

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [citycouncil](#); [PARKS, RECREATION & OPEN SPACE](#); [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: Proposed Removal of two Liquidambar Trees at 1431 and 1433 Washington Avenue Public Hearing Thursday, September 9 at 7 pm  
**Date:** Thursday, September 8, 2022 12:33:58 PM

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[REDACTED]

Thanks for your questions and your concern for our urban forest. We take tree removals seriously and only remove trees when the conditions meet the criteria established in the City's street tree removal policy (<https://www.albanyca.org/home/showpublisheddocument/46522/637436251982830000>).

Here is a high level description of the tree removal process. Tree removals are initiated by either the public or City Staff via an application. For each removal application, the Urban Forester assesses the tree to identify defects and determine if the proposed removal meets the criteria included in the policy. If the analysis results in a recommendation for removal. The analysis and recommendation are summarized in a Staff Report and presented to the Parks Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Commission. The Commission can either accept or reject the recommendation. If the analysis does not result in a recommendation for removal the application is denied without being presented to the PROS Commission. It's important to note that most inquiries about removals and applications do not result in a recommendation for removal.

For the two trees on Washington, the Staff Report attached to the agenda for the September 8th PROS Commission meeting (\*note the correct meeting date) details my analysis as well as reference to the appropriate removal criteria ([6-1 SR Tree Removals PROS 2022-09-08 \(primegov.com\)](#)).

This removal was initiated after a significant limb failure on August 16, 2022, in which a 25' limb dropped from the tree in front of 1431 Washington. Upon inspection of this tree as well as the tree in front of 1433 Washington, I identified several structural defects and signs of disease in both trees that indicated a significant likelihood of limb or stem failure. Due to the size of the trees, limb or stem failures can cause significant injury or property damage.

The structural issues with these trees are such that there are no maintenance measures such as pruning that would correct the defects and mitigate the risk posed by these trees.

Although Liquidambar trees are an attractive and robust species, they are a poor species for urban planting due to their propensity for sudden limb drop, poor branching structure, damage to infrastructure caused by roots, and the spiky seed capsules that fall and cause trip hazards. The City of Albany, as most other nearby communities, no longer plants this species. Several communities have been systematically removing Liquidambar and replacing with more appropriate species, including cities of Piedmont, El Cerrito, and Sunnyvale to name a few. In Albany we remove Liquidambar as issues arise with specific trees.

In an urban setting, trees need to be managed and often 'cycled out', meaning that we cannot accept the risk of allowing some trees to grow and live out their full lives as they would in a forest setting. This is often the case when a species selected in the past turns out to be inappropriate.

Here is a link to pictures of just some of the liquidambar limb failures we've had in the past few years:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/NwcznqD36fjfWtDm7>

You can see that the limbs that come down from these trees is substantial.

Changes and extremes in weather patterns we are seeing is another factor affecting many tree species. Liquidambar is no exception. Extreme swings in air temperature, sudden and excessive moisture or drought, can cause cracking in limbs and trunks and can stress a tree to the point where it drops limbs as a survival mechanism. Liquidambar is very susceptible to limb drop from environmental extremes and tend to drop limbs both during periods of drought and during winter storms. It is our number one tree in terms of the number and size of limb failures. With most of our Liquidambar having been planted in the 1970s and '80s, the frequency of failures increases as these trees age.

In Albany we are working to increase canopy cover. The number of new trees planted has steadily increased over the past few years. Last year we planted approximately 140 new street trees. My hope is that the new trees we plant will grow to become a part of a healthy, sustainable tree canopy for the next generation and beyond.

Replacement trees are required for all trees removed in Albany. Typically, I recommend Red Maple or Coast Live Oak as a replacement for Liquidambar. Red Maple has the large canopy and fall color of the liquidambar without all the negative attributes. The choice is largely up to the property owner. In situations where liquidambar were planted under high-voltage powerlines, a smaller replacement species needs to be planted.

As an arborist with an environmental background, I understand your concern with tree removals. As Urban Forester for the City of Albany, my general concern is for the health of our urban forest, but my top concern is public safety.

Let me attempt to answer your questions one by one. Some I have already addressed or are discussed in the Staff Report for the upcoming PROS Commission meeting.

1. How much does it cost to cut down a Liquidambar tree like the one scheduled for removal on at 1431 Washington Avenue?

2. How much does it cost to remove the TWO trees, as proposed, on 1431 and 1433 Washington Avenue?

- Trees this size may cost anywhere from \$1200 to \$4000 each to remove, grind the stump so a new tree can be planted, and haul away the debris.

3. What City funds are used to pay for the cutting down of these trees?

- Tree removals are paid for by the annual Urban Forestry budget.

4. How many Liquidambar trees have been cut down by the City over the past 10 years? How many in the past 5 years? How many in the past 2 years?

- About 21 liquidambar have been removed since 2016. Most of these were initiated by large limb failures. At least four of these caused damage to vehicles, one fell on a residence. One was a

complete tree failure during a storm.

5. The homeowners at 1431 AND 1433 Washington DID NOT REQUEST REMOVAL OF THE TREES. If you initiated the removal, what are your reasons?

- See my report to the Commission.

