

**CITY OF ALBANY
PARKS RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: January 9, 2025

Reviewed by: _____

SUBJECT: Street Tree Removal Applications

REPORT BY: John Hawkridge, Urban Forester

SUMMARY

The issue before the Commission is to consider four non-emergency street tree removal applications submitted by property owners at three locations: 728 Masonic Ave, 1106 Pomona Ave (2 trees), and 1518 Sonoma Ave.

Section 2 of the City Tree Removal Policy & Procedures details the removal criteria and process for approval of removal applications. In general, the City's Urban Forester reviews each tree submitted for removal for conformance with the established non-emergency removal criteria (Section 2.1) and provides a recommendation to either remove or retain the tree in question. The Commission then votes to approve or reject the Urban Forester's recommendation.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The following are Staff's recommendations for the three street tree removal applications:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| • 728 Masonic Ave | Recommended for Removal |
| • 1106 Pomona Ave (2) | Recommended for Removal |
| • 1518 Sonoma Ave | Recommended for Removal |

These recommendations are based on the following analysis and the non-emergency removal criteria details in Section 2.1 of the City Tree Removal Policy & Procedures.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

The following presents background information and analysis for each Non-emergency Tree Removal Application submitted to the City for consideration. Staff analysis includes a reference to the specific removal criteria where applicable.

Per the removal criteria, Street Trees in Albany are considered for removal when they:

- pose a risk to the public,
- are diseased or damaged beyond reclamation,
- cause infrastructure damage that cannot be repaired without tree removal,
- cause repeated infrastructure damage that has been previously repaired, or

- are in conflict with an approved City project.

Each tree recommended for removal will be replaced with a tree selected from the City's accepted street tree list in consultation with the property owners.

728 Masonic Ave (Liquidambar 21" dbh) Tree ID #10

The property owner submitted a street tree removal application (attachment 1) due to repeated damage to the sidewalk.

The City's Street Tree Inventory identifies this tree as an American Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) with a DBH range of 19-24 inches and assesses the tree's overall health as good.



Staff performed a visual inspection of the tree and confirmed the assessment contained in the inventory (generally good). However, visible structural issues with the tree were observed.

Of primary concern is the main branching union which has included bark with the potential for a major limb failure, on the main trunk at about 5'-6' above grade. Another branching union at about 20' also has included bark and potential for failure.



Evidence of a previous large limb failure that has not healed correctly is an area of weakness with potential for failure.



The damage to the previously replaced sidewalk is extensive and is now affecting the curb and the driveway. The sidewalk was repaired in 2016, and further concrete shaving was completed in 2022 due to continued sidewalk lifting.

The planting strip on this block is 27" wide. The tree has filled the planting space with no room for expansion. The curb is being pushed on the street side, and the sidewalk and driveway are being damaged on the property side. This is the wrong tree for this location. There is little room for sidewalk realignment. The root flare is now lifting the sidewalk. Pruning to replace would involve cutting into the root flare, and other extensive root removal which would be detrimental to the tree's health.



Based on the above observations, staff recommends removal and replacement with a more suitable species for the location.

This application is recommended for approval per the Albany City Tree Removal Policy and Procedures, Non-Emergency City Tree Removal Criteria Section 2.1c (damage to sidewalk, tripping hazard, and at least one previous repair), and 2.1d (sidewalk repair will cause damage to the roots and/or instability to the tree).

1106 Pomona Ave (2 Eastern Redbud trees, dbh 5" & 5") Tree ID #s 2478 & 2479

The property owner submitted a street tree removal application due to concerns about the physical condition of the trees.

The City's Street Tree Inventory identifies these trees as Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) with a DBH range of 04"-06" inches and assesses the overall health of the tree as fair. Attachment 4 includes the data report for this tree.



Staff performed a visual inspection of the trees and confirmed the assessment contained in the inventory (fair). Both trees are mature and show signs of decline.

Tree #2479 has been heavily cut back, including the central leader. At the time of inspection, about 75% of the canopy was dead. Pruning this tree would remove a substantial portion of the canopy which would continue to die back. The tree is at risk of further decline and/or failure due to decay in the root flare zone.



Tree #2478 has some dieback in the canopy, and visible decay in the root flare zone. Canopy dieback and observed root movement when putting g pressure on the trunk, indicate a more serious decline. Pruning this tree would remove dead branches, but the dieback will continue and there is a risk of complete failure due to decay in the root zone.



Eastern Redbud trees (*Cercis canadensis*), a typically understory tree, native to eastern forests, can have several problems in California. They are adapted to full sun to partial shade,

but they are not well adapted to hot summer sun, or aridity and moisture stress which can lead to root rot. Poorly draining soils can also lead to root rot, which may be the case here. Diseases such as verticillium wilt, a soil-borne fungal disease, and Botryosphaeria canker disease which causes branch dieback, easily affect this species. No effective chemical control is available for these diseases.

Although these trees pose a minor risk to the public due to their small stature, staff recommends removal and replacement to allow for a more suitable species that would better serve the public moving forward.

This application qualifies for removal per the Albany City Tree Removal Policy and Procedures, Non-Emergency City Tree Removal Criteria Section 2.1a “damaged, diseased, or borer infested beyond reclamation.”

1518 Sonoma Ave (Australian Willow - 21” DBH) Tree ID #3251

The property owner submitted a street tree removal application due to concerns about tree-caused sidewalk and property damage and the overall health of the tree.

The City’s Street Tree Inventory identifies this tree as an Australian Willow (*Geijera parviflora*) with a DBH range of 19-24 inches and assesses the overall health of the tree as poor, noting hardscape damage and guy wire clearance.



Staff assessment indicates that the tree had increased its lean toward the street after PG&E replaced the nearby power pole and removed the guy wire the tree had been pushing against.

Also noted was the presence of a large conk near the base of the trunk, indicating advanced decay on the compaction (or compression) side of the trunk. Loose and peeling bark on the extension (or tension) side of the trunk illustrates the recent movement of the tree. Crown dieback continues after recent pruning removed several large dead limbs.



Sidewalk damage is extensive. The lean away from the sidewalk has caused root growth on the sidewalk side to compensate. Pruning these roots would cause instability of the already compromised tree.

Staff recommends approval of this application per the Albany City Tree Removal Policy and Procedures, Non-Emergency City Tree Removal Criteria Sections 2.1a (damaged or diseased beyond repair), 2.1b (unacceptable risk to the City), and 2.1d (severing roots will cause instability).

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

Tree failure and decline, in light of our increasingly changing weather patterns (drought, lack of summer fog, excessive winter rains and storm intensity), indicates that we need to pay more attention to the species of trees planted going forward. Several species that previously did well in the City have been removed from our accepted street tree list. Others will need to be reviewed for suitability. The goal is to have an urban forest that can both withstand long periods of drought and extreme heat events, as well as excessive wind and rain events, populated with tree species that are suitable to Albany's unique soil conditions and changing climate patterns.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

Per the Migratory Bird Treaty Act as well as California State Codes 3503 and 3503.5, bird nests are to be protected while there is active nesting. California Department of Fish and Wildlife has defined nesting season as February 1st through August 15th. Any approved tree removal will occur outside of the nesting period or after the completion of a bird nesting survey.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Review

These removals are Categorically Exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15304 "Minor Alterations to Land" of the CEQA Guidelines, which exempts the minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees.