

**CITY OF SOUTH PASADENA
NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
MINUTES – September 26, 2017**

Roll Call – The meeting called to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Commissioners: Chair William Kelly, Vice-Chair Al Benzoni, Kay Findley, Stephen Leider, Daniel Snowden-Ifft, and Nancy Wilms (arrived 8:02pm). Also present were Council Liaison Dr. Schneider, and Staff Liaison Jenna Shimmin.

Minutes – Minutes for August 30, 2017 were approved with no corrections (Findley, Leider; Ayes: All, Nays: 0).

PUBLIC COMMENTS – None.

BUSINESS ITEMS

1. **Tree Removal Permit Hearing: 1446 Oak Crest Avenue** – Staff provided a brief recap regarding this request from Karineh Minassian, the owner of 1446 Oak Crest Avenue, to remove a Canary Island Pine, that she stated was damaging the property. Staff also explained that Commissioner Wilms was absent during this hearing as she had recused herself from the procedures due to her living in close proximity to this property.

Chair Kelly requested a review of the planned construction plans that were submitted to the planning department regarding this property after the initial hearing before the NREC in August. The applicant handed out a packet to the commissioners that included a letter from a second arborist, a close up of the plans, and pictures of the property.

Commissioner Benzoni stated that the original arborist report states the tree is healthy, balanced and symmetrical. He asked for clarification of the location of the tree described in the arborist's report dated 6-17-2017, as it is difficult to tell how far from the house the report states the tree is located. Commissioner Snowden-Ifft asked what is meant by the northeast corner.

- The applicant had the arborist from McKinley & Associates (William McKinley) respond, and it was determined that northeast is not the correct directional indicator. The arborist showed the commission the correct corner on the plans.

Commissioner Benzoni then asked if the International Society of Arboriculture's (ISA) standard is greater than or equal to three times the tree's diameter of 25" minimum (75" in this case), why the most recent arborist's report states that root trimming cannot be done.

- Mr. McKinley responded that the roots are damaging more than one area of the home, the garage area and the living quarters. He further explained that even if the roots were not directly against a structure/foundation their growth nearby would displace soil, which would push against the nearest thing, which is the house in this case.
- The applicant presented a photo on her phone of a crack under the stairs that run outside of the living area, not far from the tree in question.

Commissioner Snowden-Ifft asked for clarification regarding how the applicant knows the tree roots are causing the damage to these three areas of the home, in the garage foundation, under the stairs and under the living area, when it is not apparent from any of the photos provided.

- The applicant had a second arborist, Peter Harnisch, respond, and he advised the commission that even if this tree were not causing the damage currently, its roots would inevitably cause the same damage.

Commissioner Benzoni stated that there appears to be another pine in front of the house that is just as close to the property as the tree in question. He asked the applicant why she does not feel this is a threat to the property in the same respect.

- The applicant responded that the arborist assessed that tree as well and stated it was not a threat.

Commissioner Benzoni asked the applicant if there is a tree replacement plan available.

- The applicant responded that she did have one where she will be planting three 24" box trees. She also advised the commission that she obtained a quote to remove the pine, but was unable to obtain a quote to root trim the tree and replace the concrete. She stated that of the companies she contacted they told her either they would not take on the project, or did not contact her back at all.

Chair Kelly made a motion to approve the tree removal with no second.

Commissioner Benzoni stated that because of the other tree on the property that is in close proximity to the structure, and other similar trees in the neighborhood that are similarly located on their properties, he doesn't see any backing for the imminent harm claim being used as ground to remove this tree.

Commissioner Snowden-Ifft stated that to him the issue lies with whether or not the roots of this tree are causing the damage to the property. The engineer's report states that there are cracks on the property, and there is a pine tree present, but he does not see where it specifically says that the pine tree is causing the damage.

- The applicant explained that at the start of the report it states that the purpose for being at the property is to assess the effects of the pine tree on the property.

Commissioner Leider made a motion to deny the request due to a lack of evidence to support the applicant's claim that there is imminent harm to her property being caused by the Canary Island Pine in question, with Commissioner Findley seconding the motion.

Roll call vote: Findley – Yes, Benzoni – Yes, Snowden-Ifft – Yes, Puni – Yes, Leider – Yes, Kelly – Yes (Commissioner Wilms was recused at the time of the vote)

2. **Tree Ordinance** – Commissioner Findley suggested that the commission go through the document and review the comments and markups in order.

