



*City of Arts & Innovation*

# City Council Memorandum

**TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL      DATE: SEPTEMBER 13, 2016**

**FROM: PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT      WARDS: ALL**

**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF REVISIONS MADE TO THE URBAN FORESTRY POLICY MANUAL**

## **ISSUE:**

Receive an update on the progress of implementation of the City's Urban Forestry Policy Manual revisions that were made in 2015.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the City Council receive and file the report.

## **BACKGROUND:**

On March 12, 2015, the Utility Services/Land Use /Energy Development Committee (Committee) with Chair MacArthur, Vice Chair Perry and Member Gardner present received an update on the Street Tree Program and considered several potential changes to the program. Following discussion, the Committee unanimously recommended that the City Council:

1. Make no changes to the policies on street trees and sewer laterals;
2. Support a policy of more flexibility to consideration of requested tree removals when a property owner will agree to pay for their removal and replacement; and,
3. Support a change in practices to more proactively remove problematic trees.

On April 28, 2015, City Council concurred with the Committee's recommendations.

Public Works Urban Forestry staff worked with an Ad-Hoc Committee of the Park and Recreation Commission (Commission) to review and update the 2007 Urban Forestry Policy Manual (Manual) to facilitate these changes.

Key substantial changes to the document included:

1. Authorization was provided to Public Works Director or Designee to approve all tree removals and report them quarterly to the Commission. These changes were implemented several years ago at the recommendation of the Commission and management, but had not been formally adopted in the Manual.
2. The California Pepper (*Schinus molle*) was added to the category of Class I inappropriate trees due to their invasive root system, the tendency of the aging trees to

have limb failures, and their fast growing cycle. The designation of the California Pepper (*Schinus molle*) as an inappropriate class, in addition to the previously designated Shamel Ash and Carob trees, allows for expedited removal.

3. Guidelines for removal of Class II inappropriate trees (Holly Oak and Elm Trees) were changed to allow the property owners' to remove and replace them, at their expense, with the approval of the Public Works Director or designee.
4. In order to further the intent that the City will be proactive in addressing problematic trees while working cooperatively with residents, the following was added:
  - a. Tree Care Guidelines, addition on page 6: *"It is the goal of the City of Riverside to work closely with our residents and property owners to proactively remove problematic trees such as those with invasive root systems that are causing chronic infrastructure damages and replace these problematic trees with appropriate tree species that are suitable for the surrounding environment."*
  - b. Removal Process, on page 16: Language was added to help facilitate the removal of problematic trees on streets *"..if there is full community support and approval to remove all the trees that are considered problematic on one (1) street of a neighborhood and replace with an approved appropriate species."*

On July 13, 2015, the Commission unanimously approved the updated manual. On August 25, 2015, the City Council unanimously approved the updated manual and requested that staff return in a year to provide an update on implementation of the changes.

In addition to the increased flexibility for staff to allow for removal of trees, the City also continues to provide options for residents to facilitate trimming, removal and planting of street trees. Approximately 100 people per year take advantage of these programs which include:

1. Resi-Pay Program – this program allows residents to trim, remove or plant a tree with City approval in accordance with the policy manual. The resident may pay the City contracted rate to have the work performed. This is a direct benefit as the rate is considerably lower due to the high volume of work that is performed by the City's tree contractor under the current contract. The current rates for this work are:
  - a. Trimming: \$95
  - b. Removal: \$14.99 per diameter inch at shoulder height
  - c. Planting: \$95 for a 15 gallon tree
2. No-Fee Permit – this program allows residents to trim, remove, or plant a tree with City approval. The resident may obtain a No-Fee Permit from the Public Works Urban Forestry Division and hire their own contractor that is licensed, insured and bonded to perform the approved work and pay their contractor directly.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The changes to the manual have made the removal process easier and more seamless. Residents seem to respond well to the increased flexibility. To determine if the policy changes had the intended effect, statistics for the last three fiscal years were reviewed. In FY 2014-15, 607 tree removal service requests were received and in FY 2015-16, 608 tree removal service requests were received. However, there was a 4.7% increase between FY 2013-14 and FY 2014-

15 which may have been the result of increased public attention on the tree program while discussions occurred at the council and committee meetings, prior to formal approval of the changes to the program. Requests related to removal of trees represent approximately 12% of all service requests received related to trees and landscaping.

The actual number of tree removals varies from year to year, due to timing when the actual removals occur versus when they are requested, as well as funding and staffing limitations. These variables make a comparison difficult, particularly in FY 2015-16 when there was a spending freeze and we were reduced from two inspectors down to one, for a few months of the year. However, a comparison can be made by looking at the reasons for the removals.

The following table indicates the top four reasons for tree removals and the percentage for each that were removed during that fiscal year:

Top Four Reasons for Street Tree Removal			
Fiscal Year	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16
Total Number	593	675	436
% Dead	49%	45%	37%
% Infrastructure	17%	16%	23%
% Major Limb Loss	12%	11%	7%
% Decayed	8%	9%	15%

When comparing the types of trees removed each year, there was a significant increase in the removal of the California Pepper trees that were added to the list of inappropriate trees. Below is a three-year summary of California Pepper tree removals:

California Pepper Tree Removals			
Fiscal Year	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16
Number	10	29	40
Percentage of Total	1.65%	4.3%	9.17%

In addition to designating the California Pepper Tree as an inappropriate tree, Holly Oak and Elm trees were designated as Class II trees allowing for removal by residents, at their own expense with their own contractor, or through the resi-pay program in which the City's contractor performs the work. In FY 2015-16, one resident took advantage of the resi-pay removal option for an Elm tree however, no residents took advantage of the resi-pay option for removal of Holly Oak trees.

Overall, the changes have had a positive impact on the program in allowing for more pro-active removal of problematic trees.

### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact related to the receipt of this update.

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Attachment: Urban Forestry Policy Manual, Revised August 2015