AGENDA REPORT
City Council

MEETING DATE: September 28, 2016

PREPARED BY: Glenn Pruim **DEPT. DIRECTOR:** Glenn Pruim

DEPARTMENT: Public Works **CITY MANAGER:** Karen P. Brust

SUBJECT:

MAINTENANCE OF FICUS TREES IN DOWNTOWN ENCINITAS

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that City Council take the following actions:

1. Direct staff to provide increased levels of maintenance for the Ficus trees in downtown Encinitas;

2. Adopt City Council Resolution No. 2016-90, Resolution of the City Council of the City of Encinitas Amending the Fiscal year 2016-17 Budget, authorizing an additional appropriation of $54,000

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This item applies to the Environment Focus Area: Be good shepherds of open spaces, beaches, parks, and the natural environment.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The fiscal impact associated with the staff recommendation requires an increase to the current approved budget in the amount of $54,000.

Based on the number of Ficus trees in the downtown area, it is estimated that the crown reduction program would cost approximately $44,000 per year. Using this figure over the five year crown reduction program timespan, without any price escalation, would cost $220,000 over five years. In addition to the $44,000 for the first year of the crown reduction program, staff recommends appropriating an additional $10,000 to address any root pruning needs. The root pruning costs for future years will be determined upon completion of the infrastructure assessment.

The Public Works Department's Streets Maintenance Division is currently funded to provide tree maintenance within public rights of way for the currently defined levels of service. Increasing those levels of service at the recommended level would require an additional $54,000 in the current fiscal year. Required funding for subsequent years of the enhanced tree maintenance would be addressed in future budget discussions.

BACKGROUND:

The City provides tree maintenance services for the trees within public rights-of-way, within City parks and on City-owned land. These services are provided by contract services and are provided on a regularly scheduled basis. Trees within the public rights of way are maintained on what is known as a "block tree pruning program," which means that trees in a certain geographical area of the City are assigned to a group, or block, and are maintained on a rotating cycle. The time it takes to get through the cycle depends upon current funding and the number of trees in the inventory. Currently, it takes approximately four and a half years to complete the cycle, during which time each tree would be assessed and provided maintenance, should maintenance be required. Maintenance consists of providing an overall tree health assessment, trimming the canopy, and removing dead limbs/branches. If a tree is at risk, the assessment could lead to tree removal, depending upon the condition of the tree. The downtown Ficus trees are included in the block tree pruning program and were last pruned in 2014.

The downtown area of Encinitas has a significant number of trees and is well known for its collection of Ficus trees. These trees provide a beautiful canopy, shade, homes for birds and enhance the appearance of downtown. Ficus trees, however, have a very invasive tree root system. The roots can grow very long with large diameters. Ficus trees can cause damage to underground utilities, public infrastructure, such as sidewalks, curbs and gutters, and private property, such as buildings adjacent to the roadway. Although the City no longer recommends the planting of Ficus trees as street trees, there are a total of 55 Ficus trees in the downtown area, which, for this report's purposes, is defined as the area bounded by B Street, Highway 101, K Street and the Pacific Ocean.

Recently, four Ficus trees were scheduled to be removed due to concerns about damage to public infrastructure and private property, as well as safety concerns about the potential of falling limbs. The direction to remove the trees was provided by the City Council at the closed session held on August 17, 2016. In addition to directing the removal of the four trees, Council directed staff to conduct a public meeting, inviting citizens to express their concerns and help develop a tree replacement plan that would be used for any Ficus trees that need to be removed in the future. The public meeting was held on Tuesday, September 6, 2016, and was attended by approximately 60 citizens. Staff continues to assess the four Ficus trees.

At the meeting, there was significant conversation about maintenance methods that could be utilized to prolong the lives of the downtown Ficus trees and mitigate the concerns about property damage and safety. The maintenance ideas proposed focused on more frequent pruning of the canopy, greater reduction of the canopy spread, selective limb removal, tree root pruning and the installation of tree root barriers.

ANALYSIS:

In discussions with the City's certified arborist and the City's Public Works Department's tree maintenance contractor, staff is recommending enhanced tree maintenance to proactively prolong the lives and preserve the health and safety of the downtown Ficus trees. Staff continues to evaluate the four Ficus trees separately as mentioned in the Background section above. Pruning of tree roots for mature trees in heavily developed areas is difficult. If the intent is to minimize the impacts that tree roots are having on private property, it would be possible to cut selective tree roots on the private property side of the tree. If too many roots are cut, however, the stability of the tree could be jeopardized during heavy windstorms. It may be possible, however, to cut certain roots causing specific damage without lessening the stability of the tree. If tree roots were cut, it could be possible to install root barrier to delay subsequent root growth from impacting adjacent improvements. Proactive tree root pruning would require the complete removal of sidewalk, curb and gutter in the vicinity of each Ficus tree downtown to allow the assessment of which roots could/should be pruned. This approach would likely exceed the budget amendment amount that staff is recommending.

