

BURLINGAME BEAUTIFICATION COMMISSION
Draft Minutes December 4, 2025

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Beautification Commission was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Chu.

ROLL CALL

Present: Chair Chu, Commissioners Batte, Bauer, Damico, and Kirchner
Absent: None
Staff: Parks and Recreation Director Glomstad, Parks Superintendent/City Arborist Holtz, Parks Supervisor Burow, Administrative Support Diaz, and Recording Secretary Flores
Others: None

MINUTES

Commissioner Batte made a motion to approve the September 4, 2025, Regular Meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Chair Chu and was approved, 5-0-0.

CORRESPONDENCE

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

PRESENTATION

None

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

1. Consideration of Petition to Remove Themed Block Designation for the 1600 Block of Chapin Avenue

Arborist Holtz presented a report on a petition to remove the themed block designation for the 1600 block of Chapin Avenue, which is currently designated as a London Plane theme block. He provided background on themed blocks in Burlingame, noting they were established around 2008, with additional blocks added through approximately 2012-2016. The original intent was to plant a single dominant tree species per block, though current arboricultural guidance favors species diversity to reduce risks associated with monocultures and ongoing maintenance challenges. Arborist Holtz explained that themed block designation does not require the removal of healthy trees but governs which species may be planted as replacements. He noted that property owners may petition to remove a themed designation if at least 70% of the block's owners sign in support.

Arborist Holtz reported that the 1600 block of Chapin Avenue contains 28 planting sites, but only eight London plane trees remain, with only one being a full-size mature tree. The remaining London plane trees have been heavily pollarded, show signs of decay, and are likely to require removal in the near future. He stated that 14 trees of other species currently exist on the block, including several planted after the themed

designation was established. As a result, the block no longer functions visually as a London plane theme block. Arborist Holtz explained that a recent petition circulated on this block, and seven of eight property owners (86%) signed, surpassing the 70% threshold.

Commissioners asked questions about how replacement lists would function if the theme designation were removed.

Arborist Holtz described two relevant lists: one for sites with overhead electrical conductors, which includes smaller or slower-growing species that reduce line conflicts, and another for narrow planter strips under four feet, with species selected for lower root space needs to minimize sidewalk and curb damage. He stated that for Chapin, the side of the street with overhead utilities would use the Primary Utility tree list, while the opposite side would use the Planters Under 4' tree list. Arborist Holtz stated that the single large London plane on the block is roughly 60 years old and not expected to be removed in the next five years, and that, where possible, the City can shift sidewalks within the 10-foot right-of-way to help preserve such trees. He stated the small, severely pollarded London planes on Chapin were most likely altered by property owners over the years, not by PG&E line-clearance crews.

Chair Chu opened the floor to public comment.

Karl Baktiari of 1617 Chapin Avenue stated that he has lived on the block since 1989. He described how PG&E periodically cuts the London plane trees when they grow into overhead utility lines, and under state authority, does so without seeking permission. According to Mr. Baktiari, these cuts are made for access and clearance, not appearance, and the trees have come to look unsightly. He described London plane trees as having invasive root systems that, in his experience, caused significant sidewalk damage along his frontage and around the corner. He cited gardening resources indicating that some cities have restricted London plane trees because of root problems affecting sidewalks, sewers, and even building foundations. Mr. Baktiari stated that he and his neighbors were unaware of the theme designation until recently, and that, upon learning of it and the petition process, the neighbors he spoke to were supportive of seeking more choice in replacement species.

No other speakers came forward, and Chair Chu closed public comment.

In deliberation, commissioners agreed that the theme on the 1600 block of Chapin Avenue has effectively broken down. They emphasized the strength of resident support.

Commissioner Bauer made a motion to dissolve the themed street designation for the 1600 block of Chapin Avenue. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Batte and was approved, 5-0-0. Commissioner Bauer concluded by noting that this action is a recommendation and that the City Council will make the final decision.

2. Consideration of Petition to Remove Themed Block Designation for the 1600 Block of McDonald Way

Arborist Holtz presented the report on the petition to remove the themed block designation for the 1600 block of McDonald Way, located in the Ray Park subdivision. He explained that McDonald was originally themed with *Liriodendron tulipifera* (tulip trees), but the City has since stopped planting tulip trees because

they are prone to invasive roots, large branch failures, and general dieback. Between about 2008 and 2012, the block's theme was modified so that tulip trees removed would be replaced with red maples, while existing tulip trees were left in place. Arborist Holtz reported that, out of 28 planting sites, six tulip trees remain; twelve red maples have been planted under the updated theme; seven trees of other species are present (including a tristiana, a catalpa, and a mature magnolia); and three sites are vacant. At least four locations contain isolated non-theme trees, breaking any strong sense of uniformity.

