



City of Long Beach
Working Together to Serve

R-24
Office of Gerrie Schipske
Councilwoman, Fifth District
Memorandum

Date: January 5, 2010

To: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

From: Councilwoman Gerrie Schipske, Fifth District *Gerrie Schipske*

Subject: **AGENDA ITEM: Revision of City Policy Prohibiting Removal of Mature City Trees even when Trees have Caused Damage to Private Property**

DISCUSSION:

The City of Long Beach has many mature trees in parking strips (the space between the sidewalks and the streets) in front of residences. These trees were planted at a time when arborists were not concerned or knowledgeable about the damage the trees can cause to sidewalks, curbs, streets, sewer lines and plumbing.

Long Beach has also become a designated "Tree City, USA" and adopted regulations which require that trees be preserved, and their removal can only be approved by the City Tree Committee and only for reasons concerning the health of the tree.

The Fifth Council District has the most sidewalk and mature trees. As these trees mature they are causing lifted sidewalks and damage to other City infrastructure as well as residential and business sewer and plumbing lines. When a resident or business requests that the "offending tree" be removed and replaced, they are told "no."

Most recently, the Los Altos United Methodist Church, 5950 E. Willow St., has requested the removal of several ficus trees that continue to invade the church's sewer lines. Over the past six years, the church has expended over \$32,000 in sewer line repair because of the trees. The same trees have severely damaged the public sidewalks which are potential hazards and which are slated for repair in the next few weeks. However, unless the offending trees are removed and replaced, the damages and hazards will continue.

RECOMMENDATION

Request City Attorney to assess on a case-by-case basis whether or not removal of a City owned tree is warranted because of the damage to public and/or private property and the continuing liability to the City.

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----- Forwarded by Irma Heinrichs/CC/CLB on 01/04/2010 03:14 PM -----



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cc

01/04/2010 02:52 PM

Subject FW: January 5th agenda item 24. 10-0018

Dear Councilmembers,

We at **Wrigley is Going Green** (WiGG) strongly urge you to vote against agenda item 24, Councilmember Schipske's "recommendation to request the City Attorney to assess on a case-by-case basis whether or not removal of a City-owned tree is warranted because of the damage to public and/or private property and the continuing liability to the City."

Lee Fukui, a founding member of WiGG and the 6th district representative on the Tree Advisory Committee, believes this proposition is a huge step backward in our city's tree policy. The Tree Advisory Committee is made up of volunteer representatives from each district that meet with tree removal appellants as well as community members against removals. The Tree Advisory Committee hears from both sides of particular tree issues and holds roundtable discussions with city staff (Public Works and City Arborists) on the best way to approach a tree problem on a case-by-case basis. This process works. All parties are heard and a determination is reached by vote.

We believe that this is not a problem that should be handled by the City Attorney. The City Attorney's office is already overwhelmed with a plethora of important issues and should not be inundated with calls about tree removals. This is an issue that should include all neighborhoods and all citizens that would be affected by such decisions. The City of Long Beach has an existing appeal process that works in favor of both trees and property owners' rights.

Here are some questions we would like you to ask to make an informed decision:

- What has been the cost of liability to the city from tree claims?
- And how much will it cost the City Attorney's office to implement this new policy?
- Who ultimately decides which cases go to the City Attorney?
- What are the costs for removal and the criteria? (There are many costs and consequences to a tree removal that must be taken into consideration.)

Perhaps the best solution is to let people know they can file an appeal to the Tree Advisory Committee when they are not satisfied with the city's initial decision. Therefore, we recommend that the system of appeals to the Tree Advisory Committee that is currently in place remain as it does now.

Again, please vote NO on agenda item 24.

Thank you,
Lisa Wibroe, Mauna Eichner and Lee Fukui
Founders of Wrigley is Going Green!