6. Are the trees diseased or infested in any way? I notice you did not check the box on the application that the trees were diseased. In other words, are these healthy trees?

- See my report to the Commission.

7. If the trees are not diseased, what is their physical condition that constitutes an “unacceptable risk to the City.”

- See my report to the Commission.

8. What options are there other than cutting down these trees?

- Once we confirm defects such as these trees have, we cannot accept the risk of leaving them in place.

9. Please provide the pruning or maintenance history of the tree at 1431 and the tree at 1433 Washington. When were they last pruned?

- Tree pruning is the responsibility of the property owner, per Albany Municipal Code 14-1.4. That said, trees in the public right-of-way may be pruned by the city at our discretion. These trees were last pruned by the city in 2018 for crown cleaning and hazard reduction.

10. If falling limbs is an issue, do you or the City require that these limbs ever removed before they become an problem?

- In most cases, there is no way to know that tree will drop a limb. Liquidambar exhibit what is known as ‘sudden limb drop’ where seemingly healthy limbs drop without warning. These limbs may break at the crotch, where it is connected to the larger limb or trunk, or just at a random part of the limb. If a cracked or damaged limb is identified, the city will have the damaged section removed.

11. Is the public interest considered in keeping mature trees in our City when recommending removal, such as climate change or increased heat in adjacent houses or sidewalks.

- All proposed tree removals are presented to the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Commission at a public meeting as announced online, in notices mailed to immediate neighbors, and postings on the tree. Members of the public are encouraged to voice their opinion at the meeting. The Commission is made up of Albany residents who review the circumstances and try to find alternative solutions to removals if feasible.

12. Is it correct that the sidewalks in front of 1431 and 1433 Washington were recently repaired and are in perfect condition, with no root damage or other safety issues that would affect pedestrians or wheelchair users.

- [See my report to the Commission.](#)

Let me know if you have any other questions and feel free to bring up these and any other questions you have at the Commission meeting on Thursday, September 8, 2022.

Thanks,

**John Hawkrige**, Urban Forester

City of Albany Public Works, [Urban Forestry](#)

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ISA Certified Arborist WE-3063

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**From:** ingrid haubrich <haubrichingrid@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Sunday, September 4, 2022 7:00 PM

**To:** John Hawkrige <JHawkrige@albanyca.org>

**Cc:** citycouncil <citycouncil@albanyca.org>

**Subject:** Proposed Removal of two Liquidambar Trees at 1431 and 1433 Washington Avenue Public Hearing Thursday, September 9 at 7 pm

[Some people who received this message don't often get email from [haubrichingrid@gmail.com](mailto:haubrichingrid@gmail.com). Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification> ]

Warning: This email originated from outside the City of Albany. Think before you click!

Dear Mr. Hawkrige,

I am a long time Albany resident and very concerned about the frequent and apparently routinized removal of mature Liquidambar trees from our City streets.

I recently saw another notice of the planned removal of TWO gorgeous shade trees in my neighborhood, this time in front of 1431 Washington Avenue and 1433 Washington Avenue, between San Carlos and Carmel.

I am trying to understand why this keeps happening, especially in light of rising temperatures and climate change. These large trees keep our houses and sidewalks cool. Liquidambar trees can live for over 400 years!

I am interested in understanding the process of how these trees are chosen for removal and who makes these decisions.

I understand that you, as the Urban Forester, have quite a bit of input and power in the decision to remove these trees.

In light of this, I would like to see your report to the Park and Rec commission explaining the reasons for the removal of the Washington Avenue trees. I assume that report is (or should be) available to the

public.

In addition, I have the following questions which I would like you to answer before the Public Meeting on September 9 at 7 pm.

1. How much does it cost to cut down a Liquidambar tree like the one scheduled for removal on at 1431 Washington Avenue?
2. How much does it cost to remove the TWO trees, as proposed, on 1431 and 1433 Washington Avenue?
3. What City funds are used to pay for the cutting down of these trees?
4. How many Liquidambar trees have been cut down by the City over the past 10 years? How many in the past 5 years? How many in the past 2 years?
5. The homeowners at 1431 AND 1433 Washington DID NOT REQUEST REMOVAL OF THE TREES. If you initiated the removal, what are your reasons?
6. Are the trees diseased or infested in any way? I notice you did not check the box on the application that the trees were diseased. In other words, are these healthy trees?
7. If the trees are not diseased, what is their physical condition that constitutes an "unacceptable risk to the City."
8. What options are there other than cutting down these trees?
9. Please provide the pruning or maintenance history of the tree at 1431 and the tree at 1433 Washington. When were they last pruned?
10. If falling limbs is an issue, do you or the City require that these limbs ever removed before they become an problem?
11. Is the public interest considered in keeping mature trees in our City when recommending removal, such as climate change or increased heat in adjacent houses or sidewalks.
12. Is it correct that the sidewalks in front of 1431 and 1433 Washington were recently repaired and are in perfect condition, with no root damage or other safety issues that would affect pedestrians or wheelchair users.

I would appreciate a copy of your report to the Commission recommending the removal of the Washington Avenue trees, and your response to my questions prior to the September 9 hearing.

Thank you,

Ingrid Haubrich











