MOTION

The City of Los Angeles is home to one of the largest urban forests in the nation, comprised of trees, understory plants, wildland interface trees and plants, and all landscaping on both public and private property. According to the Los Angeles Canopy Cover Assessment (McPherson, et al. 2006) the City’s estimated tree population is in excess of 10 million. Approximately 700,000 of these trees are located in the public rights-of-way and managed by the Bureau of Street Services.

Street trees represent a significant and indispensable portion of the City’s urban forest, and a piece of the public works infrastructure system that is vital to Los Angeles’ urban environment and ecosystem. This living infrastructure provides innumerable environmental, ecological, social, economic and aesthetic benefits to the City’s four million residents.

Over the last decade a series of environmental, financial and policy developments have undermined that stated goal. Prolonged drought conditions have distressed street trees and made them more susceptible to disease, pests and invasive species. The 2008 financial crisis and the resulting across-the-board departmental budget cuts limited the Bureau’s ability to properly maintain a safe and sustainable urban forest. And the City’s commitment to reconstructing damaged sidewalks over the next 30 years will result in the removal and replacement of a significant number of street trees. In fact, recently a determination was made by the Board of Public Works that 18 mature, healthy ficus trees on Cherokee Avenue and another 12 trees on Spaulding Avenue in the Hollywood area of Council District Four would need to be removed in order to repair sidewalks on the street.

The Bureau of Street Services’ 2015 State of the City’s Street Trees Report revealed an unacceptable condition of our street tree population largely due to three primary factors — poor age diversification, tree health and maintenance of our City’s street trees. As was indicated in the report, if deferred tree maintenance, increasing pest infestations, drought and lack of programmatic tree replacements continue, the overall condition of our street trees will continue to decline.

Due to the unique benefits of street trees, future planning to resolve the current street tree condition and any future infrastructure conflict is necessary to ensure that as many vital and healthy street trees are retained as possible. The City’s 2:1 street tree replacement policy and ongoing sidewalk repair work provides an opportunity for the City to develop policies and strategies that ensure for the long-term health and security of our urban forest.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Bureau of Street Services be instructed to report back to Council on the status of the Bureau’s current hiring efforts for tree planting, tree trimming and dead tree removal crews, pursuant to Council File 18-0600-S139, as well as cost estimates and staff requirements necessary to bring departmental operations back to pre-recession levels, achieve a 97 percent Tree Stocking Rate in the City, along with associated planting, maintenance and care, and a BMP pruning cycle of 5-7 years.
I FURTHER MOVE that the Bureau of Street Services be instructed, and City Plants be requested, to report back on the status of current efforts to conduct a comprehensive street tree inventory, including, but not limited to costs, funding options and staff requirements; and existing technologies, inventories and software used by other city departments and/or City Plants to document the street tree system and guide future tree planting strategies and investment.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Bureau of Street Services be instructed, and City Plants be requested, to review street tree maintenance and trimming practices among city departments that perform tree trimming functions, pursuant to the City Administrative Officer’s October 21, 2016 report (CF 15-0467-S3), as well as the practices of other jurisdictions that have ongoing street tree management plans, and report back to Council with recommendations on best management practices for the City’s street tree population.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Bureau of Street Services be instructed to report back with an analysis and recommendations to improve the City’s 2:1 street tree replacement policy, including, but not limited to consideration of the holistic value of a tree slated for removal based on the tree’s health, maturity and canopy size, and an evaluation of the existing tree planting in-lieu fee to ensure the City achieves full cost recovery for all tree removals, planting and maintenance costs, and appropriate age and species diversification.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Bureau of Engineering and Bureau of Street Services be instructed to report to Council with alternative sidewalk design options, that adhere to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and the terms agreed upon in the Willits settlement, that would allow the City to prioritize the preservation of healthy, established trees when conducting sidewalk repairs.

CO-PRESENTED BY: 
DAVID E. RYU
Councilman, 4th District

CO-PRESENTED BY: 
BOB BLUMENFIELD
Councilman, 3rd District

SECONDED BY: 
Paul Krekorian

OCT 17 2013
MOTION

The City of Los Angeles is home to one of the largest urban forests in the nation. According to the Los Angeles Canopy Cover Assessment (McPherson, et al. 2006) the City’s estimated tree population is in excess of 10 million. Approximately 700,000 of these trees are located in the public rights-of-way and managed by the Bureau of Street Services. The other approximately 9,300,000 are on parcels of land throughout the city, from parks to backyards, and a significant portion are located on private land.

