



Community & Economic Development Department
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Planning Division

CULTURAL HERITAGE BOARD MEETING DATE: AUGUST 19, 2026
AGENDA ITEM NO.: 7

DISCUSSION ITEM

Case Number	Not Applicable
Request	To receive and file a presentation on the City Urban Forestry Policy and historic districts.
Project Location	Citywide
Wards	All
Staff Planner	Robert Filiar, Urban Forestry Manager 951-351-6112 rfiliar@riversideca.gov

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Cultural Heritage Board receive and file a presentation on the City Urban Forestry Policy and historic districts.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

Background

The Purpose of the 2024 Urban Forestry Policy Manual is to provide guidelines for preservation and protection of Riverside's tree heritage and urban forest. This policy supersedes the 2015 Urban Forestry Policy and applies to planting, pruning, preservation, and removal of trees in City rights-of-way and identifies Public Works as the department responsible for daily management of the urban forest, including oversight of contracted and permitted tree work.

The City does not own every tree within city limits; rather, the City generally owns trees located in parkways and in the rights-of-way along residential streets. Many trees outside of these areas are privately owned as a matter of law and the City is not able to make changes to non-City-owned street trees in any way, shape, or form.

This distinction is important in historic districts because preservation concerns may involve both City-owned street trees in the public right-of-way and privately owned trees that contribute to the visual character of a historic neighborhood but fall outside direct City tree-control authority.

Policy Relationship to Historic Districts

While the Urban Forestry Policy Manual is not a historic preservation ordinance, several of its provisions are directly relevant to historic districts.

Most notably, the City emphasizes preservation of existing trees, coordinated planning, and protection of Riverside's tree heritage, all of which support the cultural landscape objectives commonly associated with historic districts and heritage resources.

The manual's "Protect" strategy is intended to preserve existing canopy, reduce impacts of development, and promote proper care and service of street trees.

The City recognizes that some trees have significance beyond routine urban forestry management and may carry historic or cultural value. Removal criteria based on economic considerations may not apply to trees considered historical, landmark, or located in a sensitive ecological and/or historical area at the discretion of the Urban Forestry Department.

Operational Standards Affecting Historic Districts

Street tree pruning standards in the manual are designed to preserve tree health, appearance, and public safety. The City authorizes periodic pruning as well as "as needed" pruning for utility conflicts, streetlight clearance, building interference, hazardous branches, and vehicular or pedestrian safety, while also prohibiting harmful pruning practices such as lion-tailing, topping, stub cutting, and hat-racking.

In historic districts, these standards are important because inappropriate pruning can alter the visual rhythm, canopy form, and streetscape character that contribute to historic setting and integrity. This aligns with historic district objectives because mature street trees often function as contributing landscape features and should be retained where feasible when public improvements are designed.

Removal and Review Considerations

The City will remove hazardous, diseased, or declining City-owned trees when removals meet policy criteria, and a quarterly listing of removals can be provided to the Park and Recreation Commission for review. Hazard trees are defined as trees that are dying, dead, structurally weak, traffic obstructions, or injurious to public health, safety, or welfare. The City documents significance, evaluates alternatives, and coordinates review before removal where a tree contributes to a recognized historic setting.

EXHIBITS LIST

1. Urban Forestry Policy Manual, Rev. 02/2024

Prepared by: Robert Filiar, Urban Forestry Manager
Reviewed by: Scott Watson, Historic Preservation Officer
Approved by: Laurel Reimer, City Planner