

RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSION
CORRESPONDENCE

February 13, 2025

Agenda Item 6-A: To Review and Comment on the Urban Forest Plan and Implementation.

From: Dorothy Freeman <dfreeman@pacbell.net>
Sent: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 9:01 AM
To: Justin Long <jlong@alamedaca.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recreation & Parks Commission Agenda February 13 Item 6A

Regarding: Recreation & Parks Commission Agenda February 13 Item 6A

Dear Commissioner Radez, Vice Commissioner Swartz, and Commissioners Alexander, Burney and Robbins.

On Page 6, 34, and 67 of the Urban Forest Plan there are images of the path and trees in the Jean Sweeney Open Space Park. For some reason the Sweeny Park has been completely ignored in the plans for a citywide urban forest. In the Placeworks master plan for Sweeney Park that was approved by the City Council the central area of the park was planned as an urban forest. Enough trees could be planted in the park in a shorter period of time than could be planted on city streets in several years. Jean Sweeney Park needs to be added to the urban forest plans and the Recreation & Parks Department should accelerate the planting of trees in the middle space of the park.

The idea of the Sweeny Park was presented to the people as a place like the San Francisco Golden Gate Park. A place where people would walk in a forest with in the city. This was part of the center design of the park. A place of trees and trails where people can walk in the quiet of this very special space in Alameda.

There is a small urban forest already in the Jean Sweeney Park on the south side between the fence and the Union Pacific Rail Road land. These threes need to be part of the parks urban forest plan and the land beneath the trees cleaned up to allow the trees to be protected from possible disease from the left over growth of weeds, black berries, and railroad pollution.

Respectfully,

Dorothy Freeman
Co-Chairman: Jean Sweeney Open Space Park Fund

CC: Recreation & Parks Director Long

February 3, 2025

Mayor and Councilmembers
City of Alameda
2263 Santa Clara Avenue
Alameda, CA 94501

Dear Mayor Ashcraft and Councilmembers:

The following comments modify and expand the January 27 comments I sent to the Planning Board and Public Utilities Board, which were copied to the City Council and Historical Advisory Board.

- 1. The 2010 Alameda Master Street Tree Plan's (MSTP's) species designations for "Major Streets" and "Neighborhoods", should be retained.** At the January 30 virtual workshop, the consultant advised that the species designations for Major Streets and Neighborhoods are not being retained. The consultant explained that when responding to street tree planting requests, staff can refer to the Appendix C tree species matrix to identify appropriate species for the planting site.

It is surprising that the consultant is not retaining the Major Street and Neighborhood designations. The designations were designed to result in the "right tree for the right place" based on factors such as existing trees, soil characteristics, and salt air exposure. The designations were also intended to serve an important urban design function by using street trees to create a defining image for each major street and to a lesser extent each neighborhood.

At the January 27 Planning Board meeting, concern was expressed that the Major Street designations might result in a single species for each street. This concern is unfounded, since the 2010 MSTP shows multiple species for each Major Street, except for Central Avenue, where continuing the existing London Plane Trees is shown.

Not using the Major Street and Neighborhood designations for determining tree selection and instead making the selections in response to each request on a case by case basis seems much less efficient than using the Major Street and Neighborhood designations. Under the consultant's methodology, staff would need to review the Appendix C matrix information for each species and sort out which species are appropriate for the site. But the Major Street and Neighborhood designations have already done this work.

Since the matrix has deleted some species and added others, the Major Street and Neighborhood designations should be revised to reflect the tree matrix changes. Revisions to the Major Street and Neighborhood designations to reflect new information set forth in the UFP concerning such factors not addressed in the 2010 MSTP as water table levels and salt water intrusion would also be appropriate. It was expected that the consultant would make these changes as part of the UFP, but this was not the case.

- 2. The MSTP's limitation of the 25' standard to high voltage lines and to nonmajor streets should be retained.** Volume 1, Section 5.2.3 (Page 69) of the Draft UFP states that "tree species with a maximum potential height of 25 feet are considered appropriate to plant under

utility lines”. This is a significant change from the MSTP that applies the 25 foot height only to "high voltage" electrical lines (as opposed to lower voltage "secondary" lines) and exempts "Major Streets" from the 25 foot height requirement. The MSTP also calls for new trees under high voltage lines to have a spreading (decurent) growth form rather than a strong central leader (excurrent) growth form to help minimize high voltage line conflicts.

