



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: July 27, 2011

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Parks Division, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Street Tree Master Plan Change for the 3100 – 3900 Blocks of State Street

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission receives a report and approves the Street Tree Advisory Committee (STAC) recommendations to change the street tree designation in the 3100 – 3900 blocks of State Street.

DISCUSSION:

Background

The parkways of Upper State Street were planted with Ficus trees between 1960 and 1962. When installed, the trees were scheduled to be maintained by shearing twice per year to limit their eventual size. By 1976, the City determined this maintenance method was too costly and began limited trimming by thinning the foliage once every three years. This pruning method allowed the trees to grow larger and, as a result, they outgrew the planting spaces and contributed to sidewalk damage.

In 2004, the Public Works Department initiated a project to improve pedestrian access along Upper State Street by replacing sidewalks and installing access ramps. The project initially proposed the removal of 14 of the Ficus trees. Due to public sentiment over the trees, the plan was modified to preserve the trees. Preservation required significant pruning of the tree roots and canopy. Seventeen of the 27 Ficus trees were severely pruned for the sidewalk installation. In addition, in an effort to maintain the trees and evaluate alternate sidewalk materials, rubber and other materials were used in some sections of sidewalk. At that time, staff indicated that although the root and canopy pruning would preserve the Ficus trees, it would also reduce their life expectancy. Regular inspections were needed to monitor the trees for health and safety.

Soon after the loss of a tree in October 2008, the Department completed a thorough evaluation of the remaining 26 trees. That evaluation indicated that nine of the trees were exhibiting signs of decline. A second tree fell in November 2009. Due to the loss of these two trees and concern about the health of a number of additional trees, the Department determined a long-term plan for the phased removal and replanting was

needed for Upper State Street. Since Ficus trees are too large for the planter spaces, new tree designations were needed to initiate this plan.

Ficus Tree Health

There are 25 remaining Ficus trees in the upper State Street corridor. During the most recent inspection in May 2011, staff analyzed the health of each tree. This analysis included the size and color of the foliage, evidence of tree growth in response to pruning, bark health, evidence of decay, and evidence of root regeneration. Healthy trees have new growth that is light green, good canopy cover, healthy bark and root regeneration.

During this evaluation it became apparent that three of the trees display signs of significant decay and poor health. Due to the size and location of the trees, as well as the potential for damage to persons and/or property, the Department determined these trees are unsafe. Located at 3324, 3412, and 3514 State Street, the Department plans to remove these trees in mid-August.

In addition to the three trees that are unsafe, an additional ten trees are showing signs of decline that require more regular monitoring. The Department will continue to monitor these trees closely. Twelve of the trees are healthy and do not exhibit any decline in health or vigor.

Tree Designation Evaluation for 3100-3900 State Street

Staff worked closely with the Street Tree Advisory Committee (STAC) over a two-year period to develop tree designation recommendations. During this time, 18 meetings were held to review potential tree species and conduct site visits. Because the available planting space varies throughout these blocks of State Street, a key early recommendation was to identify trees of varying sizes and forms that would provide the most shade within the constraints of available tree rooting space, and the proximity of buildings, driveways, utilities, and other considerations.

During the tree evaluation process, STAC and staff considered a number of factors, including the:

- size of planting space
- location of utilities
- potential size at maturity
- growth form and growth rate
- drought tolerance
- fruiting habits
- susceptibility to insects or disease
- maintenance requirements

Additional considerations included whether the tree species is evergreen or deciduous, how many of the same species are planted in the immediate vicinity and throughout the City, and whether the tree is commercially available. Once the potential list was narrowed, there was detailed discussion about 21 different tree species.

Public Review

A public meeting was held on June 8, 2011, in the Adult Building at MacKenzie Park. The purpose of the meeting was to gather public input on the proposed tree designations, inform area residents and business owners about the pending tree removals, and present the long-term plan for phased removal and replacement. Meeting notices were mailed to 590 households and businesses within 500 feet of the Ficus trees in the 3100 – 3500 blocks of Upper State Street. Eight members of the public attended the meeting, along with two Parks and Recreation Commissioners and one STAC member.

Questions and discussion included information about the existing tree type and size, timing of removal, considerations for selecting the new trees such as water use, adjacent utilities, evergreen versus deciduous, the eventual size of the tree trunks and tree diversity. Another part of the discussion was related to how big the trees will be when planted and how long it will take for new trees to provide shade. One meeting attendee expressed concern about the removal of one of the hazardous trees.

Recommendation

The STAC conducted a special meeting on June 15, 2011, to finalize its tree designation recommendations. The STAC and staff identified eleven (11) species for designation in the 3100 – 3900 blocks of State Street. These include three large trees, four medium trees and four small trees. Further outlined in the attached table, these species include:

1. *Arbutus 'Marina'*, Marina Strawberry Tree
2. *Cedrela fissilis*, Brazilian Cedar Tree
3. *Eucalyptus cinerea*, Argyle Apple
4. *Ginkgo biloba*, Ginkgo
5. *Lagarstroemia indica 'Natchez'*, Crepe Myrtle
6. *Laurus nobilis*, Grecian Laurel
7. *Melaleuca styphelioides*, Prickly Leaved Paperbark
8. *Pistacia chinensis*, Chinese Pistache
9. *Quercus tomentella*, Island Oak
10. *Stenocarpus sinuatus*, Firewheel Tree
11. *Tristania laurina*, River Wattle

Next Steps

With Commission approval of the new tree designations, staff will initiate the first phase of tree planting in early fall 2011. With the removal of the three Ficus trees that are hazardous (discussed above), there will be a total of 20 open spaces for street trees. Trees to be planted will be chosen from the approved list based on the available planting space. The remaining 22 Ficus trees will be inspected again in spring 2012. At that time, staff will determine whether additional trees are unsafe and need to be removed. If any trees are removed, new trees will be planted as replacements. This process is expected to continue over the next five to ten years.

ATTACHMENT: 3100-3900 State Street Tree Designation Recommendations

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SUBMITTED BY: Jill E. Zachary, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director

APPROVED BY: Nancy L. Rapp, Parks and Recreation Director