



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: March 24, 2010

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Parks Division, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Forestry Program Report – Part 1

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission receive the first of three presentations on the Forestry Program.

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this staff report is to provide the Commission with an overview of the Parks and Recreation Department's Forestry Program. Subsequent reports, to be provided to the Commission at the April and May 2010 regular meetings, will address the results of the Tree Inventory and Assessment Project, community outreach and education efforts, and the development of an urban forest management plan.

Santa Barbara's Heritage

The extent and diversity of the City's current urban forest is primarily the result of efforts of horticulturalists, including Joseph Sexton, Dr. Francesco Franceschi, Peter Reidel, and E. O. Orpet, that brought plants and trees from all over the world to Santa Barbara.

The most recent edition of *Trees of Santa Barbara*, by Robert N. Muller and J. Robert Haller, published by the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden in 2005, documents Santa Barbara's long tradition of horticulture, and the importance of trees in the region. The book documents over 400 species of trees that can be viewed in public places. Many of these trees are found on City streets, in City parks, and on the grounds of various public facilities.

Mission

The mission of the Forestry Program is to plant and maintain City street, park, and public facility trees for the benefit of residents, and to ensure a safe and healthy community forest.

Through its Forestry Program, the Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for the maintenance of 456 different species of trees within its parks and street parkways.

Policy Guidance

The City's Forestry Program is primarily guided by the Street Tree Master Plan and two chapters in the City's municipal code, Chapter 15.20, Tree Planting and Maintenance, and Chapter 15.24, Tree Preservation. The City's current General Plan also provides broad policy direction for the urban forest. Proposed land use, growth management, and biological resources policies included in the General Plan update, *Plan Santa Barbara*, address ongoing protection and enhancement of the City's urban forest.

Street Tree Master Plan

The Street Tree Master Plan, adopted by City Council in 1977, provides guidance in the management of the City's diverse street tree population. The Street Tree Designation section of the plan is used on a regular basis to both assess tree planting options and maintain the City's street tree diversity. With approval from the Parks and Recreation Commission, street tree designations are updated for a variety of reasons, including when the designated tree species is no longer available commercially, or when specific species present pest or health problems, cause infrastructure conflicts, and are no longer compatible with size of parkways, among other considerations. In some cases, a street or a section of a street may not have a designated species until the public right-of-way receives improvements, such as sidewalks.

Chapter 15.20, Tree Planting and Maintenance

First adopted by the City Council in 1963, Chapter 15.20 addresses City-owned trees in parks and parkways (street trees). Key aspects of Chapter 15.20 include the application of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standards for pruning trees, requirements for conformance to the Master Street Tree Plan in the placement and types of trees, the Parks and Recreation Director's authority and responsibilities related to trees, permitting requirements, and the process for review of requests for significant pruning and removal of City- owned trees.

Chapter 15.24, Preservation of Trees

Adopted by the City Council in 1969, Chapter 15.24 regulates tree removal and the degree of pruning allowed for privately-owned trees, located in the regulated front setback of a residential or commercial property, regulated parking lots, trees identified on an approved landscape plan, and Historic and Specimen trees. Chapter 15.24 establishes considerations and findings for removal, the processes for review and appeal, and designates the proper review body for various privately-owned, City-regulated trees. Chapter 15.24 also cross-references all other City regulations related to trees and landscaping.

On December 8, 2009, after two years of staff review and public discussion, the City Council adopted a number of amendments to both of these chapters to clarify and update definitions, the role of Boards and Commissions, and enforcement procedures. The City Council also adopted Resolution 09-096, which establishes a fine schedule specific to tree pruning and tree removal municipal code violations. The updated chapters and resolution are attached to this staff report.

Public Review/Polycymaking

Public review and polycymaking related to tree planting, maintenance, and preservation is provided by the Street Tree Advisory Committee, Parks and Recreation Commission, Historic Landmark Commission, Architectural Board of Review, and the City Council.

Street Tree Advisory Committee

The Street Tree Advisory Committee (STAC) provides advice to the Parks and Recreation Commission and Department staff regarding tree-related issues such as, planting and removing City trees, removal requests for street trees and trees located in residential front setbacks, and changes to the Street Tree Master Plan. The Committee is composed of five voting members who have interest and technical knowledge of trees and tree care issues. The Committee meets the first Thursday of every month and conducts site visits to review all tree removal applications. In January 2010, the Parks and Recreation Commission approved the provision for one member of the Committee to reside outside the City of Santa Barbara.

Parks and Recreation Commission

The Parks and Recreation Commission acts on all Street Tree and most residential setback tree removal applications, as well as changes to the Street Tree Master Plan. When appropriate, the Commission may seek the advice of the Historic Landmarks Commission on Specimen or Historic trees as well as Street Trees within the El Pueblo Viejo and Brinkerhoff Landmark Districts. The Parks and Recreation Commission can recommend trees to City Council for Specimen or Historic designation.