In response to questions, Arborist Holtz described the red maple's performance in Burlingame. Red maples have been used by the City for over 20 years, particularly as replacements for tulip trees and liquidambar. Overall, they have relatively low pest and disease issues but require moderate to high water and can sometimes develop aggressive root systems; a few documented cases involve 15–20-year-old trees removed due to sewer conflicts. He emphasized that such cases are exceptions. Arborist Holtz stated that the petition began when a resident, who had been cultivating a native plant garden, sought to replace her front tulip tree with a native Coast live oak. He initially encouraged this idea without checking the block's theme status, then later had to correct that guidance and inform the resident that only red maple was allowed under the theme, prompting the resident to pursue a petition for greater flexibility.

Chair Chu opened the floor to public comment.

Mary J. Hansell, a resident of McDonald Way since 1995, spoke in favor of removing the theme designation. She stated that when she and her husband moved in, they saw the street as having a pleasant canopy of trees but did not perceive a single dominant species or even know that a theme designation existed. Over the past eight years, she has systematically moved her yard toward native planting, taking part in the City's rain barrel program and focusing on environmentally conscious water use. She also volunteers with the California State Parks Foundation on the coast, helping remove invasive plants and install native species, and she has personally observed the resulting ecological improvements. When the City determined that her front tulip tree needed to be removed, she hoped to replace it with a native tree that would serve as a keystone for local wildlife. Mrs. Hansell stated the red maple theme restricted her choice. She explained that every neighbor whom she was able to contact signed the petition, and that the few who did not sign were simply unreachable. She urged the Commission to support the petition so that residents could choose from the approved list, including native species, rather than being bound to red maple.

No other speakers came forward, and Chair Chu closed public comment.

Commissioner Kirchner provided context on Ray Park, noting that it was subdivided around 1940 and that only two streets there have themed block designations: McDonald Way and a block of Balboa Way planted with Trident maples, which presents a clearly recognizable theme. He observed that McDonald Way lacks the same level of cohesion, given its mix of tulip trees, red maples, and other species. While expressing general support for themed blocks and a desire not to encourage unnecessary petitions city-wide, he felt that attempting to "re-create" a strong theme on McDonald, given its current mix, was not particularly compelling.

Commissioner Bauer contrasted McDonald with Chapin, noting that McDonald still has a majority of theme-related trees. She expressed some hesitation about abandoning a theme in a case where the species

is still fundamentally workable and where the primary driver appears to be resident preference and a desire for choice.

Commissioner Damico stated that the block did not visually read as a cohesive themed street, and the lack of visual continuity, combined with resident support and interest in native species, supported the removal of the theme block designation.

Chair Chu stated that, based on the photographs presented, the block did not appear to have a strong theme character and for that reason he was inclined to support removing the theme designation. He noted that while planting native trees is important, the range of native tree species suitable for this part of the Bay Area is limited, and relying solely on native options could restrict future planting choices.

Commissioner Bauer noted that removing the theme would allow residents to choose any approved species, from the City's approved replacement lists, not solely native trees.

Commissioner Kirchner made a motion to dissolve the themed block designation for the 1600 block of McDonald Way. The motion was seconded by Chair Chu and was approved, 4-1-0. Director Glomstad concluded by noting that this action is a recommendation and that the City Council will make the final decision.

REPORTS

Director Glomstad reported that Commissioners Batte and Bauer had been reappointed to new terms on the Beautification Commission. She stated that Recording Secretary Flores would be leaving her position with the City to focus on caring for her two young children, and Administrative Support Diaz would serve as interim staff support for the Commission while the City recruits a permanent replacement. Director Glomstad announced that there would be no January meeting due to its proximity to the New Year's holiday and that the next regular meeting would be held in February 2026, at which time the Commission would address the rotation of the Chair and Vice Chair. She also reported on upcoming community events, including the City Tree Lighting and the Winter Market to be held at the Community Center.

Commissioner Bauer reported on the "Vault to the Future" time capsule project. She explained that a working group, including herself, Jennifer Pfaff, Jill Goldsmith, and Cheri Yu, was organizing a 50-year time capsule for the City. The capsule will be stored in a World War II-era locker at the Community Center rather than buried. Beginning in January, the City will invite residents, schools, businesses, and community groups to submit written memories, photographs, and small items representing life in Burlingame. Submissions will be collected via an online form at burlingame.org/vault, and posters will be displayed on Burlingame Avenue and Broadway, as well as at public facilities. Commissioner Bauer also described the contents of a recently opened 25-year time capsule previously buried at City Hall, noting that the items provided an engaging snapshot of the past and inspiration for the new project.

Commissioner Kirchner reported on the City's landscape awards presentation, noting that the three award recipients were recognized at a City Council meeting. He stated that Councilmember Colson led the ceremony and that a PowerPoint presentation highlighted each winner. Commissioner Kirchner stated that the recipients appeared pleased and that the program continues to be an effective way to showcase successful landscape design in the community.

UPCOMING AGENDA ITEMS

Director Glomstad stated that agenda items for the February 2026 meeting would include the Chair and Vice Chair rotation.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:27 p.m. The next Beautification Commission meeting is scheduled for February 5, 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

America Diaz

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Recording Secretary