

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

Agenda Date: October 12, 2023

Reviewed by: _____

SUBJECT: Street Tree Removal Applications

REPORT BY: John Hawkridge, Urban Forester

SUMMARY

The issue before the Commission is to consider three non-emergency street tree removal applications submitted by property owners at 623 Santa Fe, 1443 Washington Ave, and 1444 Portland 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 either approve or reject the Urban Forester's recommendation.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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

- 623 Santa Fe Ave: Not Recommended for Removal
- 1443 Washington Ave: Recommended for Removal
- 1444 Portland Ave: Not 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.

623 Santa Fe (Camphor – 28" DBH)

The property owner submitted a street tree removal application (attachment 1) due to concerns about the physical condition of the tree.

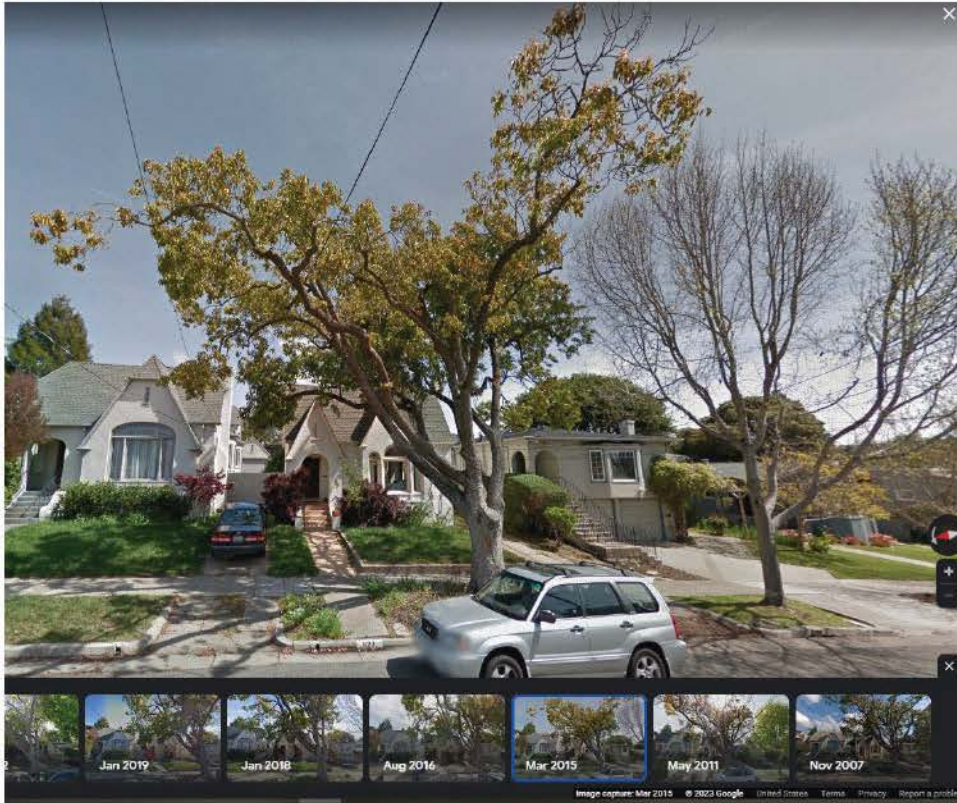
The City's Street Tree Inventory identifies this tree as a Camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*) with a DBH range of 25-30 inches and assesses the overall health of the tree as good with an observation that it is declining. Attachment 2 includes the data report for this tree.

Staff performed a visual inspection of the tree and confirmed the assessment contained in the inventory (generally good but declining). There are no visible structural issues with the tree but there is dead wood in the tree's crown and epicormic growth which are both signs of decline.

