



STAFF REPORT

AGENDA NO: 9c

MEETING DATE: January 20, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and City Council

Date: January 20, 2026

**From: Margaret Glomstad, Parks and Recreation Director – (650) 558-7307
Richard Holtz, Parks Superintendent/City Arborist (650) 558-7333**

Subject: Adoption of a Resolution Approving the Request to Remove the 1600 Block of McDonald Way from the Themed Block Designation

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council adopt the Resolution approving the request to remove the 1600 block of MacDonald Way from Themed Block designation.

BACKGROUND

A street tree Themed Block is defined as a block in which one dominant species of street tree is established and maintained indefinitely. Once a Themed Block is established and a tree is removed for any reason, the tree must be replaced with a tree of the established theme species.

Themed Blocks benefit the community by honoring the intended look of a developed area. Themed Blocks can create a consistent aesthetic with memorable uniformity. Themed Blocks can also face challenges, such as fast-spreading disease or insect infestations. Having a single species increases the likelihood that a single disease or insect will cause widespread tree loss, potentially devastating an entire block.

Additionally, requiring a large canopy tree due to a Themed Block designation in a location with limited growing space can create ongoing conflicts, including the tree's inability to reach its typical species size due to overhead utilities. These trees cannot reach their intended size and require significant, frequent maintenance resources from the City and utility providers to mitigate risk.

In 2008, the City Council approved the City's first Themed Block List and Policy of Establishing a Themed Block. The policy includes the following:

- The Beautification Commission will recommend "Themed Blocks" to the City Council.
- To petition the Beautification Commission for a new Themed Block, a property owner on a block shall gather signatures of at least 2/3 of the property owners.
- Forms for the "Petition" will be provided by the Parks and Recreation Department Office.
- Petitions shall be forwarded to the Beautification Commission for recommendation to the Council to establish a new "themed" block.
- If approved, staff will determine the species theme in collaboration with the property owners.

- Selected "themed" species will replace existing trees only when removing an existing tree is deemed necessary according to City policy.

Since the program's introduction in 2008, the City has established 122 Themed Blocks. In July of 2025, the City Council approved modifications to the original Themed Block designations based on available species, which may cause less interference with overhead conductors (Exhibit A) (Resolution No. 073-2025).

The policy was amended in 2015 to also allow the property owners to petition to remove a block from the Themed Block designation if at least 75% of property owners agree (Exhibit B).

DISCUSSION

In October 2025, a resident of the 1600 block of McDonald Way was informed that they could not select a tree from the City's official species list because the theme is Red Maple. The resident was surprised because the 1600 block of McDonald Way has had multiple species planted over the last decade and seemed to lack a common theme. The resident submitted the attached petition on behalf of their neighbors. Twenty 24 of the 26 property owners signed the petition. Staff matched signatures of 23 properties to property owners on record and determined that 88% of property owners supported removing the Themed Block designation (Exhibit C).

Staff researched the area's history and found that when the area was developed, the Liriodendron (Tulip Tree) was planted at most residences along this street. The Parks Division no longer plants this tree due to susceptibility to aphids and significant root-infrastructure challenges. Sometime between 2008 and 2016, the Red Maple tree was selected as the replacement species. However, the table below shows the actual species at 1600 McDonald Way.

Total Available Planting Sites	28
Vacancies	3
Original Theme Tree (Tulip Tree)	6
Replacement Theme Tree (Red Maple)	12
Other Species	7
Other Species Planted Since 2012	3 (2013, 2020, 2021)

This matter was brought before the Beautification Commission on December 4, 2025. The Commission approved the removal of the 1600 block of McDonald Way from the Themed Block designation (Exhibit D).

If the Council approves the removal of the Themed Block designation for the 1600 block of McDonald Way, residents would be allowed to select the replacement street tree from the list for planting areas greater than 6' (Exhibit E). However, the existing trees would be replaced only if a street tree is required to be replaced under the City ordinance.

In preparation for the Tuesday, January 20, 2026, City Council meeting, staff noticed this meeting via the City E-news, social media, and mailing to the twenty-six property owners and tenants on the 1600 block of McDonald Way.

FISCAL IMPACT

No fiscal impact is anticipated.

Exhibits:

- Resolution
- Current Themed Block List
- Themed Block Policy Form
- Petition From Property Owners - 1600 Block of McDonald Way
- Beautification Commission Staff Report - 1600 Block of McDonald Way
- City Street Tree Lists for Planters Greater Than 6'