



Budget Engagement Commission

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: BUDGET ENGAGEMENT COMMISSION DATE: NOVEMBER 14, 2024

FROM: PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT WARDS: ALL

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE URBAN FORESTRY STREET TREE PROGRAM

ISSUE:

Receive an update on the Urban Forestry Street Tree Program.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Budget Engagement Commission receive and file an update on the Urban Forestry Street Tree Program.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Riverside is known as a City of Trees, having been designated as a “Tree City, USA” by the Arbor Day Foundation every year since 1987. The City has historically supported and serviced street trees within the public right-of-way to enhance the quality of life for all residents. It is estimated that there are 150,000 street trees of which approximately 135,000 are within parkways, along the front or side of homes and businesses, and approximately 15,000 are located within medians and other reverse frontage areas serviced by the City; the street trees have an estimated value of over \$400 million and the program dates back to the 1800’s.

Street trees provide an overall benefit to the community by beautifying our parkways, providing oxygen, improving air quality, supporting natural wildlife and providing shade to keep homes cool reducing the demand for electricity. In an effort to foster and preserve the environmental and economic benefits of trees, the City Charter specifies that the Park and Recreation Commission (Commission), serving in an advisory capacity to the City Council, establish policies for the proper planting, care and removal of street trees. The policies as developed with the Commission and approved by the City Council are set forth in the Urban Forestry Tree Policy Manual (Manual) which serves as the guide for the maintenance of street trees.

In 2006, management of the Street Tree Program (Program) was transferred from the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department to the Public Works Department to better facilitate coordination of maintenance activities occurring within the public right-of-way such as sidewalk repairs, street maintenance, and solid waste and street sweeping services. Although managed by the Public Works Department, Street Tree Program activities remain part of the purview of the Commission in accordance with City Charter Section 809, and Urban Forestry staff report periodically to the Commission on activities of the Program and implementation of the

policies set forth in the Manual.

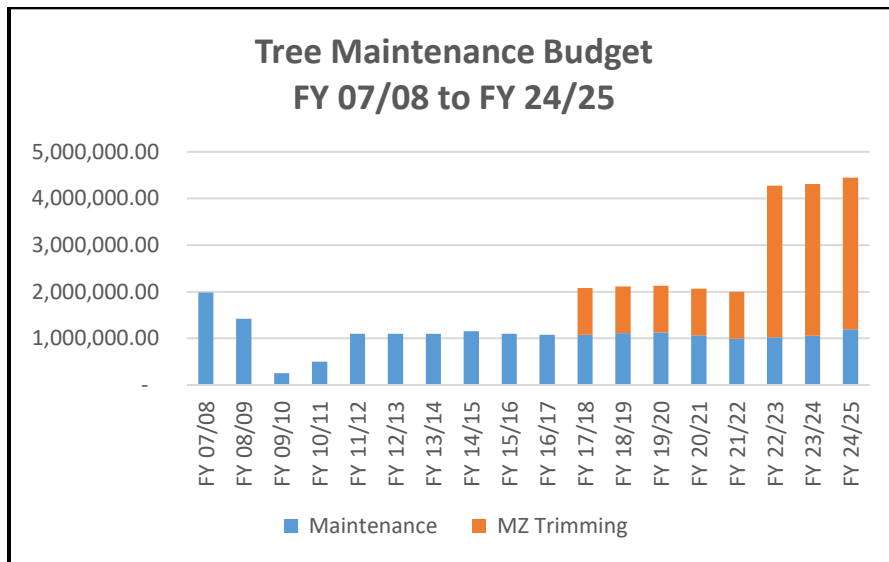
The currently revised 2024 Manual is a comprehensive plan that sets forth the types of trees that can be planted and sets guidelines on the proper maintenance of the trees and when they can be removed. The overall goal of the Manual is to establish policies that will continue to support the Program with trees that will enhance the quality of life for all residents. The Manual recognizes that street trees require a public/private partnership to ensure a successful program, with property owners responsible for watering and fertilizing and the City providing for the oversight and service of the trees.

