

**Claremont Tree Committee
Agenda Report**

TO: TREE COMMITTEE

FROM: JEREMY SWAN, COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTOR

DATE: DECEMBER 18, 2024

SUBJECT: UPDATES TO THE TREE POLICIES AND GUIDELINES MANUAL

SUMMARY

In February 1997, the City Council adopted what is now known as the Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual. The Manual guides the day-to-day maintenance standards of the City's urban forest. Over the years, the Manual has been updated to address changes in the urban forest maintenance industry and the priorities of the Claremont community.

The City's urban forest program has been scrutinized since the windstorm of January 2022, with staff and the community questioning many of the maintenance practices outlined in the Manual. In an effort to address these concerns and to verify that the City's maintenance activities are in line with industry standards, staff solicited proposals for urban forest professional services. In July 2023, the City Council entered into an agreement with Dudek for urban forest professional services.

Dudek was charged with reviewing the current Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual. The goal of the review is to recommend changes that meet current industry standards while considering community character, fiscal responsibility, and compliance with State and local regulations (e.g. the Americans with Disabilities Act), as well as compliance with guidelines and standards set forth by the California Joint Powers Insurance Authority, the City's insurance provider.

Over the past 18 months, Dudek has held several meetings with City staff and the community. Input received during these meetings along with updated industry standards have shaped the revisions recommended to the Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual. The revised Manual is completed and ready for review.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Tree Committee recommend to the Community and Human Services Commission approval of the Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual as presented.

ALTERNATIVE TO RECOMMENDATION

In addition to the recommendation, there is the following alternative:

- Refer the matter back to staff for additional information.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The total amended contract amount with Dudek is \$75,775. The staff cost to prepare this report and administer this project estimated at \$22,276 and is included in the operating budget of the Community Services Department.

ANALYSIS

Background

In 1997, the City Council adopted the Tree Policy Manual (now the Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual), which describes the day-to-day operations and maintenance guidelines for the City's urban forest. The Manual outlines the guardianship for the urban forest, and gives City staff the responsibility of providing the daily management and emergency services to sustain the City's urban forest. The Manual also includes the City's standards for planting, trimming, and removal of trees within the urban forest.

The Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual has been revised over the years to stay current with industry standards and the priorities of the community. Most changes have been minor and directed by City staff, with the most noted revision occurring in 2015. In 2015, City staff and a group of community members recommended revisions to address drought conditions, reforestation requirements, species mitigation, and pest/disease treatments. Since that time, only minor revisions have been made, mainly addressing nursery stock standards to meet grant requirements. All revisions to the Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual have been recommended by the Tree Committee and the Community and Human Services Commission, and adopted by the City Council. The current Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual is included as Attachment A.

Much has changed in the industry and the community over the past eight years. Most notably, the ongoing drought, the Windstorm of 2022, and increasing conflicts between trees and hardscape/infrastructure. Another industry change that is occurring is a movement towards reforestation with more climate-appropriate and native species. To address these changes, staff recommended utilizing the services of an outside urban forest consultant to review the Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual. The goal of the review is to recommend changes that meet industry standards while considering community character, fiscal responsibility, and compliance with State and local regulations (e.g. the Americans with Disabilities Act), as well as compliance with guidelines and standards set forth by the California Joint Powers Insurance Authority, the City's insurance provider.

In July 2023, the City Council entered into an agreement with Dudek for urban forest professional services. The project included a review of the existing Manual, initial comments for revision, a community input process, and final recommendations for revisions. Over the past eighteen months, an in-depth review of the Manual by Dudek, several internal staff meetings, and a vast community input process have occurred and helped shape the revised Manual (Attachment B).

Community Input Process

Three community meetings were held from September 2023 to December 2023. Each community meeting focused on a different goal or objective of the review process, which are noted below. Additionally, in October 2023, the Sustainability Committee reviewed the initial revisions and made recommendations for consideration.

Community Meeting and Topics

- September 2023 - Tree versus infrastructure conflicts and root pruning.
- November 2023 - Urban forest health versus tree risk and tree removal procedures.
- December 2023 - Tree conflicts versus ADA considerations and infrastructure conflict resolutions.

Following the three community meetings, staff and Dudek reviewed the public input received and made final revisions to the Manual. In May 2024, the revised draft was released to the public for a thirty-day public comment period. Staff received sixty suggested revisions during the public input period. Close to fifty suggested revisions were incorporated into the final draft Manual.

In September 2024, a final community meeting was held to review the final draft Manual. After the final community meeting, staff met internally with Dudek to discuss next steps and completed the Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual draft for review and approval. A complete list of all public comment received is included as Attachment C.

Goals and Objectives

City staff and the community presented many goals and objectives for the revision process. The complete list of goals and objectives is included as Attachment D.

Best Management Practices

Since the Manual was written by staff in 1997, City staff felt it was important to have a third-party urban forest professional review the Manual to ensure the City's practices are in line with current industry Best Management Practices (BMPs). The industry is continually changing to address rigors of the urban forest, climate change, and sustainable practices. Dudek found the Manual to be generally current with industry BMPs but recommended a few clarifying changes. These changes were minor, primarily related to changes in industry terminology, nursery stock standards, and species diversification.