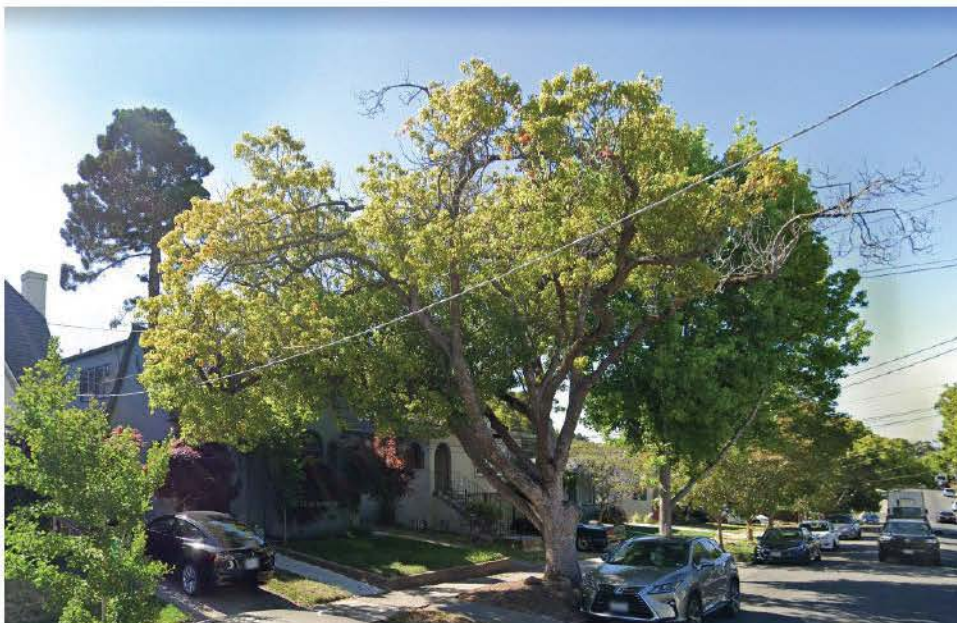
The tree has since been pruned to remove deadwood and balance the crown.

A review of photos from Google Maps shows that the tree's canopy has increased over time.

March 2015



June 2022



Camphor trees tend to decline slowly and do not drop branches like other trees species. Camphor trees are generally stable and rarely topple during storms or due to decline. The decline of camphor trees can be managed by pruning back dead and dying branches.

The application does not qualify for removal per the Albany City Tree Removal Policy and Procedures, Non-Emergency City Tree Removal Criteria because the tree is stable, and the decline can be managed through pruning of dead and dying branches.

This recommendation was communicated to the property owner and the City had the tree pruned to remove dead wood in May of this year.

1443 Washington Ave (Liquidambar – 22” DBH)

The property owner submitted a street tree removal application (attachment 3) due to concerns about the physical condition of the tree.

The City’s Street Tree Inventory identifies this tree as a Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) with a DBH range of 19-24 inches and assesses the overall health of the tree as fair. Attachment 4 includes the data report for this tree.

A Tree Risk Assessment for this tree was performed by HortScience which found the tree to be in fair condition (Attachment 5). The assessment recognized the tree’s poor structure due to multiple stems emanating from a single area of the tree, a history of limb failure, and the wounds caused by failed limbs which are difficult if not impossible to correct through pruning or other management strategies. Also noted were large surface roots that fill the tree basin. The assessment recommends replacing the tree with a more appropriate species.



Staff assessment of this tree indicates that the tree had dropped two large limbs within 4 months of each other. The first limb fell in September 2022, attributed to Sudden Limb Drop, and caused damage to the owner's vehicle. The second limb failure occurred in January 2023. Repeated limb drop is an indicator that this tree is in decline. A previous limb failure occurred in 2020. There have been other limb failures in the past as seen in part by tear wounds that are visible on the trunk. A more recent wound encompasses about half the diameter of the main stem, leaving this tree prone to further and more serious breakage. Another, older tear has some wound wood formation but around an area of decay.



The tree's roots have filled the approximately 10' x 5' tree basin. Some past repairs have been done to the sidewalk to remediate root damage. The damage continues along the sidewalk, driveway, curb, and street as large structural roots continue to expand.

After reviewing the tree and the Tree Risk Assessment from HortScience, staff determined that removal and replacement is the best course of action for this tree. Pruning to correct the affected areas and potential risk would be impossible due to the tree's large wounds from limb failures and its long-standing structural issues.

This application qualifies for removal per the Albany City Tree Removal Policy and Procedures, Non-Emergency City Tree Removal Criteria

1444 Portland Ave (Liquidambar - 21" DBH)

The property owner submitted a street tree removal application (attachment 6) due to concerns about tree-caused sidewalk and property damage.

The City's Street Tree Inventory identifies this tree as a Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) with a DBH range of 19-24 inches and assesses the overall health of the tree as good. Attachment 7 includes the data report for this tree.

A Tree Risk Assessment for this tree was performed by HortScience who found the tree to be in fair condition overall with good vigor (Attachment 8). Tree risk was assessed as being low, with the tree having good structure and branching unions, stating that pruning could address some of the concerns and recommend preserving the tree.