- It was decided that ISA would be spelled out as International Association of Arboriculture every use.
- 34.5(a) to add language that trees less than 4" in diameter do not need to be on the tree replacement plan.
- 34.7(a)(1) the commission is okay with the words "imminent" and "feasible".
- 34.7(a)(2) to add the following language "The presence of proposed development plans does not constitute an unreasonable hardship on their own".
- On construction related removals, there is a one 24" box for 6" of diameter replacement requirement for non-native trees and two 24" box for 6" of diameter replacement requirement for native trees, versus the current code language of every 10".
 - o Staff will need to determine a threshold of what constitutes "construction", as the intent is to capture major development and not small residential construction.
- There was discussion on whether to include language that requires residents to water trees on the parkway and penalize those who do not. Chair Kelly mentioned that it would be a good idea to work into the rates a way to incentivize residents to water trees, and to find a way to fund tree maintenance through a fee similar to the Water Efficiency Fee. The commission discussed the potential penalties for not watering trees, and whether the city should require the watering with or without a penalty. It was decided to hold off on adding any language of this nature at this time in lieu of future alternatives.

A motion was made to approve the edits to Chapter 34 Tree Ordinance and recommend that council adopt them as an update to the city's municipal code (Snowden-Ifft, Puni; Ayes: All, Nays: None).

3. **Tree Removal Hearing Discussion** – Commissioner Findley stated that in the past, the NREC did not approve any tree removal requests, and she is concerned with how and why requests are being approved now. She is also concerned that the Public Works Director has too much approval authority, and wanted to see how the rest of the commission felt. The commission reached a consensus that going forward there would be more consistency and standards thanks to the revisions to Chapter 34 that were approved earlier tonight.
4. **Trees & Climate Change** – Chair Kelly advised the commission that he has spent the last few months investigating the affect climate change is having on our trees. He has interviewed scientists and came across a study on climate ready trees in urban areas of Southern California. The City's list of approved trees only has two of the trees recommended by this study, with 10 additional trees that are missing.

To summarize the study, he stated that trees planted 100 years ago may not be appropriate for 100 years from now. Because of this, we need to consider climate change projections, plus the urban heat island effect with planting new trees. He is purposing the city hold a "tree summit" of sorts to engage the community on the impacts of climate change on our tree canopy. It also mentioned that some sort of carbon sequestration fee, used to offset the emissions from pumping water, could potentially fund maintaining our tree canopy.

Chair Kelly also suggested that it would be a good idea to update the City's approved tree list in order to eliminate species that are specifically susceptible to pests. Chair Kelly explained that Dr. Turney, a South Pasadena resident and expert on the subject matter currently working for Los Angeles County, stated that there are 49 species of trees susceptible to the shot hole bore beetle. Dr. Turney recommends not planting trees such as Western Sycamores, Olives, and Liquid Ambers in order to prevent the spread of this pest.

Chair Kelly made a motion to direct Public Works to work with West Coast Arborist to remove pest prone trees from the City's drought tolerant/native tree list that the city and the public utilizes, and to add the recommended climate ready trees (Kelly, Leider; Ayes: All, Nays: None).

5. **Water Conservation Programs and Drought Update** – Jenna Shimmin updated the commission that there was a 21% reduction in water use for August 2017 versus 2013 usage.
6. **October Meeting Date Change** – A motion was approved to cancel the regular meeting scheduled for October 24th and hold a special meeting October 30th (Benzoni, Kelly; Ayes: All, Nays: None).

INFORMATION ONLY

7. **Urban Forest Update** – Staff explained that because Public Works is still updating the landscape maintenance RFP and tree maintenance RFP tree trimming activity is limited to emergency trimming. Public Works staff are also planning fall tree plantings.
8. **AB 1530** – A copy of the new law was passed out as an informational item.
9. **Upcoming Events** – Water and Sewer Rate Community Meeting – September 28th; Our Resilient Community General Plan Update Community Meeting – October 10th; Dumpster Day – October 14th; Upper District Waterfest – October 14th; Garfield Reservoir Open House – October 21st

Chair Communications – Chair Kelly advised the commission that he spoke with the chair of the Design Review Board and the Planning Department regarding 629 Alta Vista Circle. He learned that per the zoning code because of the location of the street to the garage the driveway had to be arranged in such a way that the trees in question would be in its path. There is no alternative design and so the trees will have to be removed.

Commission Communications –

Commissioner Benzoni – Stated he was glad to see trees and climate change item on the agenda because the heat island effect is a real and ongoing issue with roofs and construction.

Commissioner Findley – Mentioned a LA Time article regarding palm trees dying in mass throughout Los Angeles, thus changing the skyline of the area.


Commission Wilms – Requested that staff provide the commission updates on the progress of the Chapter 34, Tree Ordinance update. She also advised the commission that she attended her first Golf Course Subcommittee meeting where they mainly discussed finances, not any environmentally related issues.

Staff Liaison Communications – Advised commission that the Senior Planner, John Mayer, was no longer with the city, which may cause a slight slowdown with the speed building plans are processed.

Council Liaison Communications – None at this time.

Adjournment – Commissioner Leider motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:34 p.m., Commissioner Benzoni seconded. Ayes: All, Nays: None.

NEXT MEETING – The next meeting of the Natural Resources and Environmental Commission will be held on October 30, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.



William Kelly, Chair