Tree maintenance is provided by contract tree trimmers and overseen by three tree inspectors (one of whom also oversees vegetation management for utility lines), one newly created supervisor and the Urban Forester. The Urban Forester and supervisor also manage Citywide landscaping overseen by three landscape inspectors. The Program currently provides trimming on a grid-by-grid basis with 67 grids (Attachment 1). Also, the grid trimming map can be found at www.riversideca.gov/treertrimmingmap.

DISCUSSION:

Tree Maintenance Budget

The following graph depicts the history of the Public Works Department’s street tree trimming budget from FY 2007/08 to FY 2024/25. Decreased investment in tree maintenance resulted in a reduction in tree trimming frequency from every 4 to 5 years to every 8 to 11 years. It should be noted that in FY 2008/09, the actual amount expended was about half of what was budgeted due to a mid-year need to decrease overall General Fund expenses.



Taking into consideration the age and variety of trees that make up the City’s urban forest, it is the preference of the Urban Forestry and Landscape Division to grid trim street trees approximately every 4 to 6 years, however, due to budget constraints during the Great Recession, street tree grid trimming was reduced in FY 2008/09 and eliminated in FY’s 2009/10 and 2010/11. Grid trimming funds were restored in FY 2011/12, but to a much lower amount than prior to the Recession. Due to the lapse in regular grid trimming, emergency trimming increased with costs

ranging between \$350,000 and \$600,000 per year.

Tree maintenance funding was increased beginning in FY 2012/13, and through FY 2016/17 the General Fund provided approximately \$1,000,000 annually for grid trimming, tree removals and plantings, service request trimmings and emergency responses. The cost at that time for grid trimming was \$37.50 for most trees and \$60 for certain palm trees. Although \$1,000,000 per year was a significant increase over prior years' funding, it was able to support only a 10 to 11 year grid trimming cycle.

Beginning in FY 2017/18, \$1,000,000 in Measure Z funding was allocated to Urban Forestry to increase tree maintenance funding and improve the 11-year tree trimming frequency cycle. In the years since this initial Measure Z investment, staff have been able to improve the cycle to approximately 4 to 6 years. However, increases to tree trimming costs since 2017 have resulted in fewer tree trims each year, impacting the trimming cycle.

In June 2022, City Council approved an additional \$2,250,000 in Measure Z funding to increase planting of trees and trimming of City-serviced palm trees. This additional funding has since enabled palm tree trimming approximately every 1-2 years throughout the city and allows Public Works to use its \$1,000,000 General Fund allocation to retain a shorter cycle for the remaining City-serviced trees.

In the past two years Riverside Public Utilities has increased their budget to \$4,000,000 annually to comply with State requirements to maintain tree and vegetation clearance from utility wires. This tree trimming activity has a minor overlap with the grid trimming of street trees. The primary purpose of this activity is public safety and maintaining reliability of service for electric customers. In 2015, approximately 18% of all service interruptions were related to trees and vegetation. Thanks to the additional investment by Riverside Public Utilities and the great partnership between Riverside Public Utilities and Public Works, service interruptions related to trees and vegetation represented 8% of total service interruptions in 2024.

The current budget from all funding sources allocated to maintaining the City's urban forest is over \$8.3 million. A breakdown is depicted below:

Fiscal Year	General Fund	Measure Z	Public Utilities	# Tree Trimmed
2023/24	\$1,056,389	\$3,250,000	\$4,000,000	52,625

As shown, with current funding levels the number of trees trimmed in FY 2023/24 was significant. This greatly helps to reduce claims, complaints, service requests, electrical outages and provides a much higher level of customer service to our residents.

