

Additional Documents

September 23, 2025 NREC Meeting



NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

CITY OF SOUTH PASADENA

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REGULAR NREC MEETING
SEPTEMBER 23, 2025 6:30PM
WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENTS

FROM: ANGELO GLADDING

**AGENDA ITEM: ITEM 2: FIRE HAZARD SEVERITY ZONE MAP
COMMENT ATTACHED**



Commissioners,

Does our fire chief know:

- the difference between natives and invasives
- how to instruct pruning according to ISA standards
- the difference between a "shrub" and a "tree"
- the role shrubs and trees provide in our hills – erosion control, noise reduction, aesthetics, ecology
- the role extirpation of invasive weeds plays in wildfire, defensible space and the care of native shrubs and trees – overclearing can lead to "type conversion" to invasive grassland

The tree ordinance doesn't require on-site replacements. It is up to the Director's discretion and I've spoken to our director and our Director DOES. NOT. CARE. AT. ALL. For this reason we also need to keep notifications and appeals. Some of you were on the commission when I had to appeal a *completely broken* removal application. You saw what happened Commissioners Siegel and Law. Try a radius map generator I created at ragt.ag/south-pasadena/trees/radius-map – with the addition of a paid API call I can produce names and owner addresses streamlining the appeal process completely. The tool could be used for creating a replacement plan that actually shows accurate structure sizes and existing tree canopies.

Page 19 of the agenda shows what our fire chief has thus far shared with residents of the hills. "High" only lists 100' defensible space. The slope spacing of shrubs and trees is going to catch everyone off guard. Two of the people I've spoken to didn't even attend the Fire Hazard meeting—they have no clue. The laws are being written today but the inspections don't start until 2029. This needs to be done right now. There needs to be a plan for cautious clearing, mitigation for removals and overall site remediation. The end result should be stretches of private properties forming seamless "mosaics".

I have heard nothing about deadwood. Deadwood creates a "live-dead fuel complex", Zone 1 calls for it and it is, after Zone 0, the second most important nuance to get right. The difference between a shrub/bush/plant with 80-90% bone dry deadwood and 0% deadwood is pruning style—hedging versus hand pruning. There needs to be a culture shift in home landscaping and our various codes needs to reflect that.

There's work to be done and you all need to do it. Reopen public comments. Stay late. Keep working. The city needs this and we need it done right.

Angelo Gladding

Vice President, South Pasadena Beautiful

Additional Documents

ITEM 3: Tree Ordinance Supplemental FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

South Pasadena Revised Tree Ordinance – Chapter 34

The City of South Pasadena’s adopted a completely revised Chapter 34, which sets forth the City’s regulations on Trees (“Tree Ordinance”). This FAQ explains the ordinance requirements and provides practical guidance for residents, contractors, and property owners.

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Why did the City update its Tree Ordinance?

The ordinance was modernized streamline the permitting and notification requirements with the goal of creating a clearer and more efficient process. The goal was to modernize the process and provide clarity for both staff, residents and contractors.

2. What is a “Protected Tree”?

A Protected Tree is:

- A native tree species listed in City of South Pasadena’s Resolution 7360 as shown in the **Table 1**.
- Heritage Trees, are those trees that are individually designated by the City as a South Pasadena historical landmark. A Map of all historical landmarks can be found [here](#).

TABLE 1

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Coast Live Oak	Quercus Agrifolia
Holly Oak	Quercus Ilex
Southern Live Oak	Quercus Virginiana
Scrub Oak	Quercus Berberidifolia
Canyon Live Oak	Quercus Chrysolepis
Engelmann Oak	Quercus Engelmannii
California Black oak	Quercus Kelloggi
Interior Live Oak	Quercus Wislizeni
California Bay Laurel	Umbellularia Californica
Desert Willow	Chilopsis Linearis
Catalina Ironwood	Lyonothamnus Floribundus Asplenifolius
California Sycamore	Platanus Racemosa
Toyon	Heteromeles Arbutifolia
So. California Black Walnut	Juglans Californica
Hollyleaf Cherry	Prunus Ilicifolia

REFERECE: Section 34.1(t)

3. What is a “Mature Protected Tree”?

A Mature Protected Tree is a tree with a trunk diameter (caliper) greater than or equal to 4-inches, measured 4.5-feet above natural grade, that is also a species that the city has determines to be native by resolution. The tree species shown in the **Table 1** are currently considered protected in the City of South Pasadena.

