

CITY OF OAKLAND
AGENDA REPORT

2009 SEP 17 PM 4: 12

TO: Office of the City Administrator
ATTN: Dan Lindheim
FROM: Public Works Agency
DATE: September 29, 2009

RE: **Report on the Pacific Gas and Electric's Comprehensive Tree Pruning Program
for Trees under High Voltage Power Lines**

SUMMARY

The Public Works Committee on July 14, 2009 requested a map showing the streets where Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) prunes trees. City Staff has had extensive communication with PG&E staff on their tree pruning program. PG&E prunes trees on the vast majority of the streets in Oakland and it was not possible to produce a map with this level of intricate detail.

Staff has determined that PG&E currently prunes street trees under high voltage lines on variable frequencies to achieve clearance between power lines and tree limbs that could cause outages. The frequency of pruning depends on need and the rate of growth of the various species under the power lines but seldom exceeds three years. There may be some potential to achieve efficiencies in pruning street trees by working collaboratively with PG&E's contractors.

Staffing reductions in the Tree Services Section since July of 2008 have resulted in 39% fewer staff. Currently, the Tree Services Section only prunes trees that are deemed to be potentially hazardous. Tree Services has also implemented an audit report recommendation to reduce crew size, and in doing so has increased productivity and is reducing the backlog of hazardous tree work. The forestry staff has also begun implementing a second audit recommendation to work collaboratively with community organizations to plant street trees and sustain the urban forest in Oakland. Utilizing the PG&E contractor to prune trees under high voltage lines to street tree specifications would result in a service level increase.

FISCAL IMPACT

There are an estimated 45,000 street trees in the lower elevations of the City where there are sidewalks, but it is unknown how many of those trees are associated with high voltage lines that require pruning. If competitively bid it is estimated that the per tree cost for pruning street trees might be reduced from an average of \$340 (last series of contracts) to an amount that is significantly less. There is currently no funding available in the Tree Services Division's budget to prune additional trees via contract; in addition, contracting out work after incurring significant staff reductions is prohibited by City Charter. However, if the City were to engage in an expanded street tree pruning program it may be possible to achieve some efficiencies by

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collaborating with PG&E to prune street trees for street, sidewalk and safety at the same time they are pruned for power line clearance.

BACKGROUND

PG&E prunes trees for power line clearance on virtually all streets in the City except areas where power lines have been undergrounded. PG&E inspects all trees under power lines annually. Trees are generally pruned every one to two years, but intervals of two to three years occur where more frequent pruning is not necessary due to slower rates of growth. The number and location of circuits (power lines) and trees is proprietary for reasons of security and competition.

A significant portion of the cost of pruning a tree is incurred in the logistics of getting the workers and equipment to the tree. It is therefore logical that once the PG&E contractor (currently Davey Tree) is set up on a tree to prune for power line clearance, any additional pruning required to achieve needed street and sidewalk clearance, as well as the removal of dead, diseased or dying limbs, street light clearance and sight lines for traffic safety could be performed at less cost than if it were pruned independently by City forces or contractors. To achieve this efficiency, the City would need to have a street tree inventory that identified all street trees associated with power lines. This data could then be used to identify trees in the PG&E data base that are street trees under power lines. These trees could then be inspected annually for both the need to prune for a power line clearance, as well as any pruning the tree might need as a street tree in the public right-of-way.

KEY ISSUES AND IMPACTS

The greatest challenges to implementing a collaborative pruning program with PG&E, beyond funding and Charter restrictions, would be negotiating an arrangement with PG&E and their contractor that provided incentives to become involved in such a program. It would also be necessary to fund and develop the needed street tree inventory and merge this data with PG&E's in order to identify the trees that would be pruned under this proposed program.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: The PWA is currently researching improved funding sources for the urban forestry program to replace the Landscape Assessment District, which has not been adjusted for inflation in a number of years and is no longer able to fund the tree services program at the needed level.

Environmental: Pruning street trees improves the environment for residents in Oakland by improving the health, vigor, life expectancy and appearance of street trees. A healthier urban forest improves air quality and reduces noise and heat in the urban environment.

Social Equity: No social equity opportunities have been identified.

DISABILITY AND SENIOR CITIZEN ACCESS

A street tree inventory program could include data on the condition of curb, gutter and sidewalks. This data could be used by in-house crews and in the preparation of contracts to address the repair of sidewalks.

RECOMMENDATION(S) AND RATIONALE

The PWA, while collaborating with PG&E's governmental liaisons, was informed that the California Public Utilities Commission would not allow them to fund this type of program. PG&E is also unable to produce maps of all the high voltage areas that are near trees in the City. However, PG&E is willing to continue to collaborate and negotiate with the City to formulate a plan to address tree pruning around high voltage areas. The Tree Services Division currently does not have funding available to participate with PG&E or its contractor's in such a program.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

This is an informational report. No action required.

Respectfully submitted,

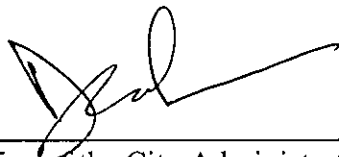


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APPROVED AND FORWARDED TO THE
PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE:



Office of the City Administrator

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