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OAKLAND

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# AGENDA REPORT

**TO:** DEANNA J. SANTANA  
CITY ADMINISTRATOR

**FROM:** Brooke A. Levin,  
Interim Director, PWA

**SUBJECT:** Infrastructure Report Card: Trees

**Date:** September 25, 2013

City Administrator  
Approval

*Deanna J. Santana*

Date

*10-8-13*

**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** City Wide

## RECOMMENDATION

This is an informational report on the Tree Services Unit (TSU) as a follow up to April 23, 2013 committee report "2012 Infrastructure Report Card."

## OUTCOME

This is an informational report, no action is required.

## BACKGROUND

The Infrastructure Report Card on Trees provides an overview of tree maintenance. According to the 2008 Sidewalk Survey, there are 46,642 official street trees growing along the sidewalks and there are unknown number of trees found within the street right-of-way in the Oakland hills. In addition, there are additional trees found in parks, city facilities, medians and streetscapes. With current staffing levels, tree maintenance is limited to emergency and hazardous tree abatement. Aesthetic tree pruning is not performed and trees are no longer planted or watered manually. The overall grade was a D+.

Trees growing in the urban landscape supply the City with many benefits including a more esthetic community. Also, trees supply environmental benefits; they alter the environment in which we live by moderating climate, improving air quality, conserving water, and by providing habitat for wildlife. Trees provide economic benefits, such as increased property value from the time they are planted until they mature.

Tree maintenance staff reductions have resulted in deferred tree maintenance. Deferred tree maintenance results in higher emergency or storm related tree damage and the associated property damage caused by a falling tree or branches. Deferred tree maintenance could result in higher overall cost to the City as opposed to the cost of funding routine maintenance due to property damage, claims and lawsuits.

Item: 4  
Public Work Committee  
October 22, 2013

The 2012 Infrastructure Report Card follows a series of budget cuts that has reduced tree maintenance services. In 2008, there were 32 full-time tree maintenance staff and this level has been reduced by over 50%. The current staffing includes: one (1) Senior Supervisor, one (1) Arboricultural Inspector, one (1) Crew Supervisor, nine (9) Tree Trimmers, two (2) Tree High Climbers and one (1) Administrative Assistant I for a total of 15 Full Time Employees (FTE).

**Priority Criteria:** With the reduction in the Tree Services budget Tree Services only addresses hazardous trees.

The following criteria are set for hazardous tree work:

- First priority is public safety; addressing trees or limbs that have fallen blocking the street or sidewalk including limbs that are broken and hanging.
- Second priority is attending to high risk trees; trees that may be dead, have a lean that threatens the public right-of-way or trees that are blocking street lights or traffic controlling devices (stop sign or signals).
- Third priority is raising trees for clearance; this would include street sweepers and trees along major routes that are low.
- TSU also assists the Streets and Sidewalk Division in cutting roots on trees when they are repairing sidewalks.

The TSU is responsible for Official trees that are growing in the street right-of-way, streets that have curbs, gutters and sidewalks. Official trees are those that the City planted or there is documentation proving the planted tree meets the City planting criteria. TSU maintains trees in parks, city facilities and median strips. Unofficial trees are trees that were not planted by the City or could be the result of natural regeneration. Most Unofficial trees are growing within the street right-of-way in areas where there are no curbs, gutters or sidewalks. These unimproved right-of-ways are commonly found in the Oakland hills, east of Highway 13.

#### Crews:

The 11 field employees are typically deployed follows;

- Heavy Duty Crew – this crew attends to large trees (works on trees 55' and above); consisting of two High Climbers and two Tree Trimmers.
- Removal Crew – this crew attends to removal of trees under fifty-five feet (55'), consisting of three (3) Tree Trimmers.
- Tree Trimmer Crew – there are two crews that work on clearing trees/branches that obstruct traffic signals or street lights by raising low branches for public safety. These crews respond to emergency calls that are reported during working hours.