A proactive tree maintenance approach recommended by staff is to institute a "crown reduction program" for the downtown Ficus trees. Crown reduction is a systematic maintenance approach that would gradually reduce the canopy spread over a number of years to reduce the tree mass and lessen the chance of having any limbs break off. Reducing the crown too quickly could be damaging to the overall health of the tree. The City's tree maintenance specialist recommends a program wherein the crowns of selected trees are reduced over a five year period through annual maintenance activities. Once the trees reach their designated canopy widths, maintenance levels could drop to a lesser level to maintain those widths. It should be pointed out that reducing the canopy widths through this approach will not address existing tree root issues. The crown reduction may slow, but will not reverse, the growth of the tree roots.

Based on the number of Ficus trees in the downtown area, it is estimated that the crown reduction program would cost approximately $44,000 per year. Using this figure over the five year crown reduction program timespan, without any price escalation, would cost $220,000 over five years. In addition to the $44,000 for the first year of the crown reduction program, staff recommends appropriating an additional $10,000 to address any root pruning needs. The initial efforts would consist of performing an assessment of each Ficus tree location to determine whether there are immediate root pruning needs. Depending upon remaining funding, the $10,000 would be used to remove public infrastructure (i.e. curb, gutter and sidewalk) required to gain access to the roots, perform any required root pruning, install root barrier and reestablish proper tree planting wells. The City's current contract with West Coast Arborists would allow for this enhanced tree maintenance work without any amendments. Additional funds would be required to perform the work, however, unless offsetting (lesser) maintenance activities are performed elsewhere in the City. Any required concrete work would be performed by City forces or through the City's annual concrete repair contract.

The root pruning and the crown reduction efforts can be managed independently. Should Council so desire, a crown reduction program could be initiated without pursuing the root pruning option. Staff does recommend that an initial assessment be performed of the Ficus trees to determine the extent of any root-related problems. The results of the assessment would then be provided to Council, seeking further direction regarding any root pruning activities.

Staff believes that this enhanced tree maintenance program for the Ficus trees in the downtown area will address some of the safety concerns associated with the large tree canopies. The program could also slow the growth of the roots and the accompanying damage to property improvements. These efforts could extend the lives of the downtown Ficus trees while mitigating the concerns about property damage and safety

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Pursuant to Sections 15060 (c) (3) and 15378 (b) (2) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, the ongoing tree maintenance associated with the crown reduction program is not defined as a project. Therefore, the proposed activities are not subject to CEQA.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution No. 2016-90, entitled, "A resolution of the City Council of the City of Encinitas amending the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 Budget."

RESOLUTION NO. 2016-90

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ENCINITAS AMENDING THE FISCAL YEAR 2016-17 BUDGET

WHEREAS, on June 22, 2016 the City of Encinitas City Council adopted Resolution No. 2016-64 appropriating the budget for Fiscal Year 2016-17; and

WHEREAS, changes in anticipated revenues and/or expenditures of the City of Encinitas necessitates a revision of the appropriations for Fiscal Year 2016-17; and

WHEREAS, budgeted expenditures do not exceed anticipated revenue and available fund balance; and

WHEREAS, the City Council has reviewed the proposed Fiscal Year 2016-17 budget amendments; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, DETERMINED AND ORDERED that the City Council of the City of Encinitas does, hereby, adopt the amendments for Fiscal Year 2016-17 as shown in **Exhibit A** to this resolution.

PASSED AND ADOPTED this 28th day of September, 2016, by the following vote, to wit:

AYES:
NAYS:
ABSENT:
ABSTAIN:

Kristin Gaspar, Mayor
City of Encinitas

ATTEST:

Kathy Hollywood, City Clerk

Exhibit A to Resolution 2016-90							
	Fund Name	Organization Code	Object Code	Project No.	Description	Revenue/ Transfer In Increase (Decrease)	Expenditure/ Transfer Out Increase (Decrease)
1.	General	10171630	432.2		Increase in tree trimming budget for increased maintenance of ficus trees		$ 54,000.00
Total						$ -	$ 54,000.00