

**CITY OF SOUTH PASADENA
NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
MINUTES – August 30, 2017**

Roll Call – The meeting called to order at 7:23 p.m. Present were Commissioners: Chair William Kelly, Vice-Chair Al Benzoni, Kay Findley, Stephen Leider, Daniel Snowden-Ifft, and Nancy Wilms. Absent was Commissioner Noah Puni. Also present were Council Liaison Dr. Schneider, and Staff Liaison Jenna Shimmin.

Minutes – Minutes for June 19th, 2017 were approved with no corrections (Benzoni, Leider; Ayes: All, Nays: 0). Approval of the minutes for July 25th, 2017 were approved with non-substantive changes (Benzoni, Leider; Ayes: All, Nays: 0).

PUBLIC COMMENTS – Stephanie Payne-Campbell – South Pasadena Beautiful board member and resident, stated that she feels there is a disconnect with the NREC’s work and South Pasadena Beautiful’s work, as they have shifted to a sustainability focus. SP Beautiful has held several lectures, and are holding their fall landscape workshop at the upcoming Clean Air Car Show, which will include talks on tree disease, proper tree care and watering, as well as becoming a zero waste household. She also discussed the recent tour that city staff and SP Beautiful board members took in Claremont with community group Sustainable Claremont and the City of Claremont. This meeting and tour were regarding Claremont’s citizen volunteer efforts to educate property owners on tree watering specifically drought stricken trees. Ms. Payne-Campbell invited the commissioners to a meeting with city staff and SP Beautiful to start a similar program here in South Pasadena (meeting TBD).

Marshall Dostal – local business owner that converts restaurant grease into biodiesel fuel, as well as cleaning supplies and soap. Asked the NREC to assist him with getting the word out to local businesses that his services exist.

BUSINESS ITEMS

1. **Tree Removal Permit Hearing: 1446 Oak Crest Avenue** – Staff explained that Karineh Minassian, the owner of 1446 Oak Crest Avenue, is requesting to remove four trees, a Canary Island Pine, a Queensland Umbrella, a Shamal Ash, and a European Olive. The city’s arborist inspected the trees and approved removal of all but the Canary Pine, stating it was in good health.

Karineh Minassian stated that the Pine tree is damaging her property and is a safety concern. Provided a structural engineers report stating the Pine is damaging the foundation and concrete stem wall of the garage area of the structure.

Commissioner Wilms asked if the owner is planning on remodeling the property in the area of the tree removal. The owner responded that she plans on repairing the damaged areas and remodeling the inside of the home.

Commissioner Findley asked if the tree had been trimmed recently and if that would help with the issue at all. The owner responded that she wasn't sure as it is the roots that are damaging the slab, she isn't sure how trimming the tree would fix that issue.

Chair Kelly asked if the cracks and damage to the slab extend into the garage. The owner responded that she wasn't sure, as the property isn't currently occupied.

Commissioner Benzoni suggested trimming the roots back instead of removing the tree altogether, and questioned the need for removal if there are ways to mitigate the issue. The owner pointed out that none of her neighbors have protested the removal, and would rather feel safe in her home than try a method she's not sure will resolve the issue. The owner added that because neither arborist (hers or the city's) recommended any alternatives, she assumed there were none.

Commissioner Findley asked if the owner discussed reducing the size of the tree. The owner advised that her arborist explained this isn't the time of year to be trimming the tree, and that since he recommended removal she didn't ask about alternatives.

Chair Kelly stated that the commission doesn't have an arborist's report or similar in front of them that substantiates the claim of imminent hazard. He explained that the next issue is whether there is a way to mitigate the structural damage so that removal isn't necessary.

Commissioner Snowden-Ifft explained that he doesn't believe the slab would actually need to be removed in order to trim the roots and make repairs since it is above the grade of the tree.

There was discussion about whether to approve if no mitigation was available, and to deny if there is no reasonable mitigation available and the city's arborist agrees with that assertion.

