

Tree Update – November 28, 2007

Dear residents:

In response to the recent removal of trees and the flyers posted recently, the City has received a number of complaints about the tree removals. Below we provide accurate information regarding the extensive public process that was undertaken prior to removing the trees.

Public Process Prior to Tree Removal

An extraordinarily thorough public process was followed during the two years prior to the tree removals which took place on Wednesday, November 21. Each tree was prominently posted with a bright red Notice of the proposed removal on December 9, 2005, and again on January 6, 2006. The notices gave the public until January 23, 2006, to send in comments and protests. City staff considered those comments and worked with the City Arborist, independent arborists and with City Councilmembers to reduce the original number of trees to be removed.

Councilmembers Nadel and Kernighan sponsored four public tours of the posted trees in the company of an arborist in December 2005 and January 2006, and two Special town hall meetings, held on February 22 and 25, 2006. During these months, numerous articles about the tree removals were printed in The Oakland Tribune and San Francisco Chronicle.

The tree removal permits were granted in April 2006. Several members of the public appealed the permit to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission, which held a hearing and voted to deny the appeal. A further appeal was heard by the City Council at a duly noticed City council meeting on June 27, 2006 and denied. Having lost the administrative appeals, several citizens then sued the City in August 2006, alleging that insufficient environmental review had been done for the proposed tree removals. A Superior Court judge carefully reviewed the case and recently issued a judgment in favor of the City, confirming that the tree removal permits are valid. After two years of thorough public review and due process, the City is now moving ahead in accordance with all laws and regulations.

Reasons for removal

Each and every tree had been carefully reviewed by arborists and landscape architects, and removal was desired for a variety of reasons. *The large blue gum eucalyptus on Lakeshore Avenue near Hanover was the most sizeable tree to be removed. One huge section of trunk had split off and fallen across the street in 2005. Examination revealed rot within the remaining trunks, and both City and consulting arborists deemed the tree hazardous to public safety. It would have been removed regardless of the upcoming park improvement projects.* Other trees were removed because they were diseased, in danger of falling over, crowding historic buildings, or in conflict with new Boathouse stairs and pathways. Two trees were removed to allow relocation of an existing shoreline parking lot to a spot further from the Lake.

There seems to be a philosophical difference between the approach of the City and that of some citizens regarding trees in urban parks. Some citizens feel that all trees should be left in place until they die, no matter what. The City takes the approach that trees in an urban park should be managed as one would take care of a garden at home. If two trees have grown too close together to the detriment of the health of one or both, one tree should be removed. If a tree's crown is getting sparse, with rot at the base of the trunk, it should be removed before it dies and falls down. If one wishes to put in a patio and a tree is in the way, one thinks about the best course of action. If the tree is a really nice tree, one would build the patio around the tree. If the tree is in poor condition and aesthetically unattractive, one might remove it in favor of the benefits provided by the patio, and plant a new tree nearby. This is the approach taken by the City. Particularly in the context of an urban park, we believe that this is an appropriate approach.

Upcoming tree removals

The removal of trees at Lake Merritt itself is virtually complete. Further away from the Lake, as part of proposed work at 12th Street, the City is planning to remove approximately 177 trees in the street median, the H.J. Kaiser Convention Center parking lot, and at the Lake Merritt Channel. These planned removals are designed to allow the relocation of the roadway and downsizing of the parking lot in order to create nearly four acres of new green space next to the Lake. Some other trees are planned to be removed to create a new tidal marsh next to the Channel. None of these trees are heritage or landmark trees, and many new trees will be planted. The environmental benefits of the project will greatly outweigh the temporary loss of trees.

For more information visit www.oaklandpw.com/measureDD or call (510) 238-3389