Staff assessment indicates that the tree had dropped a small limb following pruning by PG&E for powerline clearance in May 2022. As well, the property owner was concerned about surface roots in his front yard, and a lateral limb extending towards his property and contacting his neighbor's electric service drop.

After reviewing the tree, staff determined that pruning, including removing the section contacting the service drop, will help stabilize the tree. The tree was pruned on April 22, 2023.

The application does not qualify for removal per the Albany City Tree Removal Policy and Procedures, Non-Emergency City Tree Removal Criteria. Pruning has lessened the chances of limb failure and has removed any contact with the PG&E service drop.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

Tree failures during our increasingly changing weather patterns indicate 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 climate and soil conditions.

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

The removal at 1443 Washington Ave is Categorical 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.



Tree Risk Assessment

**1444 Portland Avenue
Albany, CA**

PREPARED FOR:

City of Albany Public Works, Urban Forestry
540 Cleveland Avenue
Albany, CA 94710

PREPARED BY:

HortScience | Bartlett Consulting
2550 Ninth Street, Suite #112
Berkeley, CA 94710

March 2023



Tree Risk Assessment

1444 Portland Avenue
Albany, CA

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Tree Risk Assessment

1444 Portland Avenue
Albany, CA

Introduction

The City of Albany requested that HortScience | Bartlett Consulting (Divisions of The F.A. Bartlett Tree Expert Company) assess the risk of one sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) in front of 1444 Portland Avenue. The tree was one of many located in the parkway between the sidewalk and curb along the residential street. This report provides the following:

1. Assessment of tree health and structural condition.
2. Assessment of tree risk.
3. Management recommendations for risk abatement.

Assessment Procedures

The tree was assessed on March 7, 2023. The assessment procedure consisted of a Level 2 Basic Inspection as described by terminology and methods described in Tree Risk Assessment Best Management Practices (2nd Ed., International Society of Arboriculture, 2017). The inspection involved a 360° visual assessment from the ground. A sounding mallet was used to assess decay. The time frame for the assessment was two years.

Risk ratings are assigned by combining the of assessed likelihood of a tree failure striking people or property and the assessed consequences of that failure. We performed the following:

1. Identifying the tree species.
2. Measuring the trunk diameter at a point 54 inches above grade.
3. Evaluating the health and structural condition using a scale of 1 – 5:
 - 5 - A healthy, vigorous tree, reasonably free of signs and symptoms of disease, with good structure and form typical of the species.
 - 4 - Tree with slight decline in vigor, small amount of twig dieback, minor structural defects that could be corrected.
 - 3 - Tree with moderate vigor, moderate twig and small branch dieback, thinning of crown, poor leaf color, moderate structural defects that might be mitigated with regular care.
 - 2 - Tree in decline, epicormic growth, extensive dieback of medium to large branches, significant structural defects that cannot be abated.
 - 1 - Tree in severe decline, dieback of scaffold branches and/or trunk; most of foliage from epicormics; extensive structural defects that cannot be abated.
4. Commenting on the presence of defects in structure, insects or diseases and other aspects of development.
5. Identify the part of the tree most likely to fail and rate the likelihood for failure (improbable, possible, probable, imminent).
6. Identify what would be struck if that part failed (targets: parked cars).

7. Rate the likelihood that a target (primarily person or structure) would be present at the time of failure (very low, low, medium, high). This assessment considers the frequency with which a person or vehicle is present, i.e. its occupancy.
8. Assess the likelihood of the tree failure impacting the specific target (unlikely, somewhat likely, likely, very likely).
9. Rate the consequences if a person or property were struck by that tree part (negligible, minor, significant, severe).
10. Combine the ratings for likelihood of failure and striking the target and the consequences of the failure to identify the risk (low, moderate, high, extreme).
11. Describe treatments (i.e., pruning, tree removal) that would reduce the risk and assess the residual risk that would remain if that treatment were applied.
12. Recommend advanced assessments to inspect tree conditions that were not visible from a ground survey. Possible advanced treatments include internal decay detection, aerial inspection, and root collar excavation and inspection.

Note that this report represents the condition of the trees at the time of inspection. All information provided by HortScience | Bartlett Consulting was based on the conditions and characteristics of the tree(s), shrub(s), vegetation, or other criteria observed at the time of the inspection. HortScience | Bartlett Consulting can make no guarantees or warranties of any kind that all conditions or defects will be observed, detected, or factored into the overall report or recommendations, nor does it accept any liability in any manner whatsoever for any damage caused by any tree on this property, whether the tree was inventoried, inspected, or present during the fulfillment of the assigned work; or not.