Commissioner Findley made a motion to deny the request to remove the healthy Pine tree.

Ayes – Commissioner Findley, and Commissioner Leider

Nays – Commissioner Benzoni, Commissioner Snowden-Ifft, Commissioner Wilms, and Chair Kelly

Chair Kelly made a motion to table this item and request that the owner obtain an arborist's report stating whether or not there is reasonable mitigation available (e.g. root trimming) to prevent the removal of the tree, and have the city's arborist review this report to see if they agree with the findings. The commission will reconsider the item once this has been provided.

Ayes – Commissioner Findley, Commissioner Benzoni, Commissioner Leider, Commissioner Snowden-Ifft, Commissioner Wilms, and Chair Kelly

Nays – none

- 2. Tree Removal Permit Hearing: 629 Alta Vista Circle** – Staff explained that William Luong, the owner of 629 Alta Vista Circle, is requesting to remove two trees, a Fern Pine and a Chinese Elm, as they are located in the area of a proposed garage and driveway associated with a home expansion project expansion project. The City's arborist found that both trees were healthy.

Sandy Luong (property owner and wife of William Luong, the applicant) stated that the project has tentative approval from the Design Review Board (DRB) and Public Works. She explained that the DRB approved the architectural design, however they requested that the driveway face East instead of North, which means that the driveway design had to be changed so that the new driveway cut through an existing courtyard, requiring the removal of these two trees. Their plan is to plant four replacement trees on the property.

Chair Kelly asked if the house is on a corner lot, meaning the driveway now comes in from a different street. He also asked why the DRB required this change. The owner responded that it is on a corner lot, and the DRB required the change because of the building code. She stated there were months of discussion with the DRB architect, and this is the design they came up with.

Commissioner Findley asked where they originally wanted to put the driveway, and where exactly the new driveway and garage will go. The owner responded that originally they wanted to place the new garage in front of the old one, but per the code this wasn't possible. She also explained that the new garage and driveway will go off to the side of an existing courtyard.

Chair Kelly asked the owner which design she would prefer, if she had a choice. The owner responded that she would prefer the original design with the new garage in front of the old one. Chair Kelly then offered to discuss the issue with the DRB architect in an effort to prevent the removal with an alternative design.

Commissioner Benzoni asked the owner what her tree replacement plan was. The owner responded that they will plant four drought tolerant trees, possibly olive trees, but they are open to suggestions.

A motion was made to have the NREC chair work with the DRB and Planning Department to attempt to return the design to one that doesn't require the removal of the trees. If it is not possible to prevent the removal of the trees, the removal is approved with the understanding that four replacement trees will be planted on the property (Wilms, Leider; Ayes: All, Nays: 0).

- 3. Tree Removal Permit Hearing: 245 Fair Oaks Avenue** – Staff explained that Chris Crolle, on behalf of 245 ZNE, LLC, applied for a tree removal permit at 245 Fair Oaks Avenue. The original request was to remove sixteen trees from the property due to new construction. The city's arborist originally approved the removal of nine trees. An additional seven trees no longer exist from the original request dated in 2008, either because of weather or because they have been removed by the Metro Transit Authority (MTA).

Ron Novitch, one of the developers for the property explained that they are building a zero net energy building, and have been partnering with Southern California Edison on this keynote project. The original plans for this project began in 2008, and approval was given at that time. Since then the site design has changed, a windstorm has knocked over several trees, and MTA has removed several others. He advised the commission that on page AD1.01 of the plans there was a tree removal plan.

Commissioner Findley asked on page AS100 which were new and which were existing structures. She also asked which structures were being torn down. The developer pointed them out on the plans.

Commissioner Benzoni asked what consideration was given to preserve the existing trees. The developer responded that they considered transplanting them to a different location on the property, but that no consideration was given to redesign to avoid removal. The commissioner then asked if tree #5 was being removed to install the parking lot. The developer responded that it was being removed because it has been damaged and is no longer in good condition due to fire damage.

