



## Sacramento Tree Ordinance Stakeholder Advisory Committee Field Tour Summary

Thursday, Dec. 12, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

### TOUR ATTENDEES

Project team members in attendance included:

- Joe Benassini, City of Sacramento
- Deanna Hickman, City of Sacramento
- Jamie Gomes, EPS
- Amy Lapin, EPS
- Jim Clark, HortScience
- Gene Endicott, Endicott Communications

Approximately 30 Stakeholder Advisory Committee and City Working Group members attended the tour.

### TOUR OVERVIEW

Gene Endicott welcomed tour participants and introduced Joe Benassini, who served as primary guide for the tour, assisted by Jim Clark, HortScience and Duane Goosen, City of Sacramento. The tour was designed to highlight several issues and situations expected to be addressed in an updated tree ordinance and/or related work practice documents. These included:

#### ***Midtown***

##### 12<sup>th</sup> and R Streets

The Capital Area Development Authority (CADA), in partnership with others, is developing the **Warehouse Artist Lofts** at this site, formerly known as Capital Lofts. These projects generally arise directly at the property line in order to maximize retail space and living areas. In many cases, projects such as these are years in planning and design, yet fail to recognize that surrounding trees will be affected. In this case, mature trees adjacent to the project and overhanging the building footprint were not considered until late in the planning process and the opportunity to redesign was impossible. The result is a choice between removing the trees because of the impact of severe crown reduction and retaining the trees in spite of the damage from the radical crown reduction.

##### 14<sup>th</sup> and R Streets

**R Street** is undergoing several phases of redevelopment and improvements. In many cases this results in new opportunities to add trees where few existed or were in poor condition. In this case, new tree planters are included in the design with wider sidewalks, planters away from the building at the edge of the street and much-improved growing conditions. In order to include the newer planters in the design, six elms would be removed. The elms are historic, yet nearing the end of their lifetime and in a poor location for future use of the property. Based on a comprehensive inspection, the trees are in marginal condition. Constituents weigh in



heavily on both sides. Removal results in lost canopy but may also offer opportunities to improve upon the existing canopy. The question before us as urban foresters is whether what we get back in the long run is worth what we give up today.

### 16<sup>th</sup> and O Streets

**East End Gateway Sites 2 and 3** are also CADA projects. In this case they are mixed use, mid-rise developments. This site held several street trees, some in marginal condition, along with several liquidambar trees. Though in fair condition, the liquidambar trees had caused damage to sidewalks due to root intrusion several years prior, and at the time of construction were again displacing the pavement. A small valley oak planted in a parking strip would never have had a chance to develop a full crown. As with the first example at the Warehouse Artist's Lofts, staff must also consider the inevitable impacts from the actual construction activities, including mechanical damage, soil compaction, drought, material storage, etc. A new plan incorporated storm water planters in addition to tree wells, and was designed in anticipation of future outdoor seating and other active uses. As in the previous example, staff's recommendation must consider the benefits of retaining trees versus the impact of removing them, and the overall ramifications to the surrounding neighborhoods and trees. Here, we lost eight trees and the project is planting over twenty new trees.

### 20<sup>th</sup> and Capital

The **Tribute** development is a mixed use project and was approved several years ago and prior to the economic downturn. The project included preservation of a large elm in a sidewalk planter. The project was put on hold until recently, and the developer has inquired about removing the tree to accommodate increased seating and to maintain Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements for minimum sidewalk width. The tree was heavily pruned several years ago in anticipation of the project, and has not responded well. At this point, the tree needs a comprehensive inspection by the project arborist to determine its health, structural integrity, and ability to withstand construction impacts beyond the pruning.



Staff will base its recommendation on the results of that inspection. The point to make here is that the first step should always be to evaluate the resource before deciding whether the tree should even be preserved.

### 16<sup>th</sup> and L

**Firestone Brewery** was an existing restaurant site also faced with a desire to add outdoor seating and challenges with ADA access and tree planters. This is a trial project using permeable concrete as a walkable surface around the trees. The permeable concrete allows water to pass through it and in to the soil beneath it. Irrigation for the dry season is provided beneath the concrete. This is a temporary solution

only, as we know that the base of the trees will eventually break the concrete as it expands in diameter and the root crown lifts in response to root growth. The adjacent tree planter to the north is topped with decomposed granite, which is not considered ADA compliant.

### 16<sup>th</sup> and K

This new **Starbucks** added outdoor seating as a critical element of its decision to use this location. This site is intended to eventually serve light alcohol as a part of a new Starbucks format. The patio and required ADA access necessitated removal of two existing five inch street trees. Trees at this location were relatively crowded already, and the city supported removal of a large tree with the condition that one planter was relocated on site and two others were planted nearby. The permit was conditioned to replace the trees in kind, all a minimum of

5 inches in diameter and of the same species and cultivar. Just south you will note that there is a vacant area of sidewalk where two existing trees were removed in favor of café seating. One was relocated close to the corner in a very small planter. This tree will not survive due to space constraints.