Service Requests

The Public Works Department receives a variety of service requests related to street trees through the 311 Call Center. On average, over 4,300 requests were received annually during each of the last five years with the following top five requests:

- Tree, Limb or Tree, Broken or Fallen 27.4%
- Tree, Overgrown, Trim Request 20.8%
- Tree, In Wires, Non-Emergency 14.7%
- Tree, Inspection Request 13.4%
- Tree, Remove or Plant 13.3%

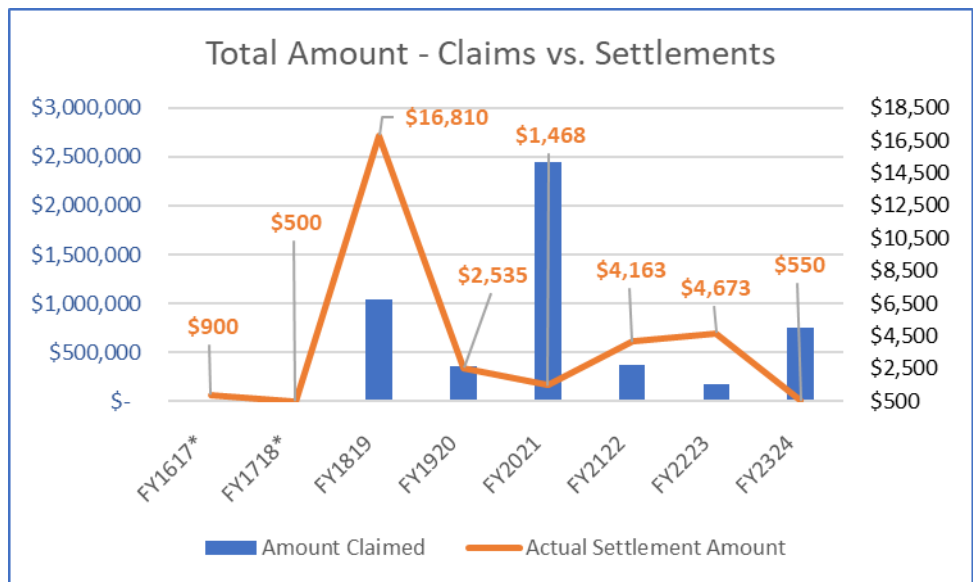
Current Liability Claims and Costs

Although trees are beautiful and provide a number of benefits to the community, there are potential liabilities associated with trees and costs for repairing damaged curbs, gutters, sidewalks, driveways, water lines, sewer lines and other infrastructure. Potential liability costs result from injuries due to trip and fall incidents and property damage costs if a tree were to fall on certain types of real property such as a home or fence.

Below are the various types of tree related damage claims received by the City over the past five years:

Type of Item Damaged	Number
Sewer Lines	74
Driveways and Other Concrete	88
Vehicles	229
Real Property (e.g. House/Fence/Mailbox)	101
Power Lines	9
Water Mains	22
Personal Injury	41

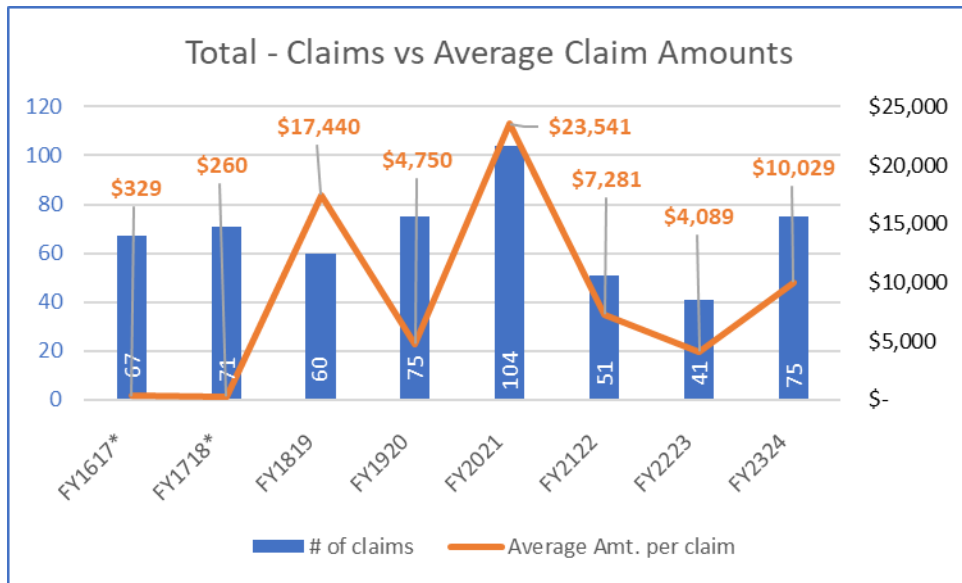
The following chart below compares the total dollar value of all tree claims submitted against the City with the total value of all claims settled during that same timeframe. During this 8-year period, the percentage of settlements paid out was 0.61% and in FY 2023/24 the percentage of settlements were at 0.07%. Staff believes that the investment of Measure Z funds for tree maintenance beginning in FY 2017/18 had a direct effect on the sustained decrease in tree-related claims since FY 2018/19.



