



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: August 28, 2019
TO: Parks and Recreation Commission
FROM: Parks Division, Parks and Recreation Department
SUBJECT: Street Tree Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Commission receive a presentation on the history and use of the Street Tree Master Plan.

DISCUSSION:

Chapter 15.20, Santa Barbara's Tree Planting and Maintenance Ordinance, requires a comprehensive plan for planting and maintaining trees along streets and public areas, and establishes the general elements to be included in the plan. The Street Tree Master Plan was adopted by City Council in 1977. The plan provides a street tree program that utilizes systematic preservation, planting, and maintenance of trees within public areas.

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 tree diversity. At the time of adoption, the City tree inventory listed 312 species; today there are over 450. The street tree designation listed 77 desirable species; the current list contains 144 different species. The expansion of species can be attributed to efforts of individuals who have a love of trees and celebrate tree diversity. Dan Condon, the City Arborist from 1980 to 2002, obtained seed and cuttings for trees that didn't already exist or were not otherwise available in Santa Barbara, and grew them in his personal nursery. Randy Baldwin, owner of San Marcos Growers, obtains samples and seed for trees and other plants he believes might be useful in the Santa Barbara area. These efforts introduce new species and help bring back species that had become unavailable. Street Tree Advisory Committee (STAC) members learn of newly available trees and incorporate them into recommended street tree designations.

The street tree designation list matches tree species to whole streets or block segments. Street blocks are generally grouped into segments based on similarity of characteristics. Some segments span several blocks while others are only one block long. Currently there are 1185 segments. The purpose of managing the designation is to allow for change when necessary and still allow for reasonable control of the maintenance needs of trees along a given segment.

Changes to the street tree designation can be made by the Parks and Recreation Director with the approval of the Parks and Recreation Commission. Change requests can also be submitted by City residents or generated by developers, property owners, STAC members, and others. Requests are reviewed by staff and submitted to the Street Tree Advisory Committee for consideration and advice. Street tree designations are updated for a variety of reasons, including when the designated species is no longer commercially available, when specific species present pest or disease problems or cause infrastructure conflicts, when planting space is too small for the species or the available space allows for larger species, new street improvements, areas annexed to the city, a desire to increase tree canopy, and other reasons.

One example of a comprehensive change was upper State Street in 2011. Currently there are 21 *Ficus* along the upper State Street corridor in the 3100 through 3500 blocks. The trees were planted in the late 1950s, and intended to be pruned into a gumdrop shape through hedging to control their growth. The trees required trimming twice per year to maintain their appearance. The practice was suspended when it was no longer cost effective to continue pruning at that frequency. Since that time, the trees grew to a more natural condition. In 2008 two *Ficus microcarpa* 'Nitida', Indian Laurel Fig Trees (*Ficus*), were lost during storms. As a result staff began to monitor the health and risk of all *Ficus* throughout the City. In 2011 it became apparent that the City needed to develop a plan to phase out the *Ficus* on upper State Street over time. Through several months and numerous meetings, the STAC voted to recommend a list of eleven co-designated trees at their June 15, 2011 special meeting. The recommendations for eleven tree species addressed size variations of available and potential tree planting locations, and proximity of buildings and other infrastructure. The designation includes trees that vary in size and form, and both evergreen and deciduous. The Commission approved the eleven co-designated trees at the July 27, 2011 meeting. Soon after, the City began filling empty tree wells by planting the newly designated trees.

The street tree designation list is maintained in an Excel database. The information on the spreadsheet lists the street segments, the designated species, any alternate species, the reason for any change, and the date the designation was made. Staff updates the database when a change is approved by the Commission.

Street Tree Master Plan Update

A key action step in the Urban Forest Management Plan, adopted April 2014, is to update the Street Tree Master Plan. The Street Tree Master Plan is a long range planning tool that is now 42 years old and many important factors have changed since its development. Examples include climate changes and ever increasing infrastructure constraints. While work has not yet begun on an updated plan, several key steps have occurred in anticipation of moving forward with plan revisions. These include a study of trees with infrastructure conflicts and where tree growth space can be improved.

SUBMITTED BY: Tim Downey, Urban Forest Superintendent

APPROVED BY: Jill E. Zachary, Parks and Recreation Director