

October 8, 2019

Honorable Mayor and City Council
City of Long Beach, California

Subject: City Council Agenda Item #20.19-1004

Attention: Robert Uranga, 7th District Councilmember,

Dear Councilmembers,

First of all I would like to bring to your attention a quote from the Department of Public Works that reads as follows: "The Public Works Department is committed to preserving and protecting the community's urban forest and promoting the health and safety of City trees, from the time they are planted through maturity." However, as well intended as that quote may seem, misdirected priorities and lack of funding have left our urban forests vulnerable to infestation and death due to lack of watering, proper maintenance, and more importantly a lack of planning. This includes hundreds of trees provided to the City by way of Long Beach Harbor Department grants. Back in 2015 the City Auditor estimated that the value of Park Trees was in the vicinity of \$112-million, not including street trees nor the additional quantifiable benefits of an Urban Forest that would undoubtedly increase the value of that asset by millions more.

Therefore, I applaud the decision by Councilmember Roberto Uranga in bringing this subject to the forefront once again. This is an issue that many of us in Long Beach including City Staff have attempted to address. A few years ago Councilmember Stacey Mungo also addressed a similar issue, known as the "Urban Tree Canopy Assessment & Management Plan." Eight years before that, Public Works also brought to the council the Urban Forest Master Plan, which was received and filed. Therefore, it is necessary that it be clearly addressed now and that the City develop the necessary structure to develop our Urban Forest Vision and clearly see it for what it is, an asset not a liability. The City has been known by many of us to not follow through on programs, to leave half baked ideas on shelves, to defer maintenance such as our shuttered Fire Station #9, or dilapidated streets and of course our Urban Forest.

Now the issue that has prompted Councilmember Uranga to step up to the plate is the Magnolia Scale (*Neolecanium cornuparvum*), a problem that is affecting not only the trees and our urban canopy, it is also affecting the quality of life of residents of District 7, District 8, District 2 and throughout the City. As we deal with the results climate change and pollution that are clearly affecting all of the residents but more notably our West Side and North Long Beach. Therefore, many residents and organizations throughout the City would like to join in the effort of developing a long range strategy and offer our assistance.

Moreover, we also propose to the City a suggested treatment method that we feel will be a first step in addressing the Tree Scale issue. This suggestion comes after various conversations with University of California Cooperative Extension personnel and other knowledgeable experts in the field. It has become apparent that using a fumigation treatment directed towards tree roots or tree trunks to treat the Magnolia Scale infestation seen in Long

Beach may not be cost effective, sustainable, nor is it a proven treatment. Therefore, a combination of approaches must be applied.

The most cost effective and sustainable method is to allow the tree to fight off the infestation without pesticides. Soon after the initial infestation of magnolia scale, the “Argentine” ant, a very opportunistic insect, arrives to protect the scale. The ant is know to be a formidable farmer and is in essence farming the scale for the sugary defecation know as honeydew that the tree scale excretes, and the ant protects it’s interest by destroying any insect that preys on the scale.

In addition to the above, the ant carries into the affected area of the tree what is know as sooty mold (*Capnodium*), a kind of fungus. Sooty mold will indirectly weaken the trees, as it will inhibit the process of photosynthesis, eventually weakening it to the point that it will become prey to other opportunistic insects or disease.

We must allow the tree recuperate naturally and effectively but it will require our help, this consist of trimming as well ridding the tree of the Argentine ant, in order to allow beneficial insects the opportunity to help the tree by destroying the scale infestation. In severe cases, fumigation treatment in combination with the above method may help.

However, as we look at the long-term success, we must encourage the City to proactively maintain our urban forest by hiring a competent Urban Forester with adequate resources to oversee the vast number of trees and increase the forested areas through out the City. The City must address the Urban Forest as an asset to be preserved not as a liability.

The Urban Forester must work with the public by educating and encouraging homeowners and property management companies to adhere to the non-invasive treatment modalities as well as adequate watering techniques to maintain and conserve the urban forest canopy and especially the thousands of threatened Magnolia trees.

In Summary:

1. Trim the affected trees to remove areas where the Scale is active without harming the trees and to maintain or create a safe distance between the trees and any structures that may allow ants to climb back onto the tree.
2. Combat ant infestation even if not visible by placing a compound barrier such as Tangle Foot™, this is a sticky substance that looks like grease or soft wax. The ants don’t cross this barrier because they get stuck. Tangle foot should be added or replaced as needed in order to keep functioning as intended.
3. Educate residents and the community at large on the need to see our urban forest as an asset that must be preserved. This is particularly critical in the western half of the city, which already lacks the open green space that the eastern side of the city has in El Dorado Park. Therefore, adequate watering and maintenance must be kept up throughout our urban forest.
4. Clean sidewalks and streets clean with authorized methods in order to reduce or eliminate sugary buildup that attracts ants, flies, and other vermin.

5. Encourage City of Long Beach officials to coordinate with neighboring cities that are suffering the same infestation and to form a regional task force to address the problem.
6. Municipalities, especially large municipalities like Long Beach, should budget adequately for the above points as well as for an Urban Forester to promote and safeguard our urban forest.

Sincerely,

Magnolia Scale Taskforce:

Juan E. Ovalle, Outreach Director, People of Long Beach

Robert Fox, Executive Director, Coalition of Neighborhood Organizations

Tom Stout, Long Beach Tax Payers

Carlos Ovalle, Executive Director, People of Long Beach

UCIPM, Official Pest Management: <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7408.html>

UC Cooperative Extension: <http://celosangeles.ucanr.edu/>