*Data on amounts claimed unavailable due to handling of claims by a Third-Party Adjuster

The following chart below compares the total number of claims with the average of each claim

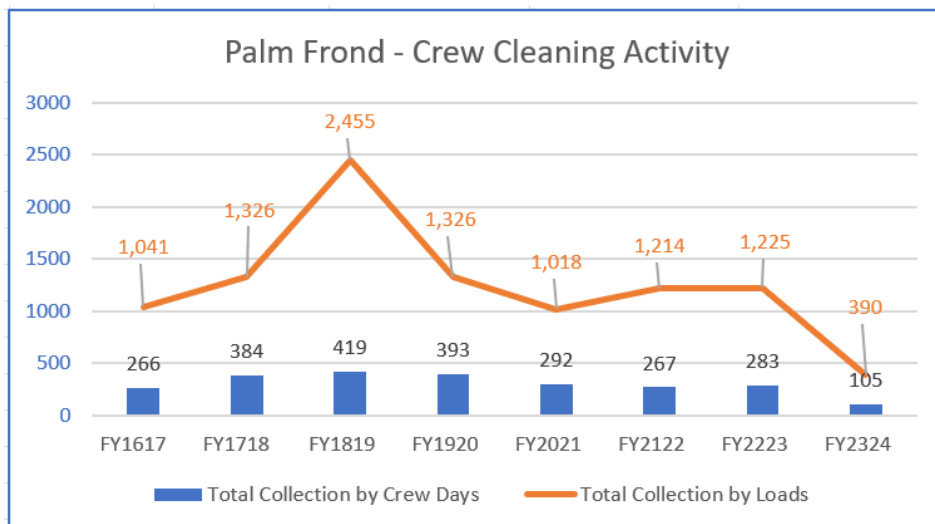
during that eight-year period.



*Data on amounts claimed unavailable due to handling of claims by a Third-Party Adjuster

Currently the Streets Division of the Public Works Department has the task of removing fallen palm fronds from the city's streets and right of ways after wind and storm events. This task reduces the time that Streets' personnel have for their essential duties that include the maintenance and repairs of the streets, sidewalks, curbs and gutters. Trimming of City palm trees on a more frequent schedule has greatly helped to reduce fallen fronds resulting in less time spent by City crews picking up fronds.

The following chart below shows the correlation of Streets Division crew activity and volume in palm frond collection maintenance citywide. The reduction of crew activity and palm frond volume is a direct benefit of Measure Z funding allocated to increase palm tree trimming schedules. This data only shows non-storm activity in cleaning up the city from the heavy volume of palm fronds. Rainstorm events can be a significant cause for downed palm fronds and the collection of palm fronds during storm events is captured as a total for all debris in storm data and is not represented here.



Tree Trimming Costs Trending Upward

Despite increased investment from the General Fund and Measure Z, as trimming costs have continued to increase, the number of trees trimmed each year is slowly declining.