### 23rd and I

This lot was the subject of a proposal to build five single family homes. The existing black walnut is considered a **heritage tree**, and removal of the tree would have been necessary to build the project as designed. The species is considered to have a very poor tolerance of construction impacts and is sensitive to crown reduction pruning and mechanical damage. The elevated grade area around the base of the tree is a result of large buttress roots,



and the tree has an extensive root system. A two inch root from tree was found under the basement slab of the apartment building next door. It is likely that there was a structure on this lot in the past. Whether the tree was planted after building or was a younger existing tree able to survive the construction as a younger tree is unknown.

The heritage tree code requires the director to issue a permit to remove the tree if the project is permitted by right or special permit:

*SCC 12.64.050(C)1. In the case of removal, (a) that the heritage tree must be removed in order for the applicant to use the property for any use permitted as of right or by*

*conditional use permit under the Planning and Development Code for the zoning district in which the property is located and that such use could not be made of the property unless the tree is removed;*

The question here is whether the *use could not be made of the property unless the tree is removed*. Per the applicant, five units were in keeping with the rest of the neighborhood, complied with the zoning code, and required five units to be economically feasible. Constituents strongly protested the removal application. At this time the applicant has withdrawn the permit application.

### ***East Sacramento***

#### McKinley Boulevard

This area is an example of where the **street right of way** extends beyond the back of curb or sidewalk and well into front yards. These are considered “street trees” by city code, and the city maintains these trees, even though they are functionally front yard trees on private property. This is a widespread issue in certain areas of the city and accounts for approximately 17,000 trees, or approximately 23% of the street tree population. The advantages are that the trees are considered protected as street trees and that the city retains control. Trees are well maintained so streets stay shaded. However, it also points to a question of equity where adjacent property owners may also have front yard trees located just outside the right of way by the matter of a few feet. Those trees are not maintained by the city. The question is whether the city should continue to maintain them, or whether the street tree definition should be modified.

#### Fab 40’s, 44<sup>th</sup> and 46<sup>th</sup> Streets

This is an example of how an area affects the **longevity and performance** of shade trees. A recent study by a US Forest Service ecologist found a direct relationship between the available space and performance. This has major ramifications in terms of sustainability, including energy use and air quality. The “Park” neighborhoods of the city such as Land Park, Curtis Park, Boulevard Park, and Winn Park are all neighborhoods where trees were

allotted a generous amount of space to grow, with wide medians and deep front yard setbacks. Trees in these neighborhoods are among the longest lived and largest in the city. A second note is that in these East Sacramento neighborhoods the species selection is heavily weighted towards London plane trees, a cousin to our native sycamore trees. A different Forest Service study recommended that Sacramento refrain from planting this species for the next twenty years based on species diversity and pest threats.

### ***North Natomas***

#### New Market and Kokomo

Many of the trees planted in North Natomas were selected and planted for immediate impact and marketing, without enough thought to space or species. Trees are located in park strips that are too narrow to accommodate their eventual size. Trees will perform poorly and cause **displacement of adjacent pavement**, where sidewalk repair is the burden of the property owner and quite expensive. Where street trees maintained by the City cause sidewalk cracks and displacement, property owners object to further tree planting. Removal of a street tree requires a permit and public notice and can be appealed. Staff believes that it is appropriate to remedy a predictable problem before it appears. This is a very widespread issue in North Natomas. The code should allow a relatively simple process for this type of situation.

### ***Natomas***

#### El Camino and Sea Mist

This is an example of smaller **trees that have been “topped”**. Topping is the practice of removing whole tops, branches or parts of branches, leaving large stubs. Topping trees is usually done as an attempt to control size, to reduce a perceived danger of large trees or to increase visibility. Besides defeating the environmental goal of shading heat sinks such as parking lots and improved air quality, topping is extremely injurious to trees, with few exceptions. Topping stresses trees by removing large parts of the leaf-bearing crown, interrupting photosynthesis. Topping stimulates latent buds, forcing rapid growth of multiple shoots below each cut in an effort to quickly replace the lost foliage. Lastly, topping causes wounds which are likely to decay. The result is rapidly growing shoots that are then attached to a decaying stub, making limb failures much more likely. The attempt to make the trees “safer” results in a tree that actually has a higher risk of failure. Topping differs from “pollarding” in that pollarded trees are trained from a young age and small shoots are removed annually, resulting in low, more frequent dosages and much smaller wounds.



### ***North Sacramento***

#### Evergreen Street and Dixie Avenue

This is an example of a well-intentioned project that included **storm water filtration** as a part of the streetscape. Most of these basins are flow-through infiltration basins, some with trees and others with grasses and other vegetation. Soils in the planters are often manufactured, generally coarse and designed to allow rapid infiltration. The planters have an impermeable bottom with an underdrain which collects the treated water and discharges it into a storm drain. In some areas the trees are planted outside and adjacent to the infiltration planters. In others the trees were planted directly in the planters. Over time, sedimentation and other debris accumulate in the filtration medium and the basins need to be cleaned out and refreshed, making these strictly short-term trees. Current design efforts are to separate tree wells from water treatment features to ensure longevity of the trees.

**CONCLUSION/NEXT MEETING**

The tour concluded at 12 p.m. The next Stakeholder Advisory Committee meeting will take place on January 28.