



STAFF REPORT

AGENDA NO: 9d

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 Chapin Avenue from the Themed Block Designation

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council adopt the Resolution approving the request to remove the 1600 block of Chapin Avenue from the 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 January 2025, a resident of the 1600 block of Chapin Ave. applied for a Tree Work Plan Permit to remove City street trees in conjunction with sidewalk repairs. The resident expressed interest in planting a utility-friendly tree from the City's approved list of species for overhead primary-conductor utilities. The resident was informed that the area was designated as a Themed Block, with *Platanus acerifolia* (London Planetree) as the required replacement. The resident was also informed that the Beautification Commission and City Council would discuss Themed Blocks and overhead utility conflicts in 2025, with the potential for changes to the policy.

After three public meetings, the Beautification Commission and City Council voted to support retaining the London planetree as the designated Themed Block species along the 1600 block of Chapin Ave. and at other locations throughout the city.

Some property owners along 1600 Chapin Ave. signed a petition to remove the Themed Block designation from this area and submitted it to staff. Staff matched signatures to property owners and determined that 86% supported removing the Themed Block designation (Exhibit C).

While 1600 Chapin Ave. is a Themed Block, several alternative species have been planted, and some of the remaining London Planetrees are in poor health and require replacement.

The table below shows the actual species planted along 1600 Chapin Ave.

Total Available Planting Sites	28
Vacancies	3
Theme Tree (London Planetree)	8
Theme Tree Requiring Replacement	4
Other Species	14
Other Species Planted Since 2012	8 (2017, 2019, 2022)

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

If the Council approves the removal of the Themed Block designation for the 1600 block of Chapin Ave., residents would be sent one of two approved species lists, depending upon the presence of primary overhead electrical conductors (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 seven property owners and tenants in the 1600 block of Chapin Ave.

FISCAL IMPACT

No fiscal impact is anticipated.

Exhibits:

- Resolution
- Current Themed Block List
- Themed Block Policy Form
- Petition from Property Owners - 1600 Block of Chapin Ave.
- Beautification Commission Staff Report - 1600 Block of Chapin Ave.
- City Street Tree Lists for Planters Less than 4' and Beneath Overhead Primary Conductors