The MSTP’s limitation of the 25' standard to high voltage lines and to nonmajor streets should be retained. Applying the 25' standard to such streets as Central Avenue would radically compromise this iconic streetscape. The pruning that has been performed on Central Avenue for the past several decades to address the high voltage lines has preserved this streetscape.

Regarding secondary electrical, street trees over 25 feet in height in Alameda and elsewhere have managed to coexist with secondary electrical lines with, to my knowledge, no major conflicts and little or no pruning for decades. Allowing such coexistence is consistent with California Public Utilities Commission General Order 95 (which sets the state standards for electrical line clearances) that calls for pruning for secondary electrical clearance only if tree branches are abrading or exerting tension on the secondary line.

Alameda Municipal Power (AMP) has advised that they are proposing this change to maintain system reliability, and reducing the need for frequent tree trimming. However, I am unaware of significant power outages caused by tree branches interfering with secondary electrical lines and AMP's proposed 2 1/2 year pruning cycle for street trees appears sufficiently frequent to address any conflicts between tree branches and secondary electrical before these conflicts become problematic.

Finally, the proposed 25' standard will significantly inhibit the City's ability to meet its tree canopy coverage goals. As part of the city's climate resilience plan, trees larger than 25' will be needed to help reduce temperatures and the heat island effect. Small trees do not provide enough shade to make a substantial difference. Also, if there is a plan to underground electrical lines within the next 15 years or so for a particular area, then an exception for that area should be made to the 25' height limit on the assumption that the lines will be undergrounded before the trees will grow tall enough to create conflicts.

3. Related to the above, working with AMP, **the UFP should identify long-term strategies for overhead utility line modifications to minimize tree/utility line conflicts**, including:
 - a. Use of specially **insulated “tree wire” or armored cable** that eliminates the need for most tree pruning for both primary (high voltage) and secondary electrical lines; and
 - b. **Utility line reconfigurations** that reduce conflicts with trees, such as:
 - i. alley arms; and
 - ii. reducing the cross-sectional area of construction and therefore the amount of tree central canopy that must be kept pruned to provide adequate line clearance such as:
 - a) attaching high-voltage wires directly to poles using brackets, rather than cross arms; or
 - b) vertical configuration.

At a minimum, exploration of the above provisions with AMP should be included in the UFP as a future action step.

4. Clarifications and modifications to the Appendix C Species Matrix.

- a. **Provide a procedure for planting species not on the list** if the species is considered well-suited to site constraints and otherwise considered desirable. See MSTP provisions.
- b. **Must all park, open space and other non-street trees be selected from the list?** For example, Atlas Cedar is not on the list, but has a very good track record in parks and other non-sidewalk tree locations. Also, parks and other open spaces are better locations than sidewalk trees for trying out species with minimal local track records.
- c. **Some species on the existing MSTP matrix are not included on the list.** Can explanations be provided why these were removed? Species that should be considered for retention include: New Zealand Christmas Tree, London Plane (see discussion below), European Beech (probably only for parks and medians), “Saratoga” Ginkgo (subject to limiting future Ginkgo Plantings as discussed in the Plan), “Saratoga” Sweet Bay (or Laurel), and Frontier, Triumph and Patriot Hybrid Elm. It is good that many species have been added, although some of these do not have local track records and should therefore probably be considered “experimental” as discussed for the MSTP matrix.

Curiously, the list includes American Elm without the proviso that varieties resistant to Dutch Elm Disease (DED) be used, although the list also includes the Valley Forge” and “Princeton” varieties, which ARE resistant to DED. **Non DED-resistant American Elm should be deleted from the list.** “Valley Forge” should also be deleted because of its highly problematic growth form but “Jefferson” and “New Harmony” should be added, since their growth forms are more manageable than “Valley Forge” and “Princeton”.

