

WESTSIDE REGIONAL ALLIANCE OF COUNCILS

BEL AIR-BEVERLY CREST NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
BRENTWOOD COMMUNITY COUNCIL
DEL REY NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
MAR VISTA COMMUNITY COUNCIL
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PACIFIC PALISADES COMMUNITY COUNCIL

PALMS NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
SOUTH ROBERTSON NEIGHBORHOODS COUNCIL
VENICE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
WEST LA NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
WESTSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
WESTWOOD COMMUNITY COUNCIL
WESTWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

Land Use and Planning Committee

Oct. 7, 2018

Co-chairs: Marlene Savage, Sharon Commins, Barbara Broide

Resolution:

WRAC requests:

All NCs shall support the City Council motion to strengthen the Protected Tree Ordinance (177404) (CF 03-1459-C3).

Facts and background:

1. Two westside councilors proposed the motion - CD 5 (Koretz) and CD11 (Bonin), which calls for the Urban Forestry Division to study the issue and propose recommendations.
2. The Council has voted to improve protection of wildlife areas, urban forest and biodiversity (CF #15-0499) and prevent habitat fragmentation (CF #14-0518).
3. The Council approved the Protected Tree Ordinance, which aims to preserve four significant native trees: All native oaks (except Scrub Oak), Black Walnut, Western Sycamore, and California Bay.

Findings and justifications:

1. 30-55% of the city's tree canopy was lost in the last 10 years, primarily because of new large buildings that replace green space and these new buildings provide little dirt area for new, large replacement trees (2017 USC study).
2. Trees provide numerous benefits - absorb carbon dioxide to reduce climate change (reduces heat and air conditioning costs), retain water (prevents landslides), provide habitat for animals/birds, and add greenery and shade to neighborhoods (increases property values and improves mental health).

APPROVED: 7-0-0.

MOTION PUBLIC WORKS & GANG REDUCTION

The City Council has recently taken steps to better protect its wildlife areas, urban forest and biodiversity (CF#15-0499) and to prevent wildlife habitat fragmentation (CF#14-0518).

As well, the City has taken steps to protect its trees by instituting a Protected Tree Ordinance (Ord. #177404), whose stated aim was to establish standards for the preservation of four significant trees native to Southern California: indigenous Oak trees, Southern California Black Walnut, Western Sycamore, and California Bay. However, the ordinance has not accomplished its goal; protected trees are too easily removed under the current permitting process.

Trees provide vital ecosystem services, including absorbing carbon dioxide (which helps combat climate change), creating canopy shade and, by their roots, water retention, protecting soil health, preventing soil erosion and thereby helping prevent landslides, providing habitat for animals, insects and birds, producing oxygen, improving the livability of neighborhoods, the health of inhabitants, and increasing property values, among many others.


A healthy tree canopy is an essential component of the City's climate disruption resilience.


Unfortunately, trees are not being adequately protected and departments are not working well together to protect them. Trees are being cut before development permits are applied for, trees are not being protected during construction activities, and building permits are routinely issued without the Department of Building and Safety being aware of the presence of protected trees on the affected properties, all resulting in an accumulating net loss of trees, tree canopy and the accompanying ecosystem services across the City.

The City's Protected Tree Ordinance, while currently in line with state laws, is not of use if it is not as supported as it could be. City department enforcement is not currently fully in line with the underlying principles and intent of the ordinance.

I THEREFORE MOVE that Council instruct the Urban Forestry Division to work with the Planning Department and the Department of Building and Safety to convene and consult with stakeholder groups, including the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, arborists, community groups, environmental groups like TreePeople, members of the Community Forestry Advisory Committee and the Mayor's expert biodiversity group, and report back within 75 days regarding recommendations for strengthening the Protected Tree Ordinance, including, but not limited to: determining methods to preserve overall native tree cover and habitat areas, limiting damage to trees retained during development, and possibly adding protected trees based on circumference and species notability.

PRESENTED BY:


PAUL KORETZ
Councilmember, 5th District


MIKE BONIN
Councilmember, 11th District