REFERENCE: Section 34.1(p)

4. Who is responsible for tree care and maintenance?

Property owners & tenants maintain trees on private property and are responsible for watering trees within the public right of way adjacent to their properties.

The City is responsible for trimming and removal of trees within the public right of way.

REFERENCE: Section 34.2 & Section 34.3

TREE TRIMMING

5. When is a Tree Trimming Permit required?

A tree trimming permit is required to trim live foliage, limbs, or branches from a Mature Protected Tree.

A tree trimming permit is not required for removal of deadwood or trimming of, non-protected trees, however, the Standard of Care must be followed when engaging in such activity.

REFERENCE: Section 34.4

6. Are there special rules for trimming oak trees?

Yes. Mature Protected Oak Trees may only be trimmed between June 1 – September 30 to prevent disease.

Trimming outside this period requires written approval from the Director if necessary to address hazardous or Emergency conditions as determined by the City Arborist.

REFERENCE: Section 34.4 (b) (2)

7. Who is allowed to perform trimming work?

Only contractors with:

- A valid California’s contractors license (C-27, C-49, or C-61/D-49) and
- A valid City of South Pasadena business license. A list of contractors with valid City business licenses an be found [here](#).

REFERENCE: Section 34.4 (c) (4)

8. How do I apply for trimming permit?

Applications for tree trimming permits must be submitted to the Public Works Department on a form provided by the City including:

- Contact information and property address.
- Description of trimming and reasons for it (photos encouraged).
- Contractor's license number and business license.
- Payment of the non-refundable fee [set by City Council].

Tree trimming application forms can be found on [this](#) page of the City's website.

REFERENCE: Section 34.4 (c)

9. How is my trimming application reviewed?

The City Arborist will inspect the tree and recommend approval or denial to the Director based on criteria such as:

- Maintenance of tree health.
- The foliage, limbs or branches pose a safety risk to people or property.
- Interference with or damage to existing structures or improvements.
- Insurance coverage issues.
- Fire Chief determines removal is necessary for defensible space clearance.

The Public Works Director reviews the City Arborists recommendation and provides a decision.

REFERENCE: Section 34.4(d) and (e)

TREE REMOVAL

10. When is a Tree Removal Permit required?

A Tree Removal Permit is only required to remove a Mature Protected Tree. Trees that are not Mature Protected Trees do not require a tree removal permit.

Tree removal permits will be processed as either:

- Not Associated with Development; or
- Associated with Development

REFERENCE: Section 34.5 & Section 34.6

11. What is the criteria for approving tree removals not associated with development?

The City may approve removal if one or more of the following criteria are met:

- Tree is dead, dying or diseased.
- Tree poses a safety risk to people or property or to health of adjacent trees.

- Tree is interfering with or damaging the structural integrity of an existing structure or improvement.
- Tree prevents homeowner's insurance renewal (documented proof required).
- Fire Chief determines removal is necessary for defensible space clearance.

REFERENCE: Section 34.5 (d)

12. What is the criteria for approving tree removals associated with development?

The City may approve removal if one or more of the following are met:

- Tree is close to the proposed development that construction would result in the death of the tree and there is no financially feasible alternative design that would permit preservation of the tree.
- Retaining the tree would reduce the permissible buildable area by more than 10% and there is no financially feasible design alternative that would permit preservation of the tree.
- The tree location is directly in the building footprint and precludes the development from being constructed.
- Denial of removal would create unreasonable hardship or significant undue impairment of the use and enjoyment of property.

REFERENCE: Section 34.6 (c)

13. How is my tree removal permit reviewed?

How the City evaluates removals not associated with development:

1. Submit Application

- Provide detailed description, photos, and reason for removal.
- Pay the **non-refundable inspection fee**.