Historic Landmarks Commission

The Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) provides design review for new development and redevelopment projects within El Pueblo Viejo and Brinkerhoff Landmark Districts and reports to the Planning Commission. The land development design review involves the placement and preservation of trees within landscape plans. HLC reviews and acts on setback tree removal applications within El Pueblo Viejo and Brinkerhoff Landmark Districts. The HLC can recommend trees to City Council for Historic designation.

Architectural Board of Review

The Architectural Board of Review (ABR) provides design review for new development and redevelopment projects and reports to the Planning Commission. Part of the design review involves the placement and preservation of trees as part of landscape plans and the development of commercial parking lots. ABR reviews and acts on parking lot tree removal applications.

City Council

The City Council sets City policy through the Municipal Code, general plan policies, and by Council resolution. All tree-related decisions by the Parks and Recreation Commission and Planning Commission (via ABR or HLC) can be appealed to the City Council. As noted above, recent changes to the City's Municipal Code related to tree preservation, maintenance, and enforcement procedures were approved by the City Council in December 2009.

Forestry Program

The Forestry Program currently has eight staff directly involved in the care and maintenance of the City's urban forest, including the Urban Forest Superintendent (City Arborist), Street Tree Supervisor, and six field staff. Program staffing has declined by over 30% over the last six years due to budget reductions and an increased focus on tree pruning by private contract. The program also receives part-time administrative support.

Urban Forest Superintendent/City Arborist

The Urban Forest Superintendent develops, implements, and supervises the City-wide Urban Forestry Program including tree planting, pruning, removal, and pest management; enforces City tree ordinances; and, coordinates urban forestry related activities with other divisions, departments, and outside agencies or groups. The Urban Forest Superintendent serves as the staff liaison to the Street Tree Advisory Committee, presents tree removal applications to the Parks and Recreation Commission, and provides technical expertise to City staff, other City Boards and Commissions, and the City Council.

Street Tree Supervisor

The Street Tree Supervisor oversees Forestry Program field staff, inspects trees located throughout the City, and schedules the day-to-day operations including contracted maintenance services. The Street Tree Supervisor also works directly with other City

divisions or departments, and outside agencies or groups, on Forestry Program-related projects.

Field Crew

The field staff is responsible for City tree maintenance including trimming, planting, and removal; as well as response to emergency situations involving trees as needed. The field staff includes a Small Tree Care Specialist who is responsible for planting and maintaining young Street trees. Since maintenance of trees and landscaping within the street right-of-way (ROW) is funded by the Utility Users Tax (see discussion below), in Fiscal Year 2010, responsibility for the maintenance of 100 street medians was transferred to the Forestry field staff to offset staff reductions in the Parks Division.

Annual Tree Maintenance and Planting/Funding

Street Trees

Street Trees are the primary focus of the Forestry Program and its annual tree maintenance schedule. Based on an inventory completed in 2007, there are an estimated 33,193 street trees and additional 3,463 sites within parkways that could be planted with trees (for a total of 36,657). Street tree work is primarily funded by revenues collected from the City's User Utility Tax. Utility Users Tax is a general tax levied on the use of residential and commercial utility services, including water, refuse, electric, and natural gas. These funds can only be used for work within the street ROW, which includes sidewalks, street parkways, and roadways.

Street tree maintenance includes general maintenance pruning of trees within eight designated sections and seven sub-sections of the City. This type of maintenance is generally performed every five to seven years. Sections of streets are pruned at the same time to allow for the most efficient tree trimming. Some sections of trees are pruned more frequently due to the species. As an example, the Queen Palms in the downtown areas are pruned annually, since they drop fruit that can cause slip hazards. With an annual goal of 5,100, both City staff and private contractors have pruned between 4,900 and 7,000 street trees since 2004.

Small tree care is a key component of the street tree program. The Forestry Program staff includes a dedicated Tree Care Specialist position that is responsible for the planting, pruning, and watering of young trees. This position is supported by a grounds maintenance worker and part-time hourly staff. The program has a goal of planting 300 trees each year. Trees are planted in empty tree wells and when trees are lost due to age, disease, or weather. Over the last five years, between 300 and 390 trees were planted each year in City parkways. The small tree care program ensures that the City maintains and enhances the urban forest. To avoid problems over the long term, young

trees require care for at least three to five years. Staff trains the tree to correct naturally occurring defects and develop the canopy clearance needed for trees adjacent to the roadway.

Forestry staff also trims street trees in response to resident and business owner requests. Each year, Forestry staff receive approximately 850 requests. Staff conducts a site visit to assess the need for trimming and schedules the work, if warranted. The inspection includes an assessment of the condition of the tree and an estimate of whether the tree will remain safe until the regular scheduled timeframe for this section of street. Typical request based pruning is due to faster than anticipated growth, blocked signs, fruit drop in the case of palms, or low growing branches. Tree pruning is required in approximately one third of the requests received each year.

Park and Facility Trees

Forestry staff also maintains an estimated 9,061 public trees located within parks and landscaped areas of public facilities. These trees, located in 68 parks and public facilities, do not include all trees within open space parks. Maintenance of park and public facility trees is funded by the General Fund.