Commissioner Benzoni raised concern about putting oak trees so close together, as outlined in the tree replacement plan. The developer responded that trees thrive when planted in groups; however their expert did advise against planting oaks close together, and so they were going to plant other natives in groups instead.

Commissioner Findley asked if staff (Kristine Courdy) had discussed the types of trees for replacement, and the timeline with the contractor. Ms. Courdy responded that they hadn't yet, but that the developers won't get their certificate of occupancy without following the tree removal requirements. Meaning they would need to install all replacements within a certain amount of time in order to be in compliance.

Commissioner Wilms asked the developer how many trees exactly they are requesting to remove. The developer responded that in 2008 they requested to remove 16 trees, however 7 of those trees no longer exist and so they are currently asking to remove 9 trees.

Commissioner Benzoni asked if there were any alternatives to removing the trees in the parking lot area. The developer responded that because MTA doesn't allow buildings within a certain distance of their infrastructure, there is no alternative place to put the parking spots.

Public Comment: Stephanie Payne-Campbell – stated that oaks can withstand fires, and that shouldn't be sufficient reason to grant removal.

Commissioner Benzoni stated that he was not in favor of removing tree #5. He asked the contractor what was being done in a triangle of space on the plans, and inquired whether that could be used for the parking spaces the tree removal would provide. The developer explained that the space on the lot is constrained, and they need to meet certain parking requirements (43 spaces). There isn't enough room in the triangle for parking, however they had hoped to move the oak tree there. Commissioner Benzoni asked if they'd be willing to plant an oak tree in this triangle area, to which the developer responded that they would be willing to do.

Commissioner Leider requested that they plant a different species of tree near the pedestrian areas, some sort of non-fruit bearing tree. The developer responded that they were open to choosing another tree from the City's list. Their landscape plan is open to changes and will wait to finalize it until after they've had a discussion with the Public Works staff.

A motion was made to approve the removal of the nine trees as requested with the correct replacement count per the City's ordinance. There were three conditions of approval made, the first being that a 48 inch box oak be planted in the triangle area (would count as 2 replacement trees); the second being that evergreen native trees that don't bear fruit be planted over the pedestrian areas; and the third that the property isn't overcrowded with trees once tree replacement begins (Benzoni, Leider; Ayes: All, Nays: 0).

4. **Tree Removal Hearing: 407 El Centro** – Kristine Courdy explained that there has been ongoing issues with a carob tree located in front of 407 El Centro. There have been several service requests on this tree, and the city's arborist has found that there are substantial issues and the tree should be removed. The arborist found that the crown is thinning, there is foliar discoloration, there are numerous cavities in the main trunk, and there is the presence of root and trunk fungus rot. She noted that there have been ongoing issues with carob trees throughout the city.

Public Comment: Jim Tavares – neighbor to this address, stated that he is concerned with how the tree removal was handled. He explained that the notice was put up one week and one day before removal, and that the notices faced the street. He also explained that there is a bee hive in the tree making it even more difficult to read the notice. He doesn't feel that the bees are enough of a reason to remove the tree. He feels that the tree isn't in that poor of health and doesn't seem to be an imminent threat.

Public Comment: John Biesek – resident who grew up near the tree in question. Stated that he noticed the tree does have some decay, structural issues, and the bees. He has an arborist who has a second opinion on the tree.

Public Comment: Tina Debon – resident who has lived at the property for a long time and states that she enjoys carob trees. She explained that there have been issues with this tree for years, and believes it poses a safety risk.

Public Comment: Stephanie Payne-Campbell – resident who lives nearby. Stated that she believes the tree to be in poor health and should be removed. The carob trees in the area have been having long standing issues, and a new species should be planted in that area.

Commissioner Benzoni asked staff what the replacement species would be. Ms. Courdy responded that they have been planting oaks, but would work with the owner if there was a specific species they'd like planted.

A motion was made to approve the removal of the tree as requested (Benzoni, Leider; Ayes: All, Nays: 0).