Tree Maintenance and Wildlife Protections

Bird nesting season in California occurs during the months of February through November each year. The City's grid trimming season runs from November through April of each year. The two activities overlap, shortening the City's timeframe for grid trimming. The City's tree maintenance contractor, West Coast Arborists, Inc. (WCA), has a robust wildlife protection program, including the care and protection of nesting birds. As a standard protocol, WCA will not trim a tree with signs of bird activity. WCA will post a notice on the tree, skip trimming, and return to trim when there are no signs of bird activity. In response to requests for information regarding instances of tree trimming affected by bird activity, the City will annually report the number of trees with bird activity noted, providing transparency in the City's protection of wildlife.

Maintaining the Tree Canopy

Focus should be placed on maintaining a healthy tree canopy rather than a particular number of trees in the urban forest. Maintaining the tree canopy and fostering climate resiliency includes protecting mature trees, responsible planting, and proactive removal and replacement programs. Protecting a tree's root system is essential to protecting mature trees. Often during construction and development projects, tree root systems are damaged. The revised Manual includes a more robust tree protection zone program. Additionally, the revised Manual will foster climate resiliency by planting the "right tree in the right place," species diversification, and, when necessary, developing and implementing proactive removal and replacement programs. These minor changes to the Manual will contribute to maintaining a healthy tree canopy for many years to come.

Removal Parameters

It is the City's policy to protect and preserve healthy trees whenever possible; however, it is inevitable that trees will require removal at some point. The community expressed concerns regarding removal categories, notification procedures, removal documentation, and lack of opportunity for input regarding removals.

Removal Categories: In response, the categories for removal were changed from "dead," "diseased," and "hazardous" to "emergency" and "non-emergency" removals. Emergency removals include hazardous trees and dead or severely declining trees. Non-emergency removals include declining trees, infrastructure conflicts, and other necessary removals.

Notification Procedures and Community Input: Currently, the Community Services Department provides a report of plantings and removals on a monthly basis to the Community and Human Services Commission. The revised procedures for emergency removals are the same. For non-emergency removals, recommended removals will be posted on the City website for a 15-day notification period prior to removal to allow for community input.

Removal Documentation: At this time, removal notes are documented in the City's urban forest inventory system. The revised Manual requires an arborist report for all non-emergency removals. The report and photos will be included during the 15-day notification period.

Infrastructure Conflict Resolutions

Historically, the Manual addresses infrastructure conflicts loosely. The revised Manual aims to ensure all potential resolutions are considered prior to tree removal by utilizing a systematic procedure. The systematic approach includes a matrix of criteria within a flow chart guiding the resolution through predetermined criteria. The outcome will then be determined through the matrix and not solely based on the opinion of an arborist. It should be noted that Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements will be adhered to at all times. Also included are several alternatives to consider prior to tree and/or root removal to make necessary infrastructure repairs.

Communication, Transparency, and Procedure

Throughout the community input process, the community expressed concerns regarding communication, transparency, and following procedures. The City addressed these concerns by building in several courses for communication, transparency, and procedures, including a public input process regarding non-emergency removals, more robust documentation regarding removals, and transparency regarding wildlife activity.

Goals and Objectives – Not Addressed in Revision

Through the community input process, several concerns were brought to the City's attention that did not fall within the purview of Dudek's scope of work. The first concern involves the roles, responsibilities, and members of the Tree Committee, which is outlined in Section 12.26 of the Claremont Municipal Code. The composition and responsibilities of the Tree Committee will be evaluated as part of the Urban Forest Management Plan review, but may require evaluation of other City Planning Documents (e.g. General Plan, Municipal Code).

Another concern was establishing requirement of an Urban Forester position or other City staff with such a credential. At this time, the City does not have an Urban Forester position; therefore, this would require the creation of a new position. In addition, the title of Urban Forester is new with very few credential programs available.

Finally, the community requested a review of the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) to ensure that the Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual, UFMP, and goals of other City plans are aligned. The 2024-26 Community Services Budget includes a review of the UFMP, which will include aligning the UFMP and other City plans/documents. The UFMP review will also update the goals included in the Plan. Review of the Urban Forest Management Plan will begin once the Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual is approved.

Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual Update

The update to the City's Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual provides updated BMPs, transparency, protections for established trees, more robust community input procedures, and recommendations for urban forest resiliency. Staff recommends that the Tree Committee recommend that the Community and Human Services Commission recommend that the City Council approve the final draft Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual.

CEQA REVIEW

This item is not subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

PUBLIC NOTICE PROCESS

The agenda and staff report for this item have been posted on the City website and distributed to interested parties. If you desire a paper copy, please contact the Community Services Department.

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Attachments:

- A – Current Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual
- B – Updated Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual
- C – Public Comment Log
- D – Goals and Objectives