As the City of Los Angeles’s 2018 Biodiversity Report states “urban biodiversity includes both native and non-native species, including LA’s urban forest, which provide many ecosystem services that enhance the City’s resilience to climate change.” The report notes that the City receives the highest scores possible on a number of biodiversity indicators including percentage of natural areas, and the number of native bird species. However the indicators of proactive enhancement fall short, with a notably low urban tree canopy and limited biodiversity preservation practices, many of which are determined within CEQA and on a project-by-project basis as opposed to a comprehensive or uniform approach aimed at enhancing citywide biodiversity.

Thus, the private tree canopy of the city is an essential component of the City’s biodiversity, and often times adversely impacted by isolated decisions made on individual projects. Currently the city of Los Angeles relies on the Protected Tree Ordinance (Ord#177404) which aims to preserve four significant trees native to Southern California: indigenous Oaks, Southern California Black Walnut, Western Sycamore, and California Bay. Unfortunately even these four protected and most rare trees are routinely removed as part of development projects on private property as part of CEQA categorical exemptions. Moreover, this protection does not extend to mature trees which are unprotected indigenous species or non-natives, and protected trees that have been planted as part of a tree planting program.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Department of City Planning, in coordination with staff assigned to the development of the Wildlife Protection Areas Study (CF 14-0518) and Environmental Policy Unit, report back to Council on ongoing tree and biodiversity planning, strategies and/or efforts at the Department of City Planning and Urban Forestry Division (CF 03-1459-S3) to protect and grow the City’s urban canopy, including cost, staffing and budget recommendations for the creation of a division of biologists and/or arboriculturists to consult on management of the private tree population and coordinate efforts with city departments.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Department of City Planning Department of Building and Safety and Bureau of Street Services, in consultation with any other departments as necessary, report to Council with recommendations for improvements to strengthen and expand the Protected Tree Ordinance and any other relevant tree planting or replacement requirements for individual private development projects with the goal of comprehensively preserving, maintaining and growing the City’s private tree population.
I FURTHER MOVE that the Department of City Planning and Bureau of Street Services report to Council with an interpretation of LAMC Article 6 and Article 7, Section 17.05 of Chapter I, to further clarify language, namely Subsection 46.02 (b) 1, ("reasonable" development of a property) to ensure alternate site designs are explored; Subsection 46.02 (c) ("approximate value" and "reasonable probability") to ensure consideration of the full economic and environmental cost of tree removal and replacement; and Subsection 46.01 to ensure protected species that are planted or grown as a part of a tree planting program are not excluded from the Protected Tree Ordinance.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Department of City Planning, Department of Building and Safety, the Bureau of Street Services, Urban Forestry Division, and any other departments as necessary, report to Council with recommendations for the creation of protocols for tree removals, to include all non-protected mature, healthy trees, regardless of their status as native or non-native (unless considered invasive) such that removal of any mature trees will result in replacement, or mitigation banking aligned with the Conservation Element of the City of Los Angeles General Plan and any other relevant general plan policies and goals to enhance urban biodiversity.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Department of City Planning and Department of Building and Safety, with the assistance of the Bureau of Street Services and any other departments as necessary, report to Council with recommendations for the enhancement of the notification process for tree removals on private property (CF 14-1634), ensuring the removal and notification process is consistent with the street tree removal and notification process, and that residents on neighboring parcels are fully informed of pending tree removals.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Department of City Planning and Department of Building and Safety, with the assistance of the Urban Forestry Division, evaluate the placement and timing of tree removals in the permitting process, and report back to Council with recommendations to require approval earlier in permitting review process to ensure that approvals of tree removals are completed prior to final permit approvals for development projects.

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The Bureau of Street Services’ 2015 State of the City’s Street Trees Report revealed an unacceptable condition of our street tree population largely due to three primary factors – poor age diversification, tree health and maintenance of our City’s street trees. As was indicated in the report, if deferred tree maintenance, increasing pest infestations, drought and lack of programmatic tree replacements continue, the overall condition of our street trees will continue to decline.

In order to properly preserve, maintain and grow the City’s street tree population, the Bureau of Street Services should consider establishing a division of tree biologists and/or arboriculturists to inspect, advise, consolidate/coordinate tree maintenance activities among all city departments, and continue to expand the City’s urban forest.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Bureau of Street Services, and City Administrative Officer as necessary, report to Council with cost estimates, staff requirements and budget recommendations for the hiring of a Director of Community Forestry and additional staff, consistent with the aforementioned expertise to support the growth, maintenance, health and preservation of the City’s urban canopy.

PRESENTED BY:
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OCT 17 2018