Description of the Tree

The mature sweetgum measured 19 inches in diameter, growing in the parkway between the sidewalk and the street. The tree was in fair condition overall with good vigor. It had a decurrent structure typical of the species. Several upright branches swept upwards with well-developed lateral branching. Three secondary electrical distribution lines and communication lines ran through the crown along the street.

Photo 1: Sweetgum in front of 1444 Portland Avenue was in fair condition with a vigorous crown and decurrent structure.



The tree had been pruned for secondary distribution line clearance, removing one approximately 6-inch diameter branch that had engulfed the street-side line (Photo 2). A small, approximately 2-inch diameter branch failure was present below the cut. The same line was touching a small, approximately 3-inch diameter branch. No line-deflection was evident to signify heavy loading pressure on the line. The other two secondary lines ran through the crown without touching branches.

Photo 2: A branch had been removed on the north side of the crown that had engulfed a secondary distribution line (yellow dash at cut point). A small piece of the branch was left (yellow circle).



Photo 3: The electrical service drop for 1446 Portland Avenue was contacting a small branch on the south side of the tree (yellow).

The electrical service drop to 1446 Portland Avenue was contacting an approximately 3-inch diameter branch (Photo 3). No line-deflection was evident to signify heavy loading pressure on the line.

The tree had heaved the sidewalk upwards by approximately 1-inch at the trunk (Photo 4).

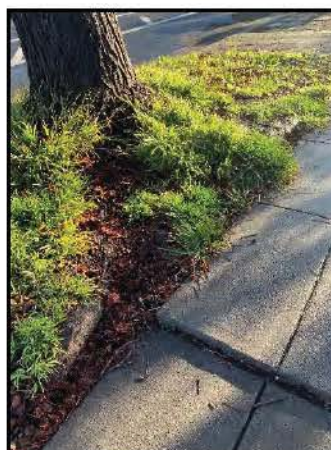


Photo 4: A root had displaced the sidewalk by approximately 1-inch.

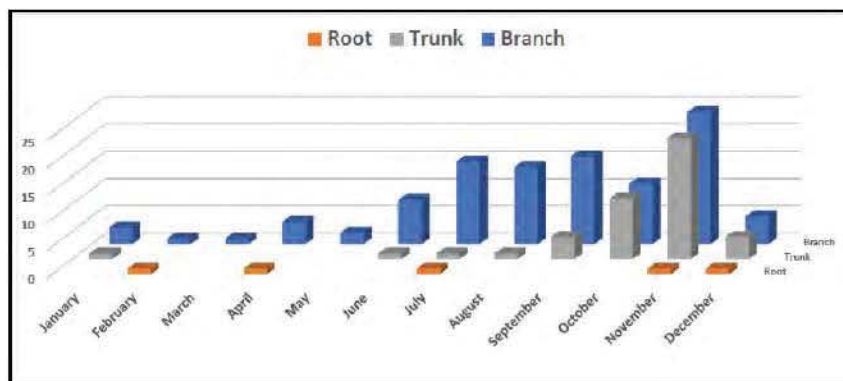
Tree Risk Assessment

Tree risk assessment systematically evaluates the potential for a tree or one of its parts to fail and to injure people or damage property in the process. All trees have the potential to fail, even those with no visible defects. The degree of risk will vary with the size of the tree, type and location of the defect, tree species, and the nature of the target.

Tree risk assessment considers both the likelihood of a tree failure striking people or property and the consequences of that failure. Risk ratings are categorized in four levels of increasing severity: *low*, *moderate*, *high*, and *extreme*. Trees rated as *low* may benefit from mitigation and monitoring. Immediate action is not normally required. In contrast, a rating of *extreme* involves a tree with an *imminent* likelihood of failure, where the likelihood impacting a target is *high* and the consequences would be *severe*. Immediate action is required.

I assessed three failure modes for this tree: 1) a live branch failing and striking an unoccupied parked car; 2) the stem on the street side failing at the point of attachment and striking an unoccupied parked car; 3) a live branch above the electrical service drop to 1446 Portland Avenue failing and striking the electrical service drop. The time frame of the assessment was two years.

According to data from the Western Tree Failure Database, two-thirds of sweetgum failures are branches. The large majority of branches fail between June and November (Figure 1). The species is known to experience sudden limb drop where green, healthy, defect-free branches fail during normal weather. One small branch has failed on this tree in the past. Given this context, the likelihood of a live branch failure over the two-year timeframe was *possible*.