5. **Tree Ordinance** – It was agreed that this item would be tabled until the September meeting. Commissioner Wilms to provide input to the Tree Ordinance Subcommittee. All others should forward comments to staff who will forward to the subcommittee.

Public Comment: Janet Ferguson – stated that she feels the NREC should be put back in the original order of a project review, so there is simultaneous review done with the DRB review of conceptual designs.

6. **Tree Removal Permit Hearing Discussion** – It was agreed that this item would be tabled until the September meeting in order to be held in conjunction with the final tree ordinance review.
7. **Commission Annual Report Review** – The commission reviewed the draft annual report provided by Chair Kelly and staff. Commissioner Benzoni asked that all references to greywater be changed to the correct spelling of graywater (with an A).

A motion was made to approve the report with the recommended spelling changes (Wilms, Leider; Ayes: All, Nays: 0).

8. **Water Conservation Programs and Drought Update** – Jenna Shimmin updated the commission that there was a 16% reduction in water use for July 2017 versus 2013 usage. She explained that this was a good amount, versus what some neighboring cities are seeing.

INFORMATION ONLY

9. **Urban Forest Update** – Kristine Courdy introduced the city’s new Parks Supervisor, David Niznik. She described his extensive background and advised the commission that he is working in obtaining his ISA certified arborist’s license.

Ms. Courdy also explained that Public Works is updating the landscape maintenance RFP and tree maintenance RFP. They are expected to go out to bid in September, and should be awarded in December. Because they are in the middle of that process, and the summer season there isn’t a lot of tree trimming activity happening in the city at this time.

10. **Upcoming Events** – Air Car Show and Green Living Expo (Garfield Park) – September 10th; Wet & Wonderful, Celebrating Our Precious Water (Descanso Garden) – September 23rd.

Chair Communications – Requested that an item be added to next month’s agenda for a Climate Adaptation Plan.

Commission Communications –

Commission Wilms – Advised the commission that the rate subcommittee met again and they gave extensive comments to staff on the proposed rates. The subcommittee members stressed that the notice needs to be easily understood and the proposed rate changes well explained. She discussed how the San Juan Capistrano decision has changed the requirements for having tiered rates.

Commissioner Snowden-Ifft – Stated that residents are frustrated by the delays in tree removal hearings and feels it would be beneficial to have an arborist at meetings in order to help answer questions.

Commissioner Findley – Added to Commissioner Snowden-Ifft’s comments, stating that the NREC needs to be involved in the decision making process when it comes to building plans with

tree removals. Kristine Courdy stated that it would be helpful if developers were given the plan check list earlier on in the process, so they're aware they'll need to apply for a tree removal permit in order to get full approval.

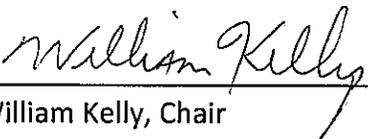
Commissioner Benzoni – stated that once the tree and graywater ordinances are finalized he would like to see a cool roofs ordinance come before the commission and ensure that it is being enforced. He has seen black roof shingles being installed, which increases the temperature in surrounding areas, that are likely not cool roof certified, and would like to see that addressed.

Staff Liaison Communications – Advised commission of Claremont tour, and invited the commissioners to participate at the City's booth at the Clean Air Car Show.

Council Liaison Communications – Dr. Schneider advised the commission of his participation in the tour with Claremont. He will research more the language used in their publications and applications. He explained that in Claremont's ordinance there is language that states residents can't deny the planting of a tree in their parkway, and that they are responsible for watering it. If they don't, they can be cited and fined. He also explained that when applicants are presenting for their tree removal, we aren't always going to be able to change their minds on the need for removal. We need to provide reassurances, and be sure to assign decisions and tasks to arborists because residents aren't always qualified to answer.

Adjournment – Commissioner Benzoni motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:37 p.m., Commissioner Leider seconded. Ayes: All, Nays: None.

NEXT MEETING – The next meeting of the Natural Resources and Environmental Commission will be held on September 24, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.



William Kelly, Chair