2. City Arborist Inspection

- The City Arborist inspects the tree to confirm its health, risk level, and other site conditions.

3. Director's Decision

- The Public Works Director reviews the Arborist's findings.
- The Director approves or denies the request based on the criteria in **Section 34.5(d)**.

4. Public Notification (if Director Denies Application)

- Neighbors **within 100 feet** receive written notice for certain cases.
- They have **15 days to submit comments**.

5. Permit Issued or Denied

- If approved, you will receive conditions, including **replacement tree requirements** (typically one new tree per removal).

REFERENCE: Section 34.5

How the City evaluates removals associated with development:

1. Integrated Permit Application

- a. Submit the **Tree Removal Permit Application** at the **same time** as your development application.

2. Certified Arborist Report

- a. Developer must hire a **Certified Arborist** to prepare a **Tree Removal and Replacement Plan**, including:
 - i. Tree health assessment.
 - ii. Reasons why removal is unavoidable.
 - iii. Plans for protecting remaining trees during construction.

3. City Arborist Review

- a. City Arborist verifies the private arborist's report and inspects the site.

4. Recommendation by Director or Commission

- a. **Planning Review Authority:** The Planning Commission or other reviewing body considers both the development project and tree removal together.

5. Public Notification

- a. Neighbors within 100 feet are notified and may provide comments.
- b. Director or Commission Transmits Recommendation to Planning Review Authority [may include conditions]

6. Planning Review Authority Issues Decision

7. Permit Issued

- a. Approval will include **replacement tree conditions**:
 - i. **Two replacement trees** for every **16-inch increment** of trunk size.
 - ii. Example: A 20-inch tree requires 4 replacement trees.

REFERENCE: Section 34.6

14. How many replacement trees are required?

- Not Associated with Development: 1 replacement tree per tree removed.
- Associated with Development: 2 replacement trees for each 16-inch trunk increment of the removed tree's caliper.

All replacement trees to be replaced at a minimum 24-inch box size.

REFERENCE: Section 34.7

15. Where must replacement trees be planted?

- Typically, on-site, but with City approval, they may be planted off-site.
- If a replacement tree dies within 2 years, it must be replaced at the property owner's expense.

REFERENCE: Section 34.8 & Section 34.9

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS AND EXEMPTIONS

16. What should I do if a tree poses an immediate danger?

If a Mature Protected Tree poses an immediate threat to life or property:

- You may trim or remove the tree without a permit, but must notify the City within 5 business days and submit documentation (including photos).

REFERENCE: Section 34.10

17. Are there situations where no permit is required?

Yes. Permits are required if you are trimming or removing a Mature Protected Tree.

Additional areas where no permit is needed include:

- Mature Protected Trees are damaged by natural disasters and deemed dangerous by City officials.
- The Fire Department orders trimming/removal of a Mature Protected Tree for firebreaks.
- Public utility companies must trim/remove Mature Protected Trees for safe operation of their facilities (with advance notice).
- The City or its contractors are performing the work on a Mature Protected Tree.

REFERENCE: Section 34.11

VIOLATIONS AND UNDERSTANDING PENALTIES

18. What are the penalties for violating the ordinance?

Violations are treated seriously and may result in misdemeanor charges or infractions.

Penalties include:

- Unintentional violations:
 - Double the permit fee.
 - Double the number of replacement trees.
- Intentional violations:
 - Additional fees up to double the tree's appraised value.
 - Possible 5-year moratorium on building permits if related to development.

REFERENCE: Section 34.15

19. What counts as an Intentional violation?

Any violation where the person knew or should have known about the ordinance, including:

- Licensed arborists and contractors working in the City.
- Property owners who previously filed tree permit applications.

REFERENCE: Section 34.1 (n)

QUESTIONS

Resources

Public Works Department – Tree Permits: (626) 403-7240

www.SouthPasadenaCA.gov/PublicWorks

ISA Certified Arborist Directory: www.isa-arbor.com