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May 10, 2016

Chair Councilmember Jay Schenirer and Members
Law and Legislation Committee
City of Sacramento
915 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chair Schenirer and Councilmembers Guerra, Harris and Jennings:

Friends of the Swainson's Hawk has been a stakeholder in the City of Sacramento's Urban Forestry Ordinance Review. Data indicate our tree canopy is diminishing over time.

Our concern is that the older, larger, big canopy trees are habitat for wildlife in the city. This wildlife, including nesting Swainson's Hawks and other raptors, directly affects the quality of life in the city, and the connection with nearby wilder areas such as the river corridors. Citizens have enjoyed watching nesting Swainson's hawks in residential neighborhoods in Midtown, Land Park, Greenhaven, East Sacramento, North Sacramento, downtown and Natomas. Swainson's Hawks nest only in large older trees. Where these trees exist there are many other species of birds as documented by the Audubon bird counts.

The General Plan and Urban Forestry Management Plan assure us that the City's goals and policies support preservation of this habitat. But the ordinance before you for recommendation of approval does not. It reflects the philosophy that it is ok to remove a protected tree if it is replaced. But the replacement of these trees takes decades of growth and a location that permits both root and branch development. There is nothing in the ordinance that prevents structurally sound large older canopy trees from being replaced with small young trees, effectively removing habitat for decades. This has a citywide cumulative environmental impact that is not addressed.

During the stakeholder process, and in a coalition letter to you on February 3, we asked that the City include language to ensure protection of nesting raptors and other migratory birds by city, permittees and contractors. We asked for this because of reports to us of disturbance of owls by street tree pruners. The staff does not support direction from the Council to them to ensure that staff, permittees and contractors comply with state and federal laws protecting migratory birds. We think it would help prevent incidents of unintended harm and disturbance through education.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed ordinance.

Sincerely,

Judith Lamare, President