emergency work, arborist reports
\$ 11,800 - planting
\$ 10,200 - removal
\$150,000

D. Contracting

The Department's current contractor is West Coast Arborists, Inc. (WCA). This company provides the majority of the urban forest maintenance in Public Works. The contract with WCA was approved by Council in 2012. The contract is for 3 years and has one 2-year renewal option.

The Department also contracts, on a case by case basis, with consultants to perform arborist reports and other tasks as needed.

E. Tree Inventory:

In addition to 9,600 public trees in the right-of-way (ROW), as mentioned in Item B above, there are trees that were planted in the ROW but are maintained by the adjacent property owners via encroachment agreements with the City. These trees were generally placed in the ROW in connection with private developments. There are also trees in privately maintained ROW that are not included in the City tree inventory.

PARKS & RECREATION

The Parks & Recreation Department (PRD) is responsible to maintain trees within parks, beaches, streetscapes (10 miles) and trail sites. All trees are maintained through landscape contractors and tree trimming companies. Maintaining trees within park sites is different than maintaining trees within streetscapes. Tree maintenance within park sites requires contractors' to:

- Coordinate with public use, park maintenance and irrigation cycles.
- Access for trimming is often restricted and requires climbing instead of the bucket truck used for streets.
- Trees may be in turf, in ornamental plantings, on banks, in picnic areas or near playgrounds or park buildings.

A. The below listed landscape contractors maintain landscaping and trees at the City's parks, beaches and trail sites, which includes trees up to 15 feet.

Contractor	Contract Status
	2 years/6 one year renewals
Excel Landscape, Inc.	1/12 to 1/14 Original Contract 1/14 to 1/15 First Extension Five Extensions Remain
Blue Skies Landscape Maintenance	2/08 to 2/10 Original Contract 2/10 to 2/11 First Extension 2/11 to 2/12 Second Extension 2/12 to 2/13 Third Extension 2/13 to 2/14 Fourth Extension Two Extensions Remain

B. The below listed tree trimming companies maintain trees at the City's parks, beaches and trail sites, which includes trees over 15 feet. Use of the below companies is on an as-needed basis. The City utilizes several tree companies for the flexibility to work within the City schedule and company availability.

- Southwest Environmental
- California Tree Service
- Urban Tree Service
- Arbor West

C. West Coast Arborists (WCA) has a contract with the Public Works Department for pruning and trimming street trees within the City. The PRD uses the services of WCA for streetscape trees only, due to the additional cost for park trimming. For example, WCA sets the cost to trim, prune or remove trees based on grid pruning (e.g. trimming an entire block).

D. Process and Procedures for Tree Maintenance, Trimming and Removal

When maintaining trees, the Park and Beach Supervisor (PBS) looks at the entire landscape the tree is in. It is difficult to separate the tree from the landscape. The landscape area the tree is growing in can influence tree growth and health. Irrigation schedules need to ensure the proper amount of water is being applied for the tree and the landscape. Priorities in park tree maintenance involve safety, tree health, aesthetics, public interaction, and integration with the park setting. Trees may be in turf, in ornamental plantings, on banks, in picnic areas, near playgrounds, in parking lots or around park buildings.

PBS's are certified arborists who inspect trees and note the conditions on a regular basis. Tree trimming is based upon data collected during inspections and to maintain tree health. Data from inspections is entered into a maintenance management software system (Cityworks), which tracks the trees. The software enables staff to sort tree data by species, individual tree location or site.

Trimming a tree is different than maintaining a tree. Trimming is mostly a one-time review establishing what needs to be trimmed or removed for the health of the tree and safety of people passing by. Maintaining is ongoing review of the tree as it sits in the park and the health of the tree and landscape around it. Tree trimming in the park sites and other maintenance activities requires coordination with public use, park maintenance, and irrigation cycles. Access for trimming is often restricted and requires climbing instead of the bucket truck used for streets.

If a PBS determines a tree should be removed, the following steps are taken:

- Staff will complete an arborist report
- Staff will complete a public notice indicating tree removal and submit for approval by Department Superintendent and Director
- Director emails tree removal notice to Council and City Manager
- Arborist report and public notice are posted on the City website by staff
- A barricade and sign indicating when the tree will be removed is placed at the tree 72 hours in advance

E. Selection of Tree Species

PBS utilizes the approved landscape plans to replace trees in parks or streetscapes. If there is an issue with the previously approved landscape plan, the PBS will identify a different tree species compatible to the site. For example, the health of the Italian Alders at the Encinitas Community Center declined and died once the site was converted to reclaimed water. The PBS searched for trees compatible with the site and selected a species (Mesquite) that would tolerate reclaimed water.

F. Department Funding

Funding for Trees is budgeted in the General Fund (Fund 101), Lighting and Landscape District Funds 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, and 297 as described below and approved in the FY 2013/14 Budget.