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TSU has one Arboricultural Inspector whose duties include:

- Inspecting tree related service requests that come through the Call Center.
- Processing tree permits in accordance with the Tree Protection Ordinance (OMC chapter 12.36) which includes tree inspections.
- Consulting with residents about the Hazardous Tree Ordinance (OMC Chapter 12.32) and the View Preservation Ordinance.

All the TSU staff respond to non-work hour emergency calls as part of a standby rotation.

#### Work Orders:

All tree service requests go through the Public Works Call Center. The Call Center initiated 1,806 services requests in Fiscal Year 2012-13 (FY12-13). The service requests can be categorized into the priority categories as follows:

- Priority 1 - 540
- Priority 2 - 601
- Priority 3 - 537
- Unfunded - 128 (Requests such as aesthetic tree pruning)

After a service request has been initiated it is either dispatched to the crew supervisor (Priority 1) or forwarded on to the arboricultural inspector. Upon completion of the inspection a work order is created and forwarded to the crew supervisor.

TSU is also responsible for administering the Tree Protection Ordinance (OMC 12.36). The ordinance is in place to protect the trees in the city as well providing a process to have trees removed. When a resident or business owner would like to have a tree removed, they are required to submit an application (tree removal permit) to the TSU. In reviewing the application, city staff will conduct a site visit and inspect the tree and its surrounding landscape. If the tree meets the ordinance approval criteria (e.g. hazardous, impedes construction, obstructs views) the permit will be approved. If it does not meet the requirements, the city will deny the permit. Upon denying the permit, the applicant may appeal the decision to the Park and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC) or the City Council, depending on the circumstances. On many occasions the PRAC will also conduct a site visit before making a determination to either sustain or overturn staff's decision.

#### Equipment:

The Tree Services Unit has an aging equipment fleet. Older vehicles are in the shop for maintenance or repairs more frequently which impacts our response time. TSU recently purchased a 2012 hybrid thirty-seven foot (37') aerial lift. This truck is relatively compact and essential for pruning trees that are blocking street lights and traffic signals. This hybrid is energy efficient, and increases employee productivity due to the ease of operation.

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## ANALYSIS

Presently there are three (3) on-profit organizations planting trees throughout the City, West Oakland Green Initiative (WOGI), Sierra Club and Urban Releaf. Their ability to plant trees in Oakland is funded with grants and private donations. The group's combined efforts are to plant approximately one thousand (1,000) trees per year. This is the only tree planting taking place in Oakland at this time.

To maintain and enhance the urban forest so that Oakland can continue to reap the benefits of trees, funding for tree maintenance is recommended to be restored. The Infrastructure Report Card recommended an additional \$4.75 million (FY12-13 costs) annually is needed to restore staffing levels to the pre-2008 level. This additional funding would restore aesthetic tree pruning, tree planting and small tree maintenance. Pruning trees on a regular schedule will improve the overall health of the tree and minimize potential tree hazards. This may result in reducing liability (claims brought on by citizens). The funding would also provide more efficient and effective vehicles and equipment. It is critical to identify funding to support operations and maintenance of existing trees and newly planted trees by non-profit organizations.

## COST SUMMARY/IMPLICATION

None. This is informational report.

## SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

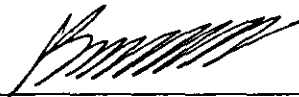
**Economic:** Trees are an asset to the City because a tree-lined street has higher property values than streets without. A house with trees tends to sell faster and at a higher price than a similar house without trees.

**Environmental:** Trees are essential because they provide oxygen, habitat, shade, wind screening and they sequester carbon and offset greenhouses gases. Studies show that a single large, well-watered city tree may transpire about 100 gallons of water in one day, thus producing the cooling effect of five average room air conditioners running 20 hours a day (Schubert, 1979). Trees thus improve the microclimate; i.e., they help control and stabilize the climate of the region and of the world as a whole. A single tree standing alone may not affect the overall surrounding much, but a belt or groups of trees or many trees scattered throughout the neighborhood can be quite effective.

**Social Equity:** Neighborhood groups, non-profit organizations and individuals are engaged in planting street trees because of the economic and environmental benefits provided by trees.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Robert Zahn, Tree Supervisor II, at (510) 615-5852.

Respectfully submitted,



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