The park and facility tree maintenance schedule is developed at the beginning of each fiscal year. Parks with higher use and more developed areas (such as picnic tables, playgrounds, and walkways) are evaluated on an annual basis. Trees in these parks may be pruned on a more frequent basis. Overall most park and public facility trees are on an eight to ten-year pruning cycle. The annual pruning goal is 880. Averaged over five years since 2004, 943 park and facility trees were pruned each year. As with Street trees, Forestry staff responds to tree damage and losses on an emergency basis.

Private and Public Land Development Review

The City Arborist reviews arborist reports and provides recommendations on tree-related issues for proposed land development projects within the City. The STAC and the Commission may also review development proposals that include trees that are subject to city regulation. As an example, the Montecito Country Club recently submitted a development application for the golf course. The project proposal required tree removals, tree relocations, and potential impacts to trees during project construction. In addition to the Montecito Country Club project, the STAC and the Commission reviewed the tree removals and tree replacement plan for the West Downtown Pedestrian Project, which is currently under construction.

Tree Removal/Pruning Permitting and Enforcement

Forestry staff reviews about 80 tree removal applications and 20 – 30 additional requests for tree pruning permits per year. The review of each tree removal application includes three site visits, discussion with the STAC, and presentation to the Commission. Site visits begin with an initial field visit to confirm the tree location and whether it is subject to regulation, a second visit for STAC field review, and a third visit to remove the public notice for removal. Outlined under Chapter 15.20, all street trees for which a removal application is under consideration require a 10-day posting as notice. Chapter 15.24 does not require posting the trees; however, as a matter of practice, staff posts those trees as well.

Forestry staff is also responsible for reviewing reported Municipal Code violations. Suspected violations are often reported by Santa Barbara residents and include either tree removals or significant tree pruning undertaken without permits. Often, staff works with Zoning Division enforcement staff in the Community Development Department to investigate and process reported violations.

When Parks Division staff receives a report of a potential violation a field inspection is conducted to document the potential violation, staff assesses the work to determine if it is significant enough to find a violation, and determines the exact location of the tree(s). Once that information is gathered, records are checked to determine if the tree is regulated and by which department. If regulated, an enforcement case is opened on the property and/or the contractor who did the work. Letters are sent to the offenders asking them to contact the appropriate department personnel to discuss the violation. Once the meeting is held with the violating party, a determination is made regarding how the violation should be mitigated. Mitigation includes payment of fines, replacement of removed trees as appropriate, and/or a tree restoration plan is required to be submitted and implemented from an ISA Certified Arborist.

In FY 2009, staff reviewed 63 reported Municipal Code violations. To date in FY 2010, staff has reviewed 21 reported violations.

Community Projects

Arbor Day

The Forestry Program has been involved in Arbor Day planting projects and celebrations for many years. Staff coordinates with Santa Barbara Beautiful and local elementary schools to plan the events and select the tree types and locations. Each year, five of the schools involve the fifth grade classes in planting a tree at the school. At the sixth school, there is a larger program that involves the whole school with several trees planted. Staff participated in tree plantings at six schools in FY 2009. Six more

are planned for FY 2010. This year, Arbor Day was designated by City Council proclamation on March 7, 2010. While the exact dates of all the school plantings have not yet been determined, they will mostly occur during the month of April.

Community Tree Planting

For many years, Forestry staff has coordinated opportunities for Santa Barbara residents to plant trees in parkways. Community tree plantings focus on neighborhoods and involve youth, community groups, and other volunteers. In FY 2009 these accounted for 112 of the 317 trees that were planted. Staff selects the locations, pre-digs the holes, and guides volunteers at the time of planting. In the last three years, trees have primarily been planted in Eastside and Westside neighborhoods.

Tree City USA Designation

Santa Barbara recently earned its 30th year of designation as a Tree City USA. The Tree City USA[®] program, sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters, provides direction, technical assistance, public attention, and national recognition for urban and community forestry programs in thousands of towns and cities throughout the country.

In order to qualify, each City must submit evidence of achievement in four areas, including:

1. A tree board or department with legal responsibility for the care and maintenance of trees.
2. A tree care ordinance that designates the tree board or department is responsible to write an annual work plan.
3. A Forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita.
4. An Arbor Day observance and Proclamation.

In 2008, 162 cities in California earned a Tree City USA designation. Although 2009 data is not yet available, if each city in 2008 qualified for recertification, Santa Barbara shares 30 consecutive years of designation with four other cities. With 33 years each, Sacramento and Burbank have the longest consecutive designation in California.

Santa Barbara Beautiful

The Parks and Recreation Department has worked with Santa Barbara Beautiful since 1977 to plant more than 11,000 trees throughout the city. Santa Barbara Beautiful's mission is to stimulate community interest and action toward the enhancement of Santa Barbara's beauty as a complement to current and future government and private activity through private donations. For the past five years, Santa Barbara Beautiful has

provided \$10,000 a year to support the small tree care program. In addition, Santa Barbara Beautiful has provided up to \$20,000 each year to purchase trees for the program.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Chapter 15.20, Tree Planting and Maintenance
2. Chapter 15.24, Preservation of Trees
3. Resolution 09-096

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