Fund	Amount
General Fund 101	\$70,000
General Fund 101	\$5,000
Lighting & Landscape District 291	\$5,480
Lighting & Landscape District 292	\$6,100
Lighting & Landscape District 293	\$6,200
Lighting & Landscape District 294	\$2,418
Lighting & Landscape District 295	\$55,530
Lighting & Landscape District 297	\$37,674
TOTAL	\$188,402

PLANNING & BUILDING AND ENGINEERING:

In addition to the work involved in maintaining City trees, the Planning & Building and Engineering Departments are involved with tree preservation and maintenance via the land development process. The Planning & Building Department, with assistance from the Engineering Department, supports City tree preservation and maintenance through the discretionary application review process and the Heritage Tree nomination process. During the discretionary review process, trees are required to be identified on project plans and preserved to the extent practicable, and appropriate conditions for tree preservation and maintenance are applied to approvals. Additionally, the Engineering Department requires a permit for the removal of City trees.

A. Application Review:

Plans for proposed projects are required to identify all City trees and trees on site or within 30 feet of site, with information on location, species, size, and dripline area. When needed, photographs of identified trees are requested. When projects propose removal of trees, staff works with the applicant to ensure that alternatives to removal are explored. City trees identified on the project plans may not be removed unless removal is unavoidable to feasibly develop or provide access to the property. For trees that are proposed to remain, staff ensures that approval documents include appropriate conditions for protection of all trees proposed to remain during the construction process, and for maintenance of trees after project construction.

B. Heritage Trees:

Nominations for Heritage Trees, whether on public or private property, are processed by the Planning & Building Department. Nominations for trees located on private properties require the consent of the property owner. A nomination with supporting narratives, photographs, and other information provided by the applicant are heard by the Environmental Commission. The Environmental Commission provides a recommendation to the Planning Commission, which determines whether or not to designate the nominated tree as a Heritage Tree. The designation of a tree may be based on any of these factors:

1. The tree is one of the oldest and largest of its species in Encinitas.
2. The tree is a unique form or species.
3. The tree has historic significance, such as an association with an historic building, site, street, person, or event.
4. The tree is a defining landmark or significant outstanding feature of a neighborhood.

Trees that receive a Heritage Tree designation are to be maintained in accordance with City maintenance guidelines, and are to be included in a list to be maintained by the City.

C. Tree Removal:

In order to preserve public trees, the Engineering Department requires permits for removal and replacement of public trees. Engineering staff works with developers and homeowners to design and locate improvements in a fashion that limits tree removal or impacts to public trees. The permit requires protective measures be provided to preserve trees during construction.

If a tree removal is proposed, the project applicant must obtain a Temporary Encroachment Permit (TEP). The requirement for a TEP could be replaced by a Tree Removal Permit after City Council approves a Tree Removal Permit and sets appropriate permit fees.

When a permit application is submitted, Engineering explores improvement alternatives that could save or reduce tree removals. After a viable alternative is selected, a tree removal application along with an arborist report will be routed to the Public Works and Parks and Recreation Departments for review and approval.

A TEP will be issued after approval of the application for removal and replacement of City trees. Engineering Field Inspection will monitor tree protection, tree removal, and tree replacement during construction. Once the tree removal/replacement is completed the inspector will sign the TEP and send to the office for filing.

ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PRACTICES

What's working for the Engineering/Public Works Department?

- Routine maintenance is working. The systematic approach implemented by the Department has reduced claims and emergency response and has improved customer service, while maintaining budget allocation;
- Coordination between project planning and operational considerations is working. Plans are circulated to operational departments for review, which provides an opportunity to improve the final product;
- GIS and Cityworks (work management system) are working. These programs allow staff to efficiently and effectively manage the street tree program.
- Cityworks maintenance management software system.

What's working for the Parks and Recreation Department?

- Certified Arborists on staff
- Ability to select multiple tree companies to work within the City's schedule
- Cityworks software system

Areas for Improvement for the Engineering/Public Works Department:

- The Procedures manual was prepared to be used by City staff to improve consistency in applying procedures for implementing the Urban Forest Program citywide. A separate manual/information guide should be created for the public to use that provides them with what they are supposed to do related to urban forest matters, i.e. where to apply for a permit, what the standards are for construction projects, etc.
- No certified arborist on staff to manage the complex urban forest program. This requires coordination with other departments to provide expertise when needed.

- Plan for removal of older trees and problem trees. This will reduce emergency response, damage and claims caused by these trees
- Realign all right-of-way landscape maintenance responsibilities to Public Works to improve customer service. Currently, the program is managed well, but customers are confused as to whom to call for service because they do not equate trees in streets with “parks”
- Align all urban forest program coordination under one department. This would allow for consistent application of urban forest responsibilities. Each department has specific responsibilities and those responsibilities do not fit well into one department, however, having a coordinator (i.e. urban forester) who would oversee the Council’s goals and objectives would improve the holistic approach. This coordinator would keep their fingers on the pulse of all matters related to urban forestry and give us one point of contact
- Provide training for Engineering Inspection staff to improve their ability to properly oversee construction-related tree issues
- Ensure contractor compliance with Council Policy and Procedures Manual requirements

Areas for Improvement for the Parks and Recreation Department:

- Streetscape tree maintenance within the Lighting and Landscape District ROW. It would be more efficient and customer friendly if the Public Works Department was to maintain all street trees and associated landscaping within the Lighting and Landscape Districts
- Keeping up with inspections is difficult due to a vacant, unfunded PBS position
- Limited budget to perform consistent tree maintenance

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 - Tree Ordinance

Attachment 2 - Urban Forest Management Policy

Attachment 3 - Urban Forest Management Administrative Manual Procedures