- d. **Identify which species are suitable as street trees vs. limited to parks and other non- sidewalk locations.**
- e. Can the matrix include: **tolerance of recycled water and ratings for: (A) carbon dioxide storage; and (B) improving air quality in terms of ozone, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter and sulfur dioxide.** (See the West Oakland Reforestation Plan, including I-Tree data.)
- f. **Do the *’s have the same meaning as in the MSTP matrix?** An explanation of the *’s should be provided.
- g. **The minimum planting area sizes for sidewalk trees in the MSTP matrix should be retained.** The UFP Appendix C matrix has radically increased the planting area sizes for many species that have performed well as street trees in 3 foot and 4 foot wide planting strips. For example, the planting area widths for Pin Oak and Silver Linden are shown in the UFP matrix as "greater than 10 feet" compared to 3 feet in the MSTP.

At the January 30 virtual meeting, the consultant explained that the revised planting

area sizes were based on what is needed for optimal performance for each species and primarily applicable to non-sidewalk situations, such as parks and medians. **Applying the Appendix C planting area widths to sidewalks in most cases eliminates continued use of large-growing species such as Shumard Oak, Silver Linden, Elms, and Red Maple and limits the selection of street trees to small species.**

Ca.100 year old specimens of these and other large-growing species have managed to perform reasonably well as street trees throughout Alameda and nearby communities in planting areas as little as 3' wide although with periodic sidewalk damage repair.

- h.** The Plan correctly notes that London Plane is overused in Alameda, and that existing mature specimens are in decline and/or poor health. However, **since London Plane is an iconic tree on several Alameda streets, such as Central Avenue, Mozart Street, Verdi Street and portions of Park Avenue, Planting of new London Plane should continue on these streets as replacements for removed trees, but only for these and possibly a limited number of other specially designated streets as identified on the MSTP.**

A likely reason for the decline of so many London Plane specimens is that as a species, its population is one of the oldest in Alameda. So it is not surprising that a disproportionate percentage of the London Plane population is in decline. Root cuts for sidewalk repairs appear to be a contributing factor. Anthracnose may be another contributing factor, but can be addressed through use of anthracnose-resistant varieties, such as "Columbia", which is also resistant to powdery mildew.

It is surprising that London Plane is not considered drought tolerant, since numerous large and apparently healthy specimens can be found at locations throughout the bay area with no irrigation as well as parts of Europe, such as southern Italy, southern France and Spain, with hot summers and a little or no summer rainfall.

- i.** **The following species in the matrix should be considered drought tolerant: Turkish Hazel, Ginkgo, Southern Live Oak, Swamp Myrtle, and possibly Black Birch.** I can provide justification in a follow up email or discussion.
- j.** **Some of the species included in the Cal Poly Select Tree List are not included in the matrix and vice versa. Which list is definitive?** The two lists also sometimes use different botanical names for the same species.

- 5. The Appendix Q guidelines for developing a protected tree ordinance are disappointing and need more development to adequately address private property trees.** The Guidelines read to address street trees rather than private property trees and repeat much of the language in the City's existing street tree removal procedure. The intent of the ordinance is to extend the protection of private property trees beyond the existing protections for coast Live Oak to include other species. The ordinance should also include definitions for key terminology, such as "removal", include criteria for assessing the trade-offs between development related tree removals and adjusting the project design to avoid removals, and provide an improved penalty structure.

The Appendix R list of ordinances from other communities with brief summaries of their provisions is helpful, but an analysis should have been provided. At the January 30 workshop, staff advised that another consultant contract will be developed to establish more definitive parameters for the ordinance and possibly development of the ordinance itself.

- 6. The Appendix I spacing guidelines for street trees is hard to read and requires a color printer.** It should be redesigned so that content can be communicated in black-and-white. The existing spacing guidelines in the MSTP are better and provide exceptions that should be continued.

- 7. The draft UFP has at least several typos and incorrect cross-references that should be corrected.**

Please contact me if you have questions or would like to discuss these comments.

Christopher Buckley, AICP
City Planning Consulting
Phone: (510) 523-0411
Email: cbuckleyAICP@att.net

cc: Historical Advisory Board, Jennifer Ott, Danielle Mieler, Tim Haines, Allen Tai, Matt Nowlen, Erin Smith