



STAFF REPORT

To: Beautification Commission

Date: November 7, 2024

From: Richard Holtz, Parks Superintendent/City Arborist

Subject: Public Hearing to Consider an Appeal of the City Arborist's Approval of the Removal of a Protected Private Tree at 2300 Adeline Drive

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission review the City Arborist's decision to approve the removal of a privately protected tree at 2300 Adeline Dr. The Commission can either:

1. Uphold the City Arborist's decision.
2. Reject the City Arborist's decision.
3. Request more information to be able to make a determination.

BACKGROUND

The Sisters of Mercy (SOM) is the largest privately owned property in Burlingame and is home to over 1,700 trees. The SOM property is largely open to the public, allowing visitors and neighbors to walk through the grounds on numerous walking trails. During the extreme storms of 2023, the SOM property experienced dozens of tree failures. In 2024, SOM contacted the City of Burlingame on April 23 & 30, July 12, September 3 and October 30 to notify staff about large tree and limb failures requiring emergency tree work. The emergency response was required on multiple occasions and dictated a thorough follow-up on significantly sized trees on the property.

On July 31, 2024, the City Arborist was contacted by the SOM regarding their private protected trees. They informed the City Arborist of their plan to remove trees of concern and prune others that are candidates for retention following a certified arborist's assessment. On September 5, 2024, the independent arborist's report and recommendations were submitted to the City Arborist (Exhibit A). 75 protected-size trees have been recommended for phased removal. This represents 4.2% of the total tree population. A site meeting was held between the City Arborist, SOM, and their selected tree contractor on September 23, 2024. Trees of concern were viewed and discussed by the parties. The City Arborist recommended that the SOM prioritize the removal of the trees of greatest concern.

On October 9, 2024, an application for the removal of one large Monterey cypress tree and two smaller dead tree trunks was received (Exhibit B). Only the large live tree was included in the public notification sent on October 22, 2024, as the dead existing trunks are not appealable.

The independent arborist report submitted identifies the subject of the application as Tree #162. The tree is adjacent to a walkway that has frequent pedestrian traffic. The report characterizes a failure as imminent, with consequences of impact being severe. Given this information and the City Arborist's verification of decay, recent failures, and poor vigor, the City Arborist approved the removal and replacement of this tree in accordance with Burlingame Municipal Code Chapter 11.06 (Exhibit C)

An appeal was received via email from a resident on October 28, 2024 (Exhibit D).

DISCUSSION

Monterey Cypress Trees

The Monterey Cypress tree is native to the Central Coast of California. It performs best in the Pacific Coast environment. The growth of this species outside of its ideal climate can contribute to the premature decline of the tree. The species has a natural form that contributes to a branching structure with a heavy end weight. This creates a lever effect on heavy branches that can experience failure at higher rates than other similar-sized species. See the following link from the 2014 University of California's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources for a species profile of structural failures: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/treefail/files/199067.pdf>.

This particular specimen is a multi-trunk tree of five large stems. Two stems have been removed later in the tree's life. Those previous points of attachment show decay and lack of response growth typically associated with healthy recovery. Two of the remaining three stems have evidence of multiple branch failures. The entire canopy lacks vigor and is experiencing dieback typical of mature specimen reaching the end of its lifecycle (Exhibit E).

Reason for the Appeal to the Removal of the Tree

Staff requested the reasons for the appeal from the appellant. As of the publishing of this staff report, no response has been received.

The applicant has provided the necessary data to support removing and replacing the Monterey cypress tree per Burlingame's Municipal Code Chapter 11.06.060 criteria. The City Arborist viewed the tree in question and confirmed the existence of site conditions conducive to replacement.

The recommended removal and replacement of this tree is based upon the increased risk of failure, the consequences of a potential failure, and the observed site conditions.

EXHIBITS

- (A) Independent Arborist Report
- (B) October 2024 Tree Removal Application
- (C) City Arborist Removal Approval Letter
- (D) Appeal Protesting the Removal of Monterey Cypress Tree
- (E) Photos of Present Site Conditions