Below shows the increases in tree trimming costs over the past 8 fiscal years.

- FY 2017/2018 - \$37.50
- FY 2018/2019 - \$75.00
- FY 2019/2020 - \$80.00
- FY 2020/2021 - \$85.00
- FY 2021/2022 - \$85.00 (Negotiated to hold previous year price)
- FY 2022/2023 - \$89.95
- FY 2023/2024 - \$94.95
- FY 2024/2025 - \$94.95 (Negotiated to hold previous year price)

Emergency tree work is more costly than grid trimming but must be performed when required for vehicle clearance over roadways, pedestrian clearance over walking paths, traffic and pedestrian sign clearance, root pruning to repair sidewalks, trimming to address limb failures, diseased tree removals, as well as addressing work needed during wind events.

Urban Forestry staff will be issuing a Request for Proposals for tree trimming services beginning July 1, 2025, and anticipates a 10%-15% increase over current tree trimming costs, due to inflation and wage increases, among other cost factors. It is imperative that tree trimming budgets are maintained at current levels or increased to keep pace with rising industry costs, so that the City can continue to reap the benefits of short trim cycles.

Conclusion

Trimming trees on a long grid cycle results in more service requests, more emergency calls, and more claims (e.g., tree limbs falling on private property such as houses or vehicles). Increased tree trimming funding allows Urban Forestry to be proactive and equates to less money spent on reactive measures. It also helps inspectors identify diseased or dying trees before they become a real problem because the tree contractors will visit the trees more often and report concerns to the inspectors for further follow-up.

Proper long-term care is essential to maximize the benefits trees have to offer in our urban forest. Being able to reduce the grid trimming cycle and visit City-serviced trees more often contributes to the health and safety of our residents. The City's investment in trees in recent years has greatly helped to improve the frequency of canopy and palm tree trimming, helped reduce damages to personal property caused by the falling limbs, fronds, and uprooted trees, and reduced time spent by City crews cleaning up palm fronds.

With the costs of services increasing on an annual basis, it is imperative that future budgets keep pace with these costs or exceed these costs in-order-to maintain current levels of services or increase the level of services needed to provide the expected level of services to our community. This not only helps with the overall health of Riverside's urban forest, it has also proven to reduce liability which in turn reduces the financial burden to the City.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This item supports **Strategic Priority 4 – Environmental Stewardship** and **Goal 4.5 - Maintain and conserve 30% of Riverside's natural lands in green space including, but not limited to,**

agricultural lands and urban forests in order to protect and restore Riverside's rich biodiversity and accelerate the natural removal of carbon, furthering our community's climate resilience.

This item aligns with the Cross-Cutting Threads as follows:

1. **Community Trust** – Management of the city's urban forest and landscapes benefit all city residents, businesses and visitors by helping to remove gaseous air pollutants and sequestering carbon.
2. **Equity** – Approval of this action benefits all who live near or travel throughout the City of Riverside.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – Maintaining city owned trees and landscapes (and their infrastructure) supports Public Works' efforts to minimize inefficiencies and maximize reliability.
4. **Innovation** – Approval of this action is neutral towards this cross-cutting thread.
5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – Trees have been noted as being the "lungs of the earth". By providing additional funding to maintain our city trees, provides proof that the City of Riverside and the Public Works Department, are committed to sustainability and resiliency by maintaining and supporting our valuable urban forest on a continuous and more frequent basis, helping to improve the environment and the quality of life for our community.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

Prepared by: Robert Filiar, Urban Forester
Approved by: Gilbert Hernandez, Public Works Director
Certified as to
availability of funds: Kristie Thomas, Finance Director/Assistant Chief Financial Officer
Approved by: Kris Martinez, Assistant City Manager
Approved as to form: Phaedra Norton, City Attorney

Attachments:

1. Grid Map
2. Trimming Dates by Grid
3. Utility Line Clearance & Vegetation Map
4. Presentation