Failure 1: Western Tree Failure Database depiction of the times of year that sweetgums fail, categorized by tree part.

I assessed the likelihood of failure of the large stem on the street side of the tree in front of 1444 Portland Avenue as *improbable*. While several stems arose from a single point on the trunk, the attachment angles were strong and no included bark was present. Holding wood had formed to reinforce the attachments (Photo 5). No evidence of decay was visible.

Photo 5: Close up of the stem attachment, looking west.



If a live branch or stem on the street side were to fail, I considered the most likely target to be an unoccupied parked car. A vehicle may be parked on the street for hours or days at a time given the area's residential nature. I considered the service drop to be the most likely target for live branches on the south side, away from the street.

I assessed the likelihood that a parked car would be present as a function of the various types of failure (Table 1). The likelihood of impact for a parked car was *medium* for live branches on the street side. Some protection from live branch failure was present as tree parts from the upper crown may be deflected or stopped by lower branches. No protection was present for stem failure at the main attachment point with the trunk, resulting in a *high* likelihood of impact. The likelihood of impact for a live branch hitting the service drop was *high*. The service drop is stationary and present at all times of day, resulting in a constant occupancy rate.

The consequences of the failure describe the unlikely circumstance where tree failure has occurred and impacted the target. Consequences of failure varied among each failure mode, generally dependent on the size of the failed tree part and nature of the target: *significant* for the large stem on the street side striking an unoccupied parked car, *minor* for a live branch striking an unoccupied parked car, and *minor* for a live branch striking the service drop (Table 1).

Tree risk was *low* for all assessed failure modes (Table 1).

Table. 1. Tree Risk Ratings. 1444 Portland Avenue, Albany CA

Tree Address	Species	Trunk Diameter (in.)	Tree Part	Target	Likelihood of Failure	Likelihood of Impact	Likelihood of Failure and Impact
1443 Portland Avenue	Sweetgum	22	Stem on street side	Parked car	Improbable	High	Unlikely
			Live branch on street side	Parked car	Possible	Medium	Unlikely
			Live branch on south side	Service drop	Possible	High	Somewhat likely

Discussion and Recommendations

The health, structural condition, and risk associated with one sweetgum on Portland Avenue was assessed. In evaluating risk, I used the terminology and methods described in Tree Risk Assessment Best Management Practices (2nd Ed., International Society of Arboriculture, 2017). I performed a Level 2 Basic Inspection with an inspection interval of two years.

Tree risk assessment combines the likelihood of a failure, the likelihood of a target being present and impacted, and the consequences of a failure impacting a target. The combination of tree part and target is called the failure mode. Risk associated with the tree was assessed through three failure modes involving a parked car being impacted by either a live branch, the large stem on the street side, or live branch failing and striking the service drop to 1446 Portland Avenue. For each failure mode, risk is rated as: low, moderate, high, and extreme. In each case the risk was *low*.

The tree was in fair condition and mature in development. Ecosystem services are generally commensurate with tree size, and retaining mature larger-stature trees in the landscape maximizes the benefits they provide to the communities in which they grow.

Based on my observations and assessment, I recommend preserving the tree.

The small sidewalk displacement may be mitigated by grinding down the heaved panel. Damage should be reassessed periodically as the tree ages.

If desired, branches in contact with either the secondary line or the electrical service drop may be easily pruned to mitigate the conflict. Before pruning away from the service drop, contact PG&E for an Electric Service Temporary Disconnect (<https://tinyurl.com/Temporary-Disconnect>) to make conditions safe for the Arborist. Only a line-clearance qualified Arborist shall prune branches away from the secondary lines. PG&E contractors may provide this service at no cost to the homeowner. More information can be found online (<https://tinyurl.com/2zf87nyv>).

Periodically re-assess the tree to monitor any changes in condition or risk on a defined inspection interval.

Proactive Management of High Risk and Poor Condition Trees

Municipalities struggle with the management of tree species prone to branch or stem failure like sweetgum. Two different approaches to management are prevalent: a reactive method which looks at trees on a case-by-case basis, or a proactive policy to eliminate trees with high failure rates from the inventory over a period of time. Proactive management is generally more effective and less costly in the long-term. To move from a reactive program to a proactive program would require the City enact a policy to remove trees strategically before the tree poses high risk or declines to poor condition.

