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NEWPORT BEACH

PB&R Commission Staff Report

Agenda Item **V-B**
September 3, 2019

TO: Parks, Beaches & Recreation Commission

FROM: Micah Martin, Deputy Public Works Director
Public Works Department - Municipal Operations Division
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TITLE: Special Tree Replacement Request – Marine Avenue

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15304 of the CEQA Guidelines because the removal of a dead, damaged, and/or diseased tree is a minor alteration of the condition of land and/or vegetation and none of the exceptions to the use of a categorical exemption set forth in the Guidelines apply; and
- 2) Approve the removal and replacement of four (4) Special City Eucalyptus Gum trees located at 210, 217, 224, and 315 Marine Avenue with a mix of new Eucalyptus Gum trees species, including Lemon-Scented Gum and Silver-Dollar Gum, as there is consensus by staff and consultant arborists on these four trees. The removal of these four trees would take place in September. Replacement of these four trees as well as the planting of the five current vacant tree wells would follow as soon as sidewalk and curb reconstruction work is completed.
- 3) Determine if Level III testing should be conducted prior to the removal of the of six (6) Special City Eucalyptus Gum trees located at 220, 300, 301, 312, 319, and 326 Marine Avenue. If determined necessary, staff would recommend the additional testing for these six trees be conducted in the next couple months. Upon further detailed review and evaluation of this additional testing information by the consulting Arborist and the City Arborist, the City Arborist will determine which of the six special trees, if any, can remain. The other trees (possibly up to all six) not approved to remain will be scheduled for removal and replacement (with a mix of new Eucalyptus Gum tree species, including Lemon-Scented Gum and Silver-Dollar Gum) this coming winter. Replanting of these trees would follow as soon as sidewalk and curb repair work is completed.

DISCUSSION:

In prior years, Landscape Superintendent Dan Sereno and the City's Arborist at the time, John Conway, recommended removal of many of the eucalyptus trees on Marine Avenue. Specifically, this recommendation was brought to the attention of the PB&R Commission in October of 2011. In part, City staff recommended removal of these trees due to the effect of prior pruning practices that occurred through the mid-80's. As a result of these prior maintenance practices, root loss, root and trunk decay, and defects in the tree canopies was identified and the health of the trees became a concern. After a large amount of public debate in 2011, the removal of the trees was deferred to

subsequent years, and various mitigation measures were implemented in an effort to further stabilize the trees and prolong their life. These measures included:

- Minor root pruning and shaving to accommodate hardscape repairs.
- Ramping with asphalt patches.
- Grinding of lifted sidewalks.
- Deferred hardscape replacement and maintenance.
- Corrective pruning on our annual inspection/trimming cycle.
- Review by Consulting Arborists (every four years).
- Implementation of treatments for diseases and insects (Lerp Psyllid and Tortoise Beetle).
- Supplemental irrigation and nutrition via water truck.

Between the years of 2012 and 2017, seven trees were removed as a result of decay, major trunk defects, or other various concerns as identified through various tree risk assessments. Two of these locations have been replanted with two different species of trees (Ginko tree and African Tulip tree) in an effort to pilot some diversity amongst these neighborhood trees with something more sustainable at the location. Five tree sites were replanted with the Water Gum (*Tristania laurina*) trees, which have died in the past couple of years and remain vacant.

Earlier this year, the City received an unsolicited Street Tree Evaluation Report from consulting arborist Greg Applegate dated December 20, 2018, regarding the forty-two (42) Eucalyptus Gum (Gum) trees on Marine Avenue. The Evaluation Report was funded by a group known as the Balboa Island Preservation Association. The report's conclusions recommended the replacement of three (3) trees and for a follow-up of a tree hazard analysis by a tree risk assessment professional.

On May 10, 2019, the City received a requested Tree Risk Assessment of the forty-two (42) Gum trees located on Marine Avenue prepared by Walt Warriner, the City's contracted consulting arborist. The Assessment concluded that twenty-seven (27) of the Gum trees were rated as "High-Risk" due to visible and suspected deformities in the trees' canopies, trunks and root systems. The conclusions recommended the replacement of the 27 "High-Risk" trees and a follow-up assessment of the "Moderate-Risk" trees.

The City Arborist, Kevin Pekar, reviewed the Greg Applegate and Walt Warriner Reports and inspected the Gum trees on Marine Avenue on June 11, 2019. As a result of the two referenced independent arborist reports and a recent tree risk assessment conducted by the City Arborist, our City Arborist is recommending that ten (10) of the "High-Risk" Gum trees should to be replaced due to significant deformities or overall health issues, as further mitigation is impractical and will not reasonably improve the condition of these trees. One of these ten (10) trees located at 315 Marine Avenue has already gone before the PB&R Commission for removal as an emergency due to the tree being dead. Emergency tree removals do not require prior approval from the PB&R Commission, however Staff has added this tree to this report since it has not yet been removed.

Furthermore, the City Arborist recommends seventeen (17) "High-Risk" Gum trees be monitored and evaluated over the next three years, which may include additional treatment/mitigation and Tree Risk Assessments potentially leading to recommendations for their removal and replacement.

The City plans to replace these 10 trees recommended for removal, along with five other vacant tree wells, with a mix of Gum species, including Lemon-Scented Gum and Silver-Dollar Gum. The City will procure replacements with 24-inch or possibly 36-inch box sized trees, as the inventory is made available and selective specimens can be identified. It should also be noted that the smaller box-sized trees will better acclimate to their new coastal environment and high salt water table, making for longer lasting trees.

A “Tree Action Plan” map identifying the ten (10) trees proposed for removal, the additional seventeen (17) high risk trees for monitoring, and the five (5) tree vacancies for replanting, with their corresponding addresses has been attached for reference.

Per request of the City Council, a Marine Avenue Tree Maintenance presentation was given on August 13, 2019 at a Council Study Session wherein this information was presented to Council and public along with a review of our tree maintenance program related to these trees. During this study session, Council recommended a level III risk assessment be performed and the related testing associated to this level of assessment be conducted as part of the decision making process in identifying any of these trees for removal. Council expressed a willingness to fund this additional testing in an effort to validate the assumptions being made with regards to the suspected risk of these trees, and to remove/replace as few trees as possible. It was also requested that City Staff work with the BIPA in selecting a third party Arborist to conduct the additional testing and perform further risk assessments as needed. Council was advised that as part of the G-1 Policy, the decision regarding the removal and replacement of these trees was to be presented to the PB&R Commission for consideration with a follow-up Staff Report to be presented to Council advising them of the outcome.

NOTICING:

The Balboa Island Improvement Assostoaion, the Little Island Association, the Marine Avenue Merchants Association, the Balboa Island Preservation Association and Balboa Island property owners with 500 feet have received a copy of this report. Additionally, surrounding property owners, map attached, were notified via postcard of the Commission Meeting related to this Special tree replacement request. Each tree was posted with the attached poster regarding the removal request.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. Tree Removal Review and Tree Inspection Reports
- B. Tree Map
- C. Noticing Map