Generally, municipalities follow these eight steps to reduce tree risk in their communities:

1. Set a policy statement that outlines the goals of the program.
2. Define the standards of care.
3. Set procedures and protocols for the program (consistent with other risk management programs in the city).
4. Set record keeping protocols.
5. Assess priorities.
6. Set the budget for the program.
7. Act.
8. Record, review, and evaluate.

The first four steps are policy decisions that must be identified by the policy making body. They should be consistent with other risk management policies and criteria in the City. Steps #5 through 8 are actions that are completed by the forestry program on an ongoing basis to implement the set policies. Completing a tree inventory is a crucial step in identifying and tracking trees and planning maintenance activities.

Removing trees on a larger scale changes the streetscape significantly which can be difficult for a community. Impacts may be lessened by creating a phased tree policy where high risk or poor condition trees are proactively removed. Removed trees should be replaced with site-suitable, climate-ready species. Proactive replacement allows time for new plantings to develop before other trees are removed.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Ryan Suttle, Consulting Arborist & Urban Forester
ISA Board Certified Master Arborist, Utility Specialist No. WE-12647BU
ISA Tree Risk Assessment Qualified



Darya Barar, Managing Consulting Urban Forester and Arborist
Registered Consulting Arborist #693
ISA Certified Arborist No. WE-6757A
ISA Tree Risk Assessment Qualified
Tree Appraisal Qualified



Exhibits

Tree Assessment

Tree Assessment Plan

Tree Assessment

1444 Portland Avenue
Albany, CA
March 2023



Tree No.	Species	Trunk Diameter (in.)	Protected Tree?	Condition 1=poor 5=excellent	Suitability for Preservation	Comments
1444	Sweetgum	19	Street Tree	3	Moderate	Root flare has filled parkway; multiple branch bark ridges; upright good stru removed on street side to clear second wire; 2 secondaries clear; street side

San Carlos Ave

San Carlos Ave

Portland Ave

Portland Ave

1440

1442

1444

1446

1448

San Carlos Ave

Coastal

ALBANY CALIFORNIA

PUBLIC WORKS
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ALBANY, CA 94706



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WWW.ALBANYCA.ORG/PW

URBAN VILLAGE BY THE BAY

Non-Emergency City Tree Removal Application

Owner's Name: Jesse Nawy
Property Address: 1444 Portland Ave Phone: 510-295-9005
Email: JNawy@sbglobal.net #of trees requesting to be removed 1

No permit to remove a living City Tree may be issued unless one or more of the following criteria is met:

- ☐ The City Tree is damaged, diseased, or borer infested beyond reclamation
- ☐ The City Tree due to its physical condition is an unacceptable risk to the City
- ☒ The City Tree has damaged the adjacent sidewalk to an extent that constitutes a tripping hazard, and the City Tree has caused the property owner to repair the adjacent sidewalk on at least one (1) previous occasion, as proven by documentation or Urban Forester inspection.
- ☒ The City Tree is detrimental to the public safety or materially injurious to the property, improvements or utility services in the vicinity
- ☐ The City Tree has been identified for removal as part of a City-approved project and/or has been determined by the Parks, Recreation & Open Space Commission to be in conflict with the best use of a park.

I understand that removal of a City Tree which does not pose a clear and imminent danger to the safety of the general public requires review by the Urban Forester and the Parks, Recreation & Open Space Commission at a public meeting. **A replacement tree will be required for all approved tree removals.** Removal application fee is \$218.03. Return fee and application to: Finance - City of Albany, 1000 San Pablo Ave., Albany, CA 94706

Signature: [Signature] Date: 1/19/23
(add digital signature, or print and sign)

City Action

Date Application Rcvd: _____ Fee Received (Amt): _____

Approved ☐ Declined ☐ Date: _____

- * Sidewalk was re-done aprox Aug 2004
- * Sidewalk was re-done again May 12th 2016
- * Sidewalk needs to be fixed again
- * Numerous Limbs have fallen onto our Cars and the street. Worse was July 24th 2022 when mat worker from Albany had to use a chainsaw to remove Limb as it was too heavy to move.
- * Tree is hitting numerous power wires and actually is Laying on my neighbors line, which was actually broken by it aprox 4 yrs ago and could not get in our house for hours as City and police Taped off area.
- * Tree has some form of fungus on the trunk and is Splitting, numerous Limbs are dying and unhealthy, The sidewalk is used by many middle and high Schoolers going to school everyday and is dangerous.

I have attached photos to email, Thank you

Jesse Navy
1444 Portland Ave.

