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January 29, 2009

Honorable Members of the Public Works Committee  
Of the City of Los Angeles  
C/O Adam Lid, Legislative Assistant  
Office of the City Clerk  
Room 359, City Hall

Dear Honorable Members:

**CF 08-3127 ALLOWABLE PARKWAY LANDSCAPING ON CITY STREETS  
BUREAUS OF ENGINEERING AND STREET SERVICES JOINT REPORT**

In reference to the Council Motion of November 18, 2008, which requested the Bureaus of Engineering and Street Services to report to your Committee to clarify what types of landscapes are presently allowed in parkway areas, please be advised that there are no restrictions on the types of plant materials that can be installed within parkway areas as long as the abutting property owner has obtained a valid permit from the Bureau of Engineering.

Parkway areas are typically defined as the space between the back of curb and the property line that is not covered by paving or a sidewalk. Department of Public Works policies adopted in the late 1960's and early 1970's provide guidelines encouraging the use of turf as the "most acceptable parkway groundcover". Plants with thorns, and noxious, invasive, poisonous or other dangerous plants were strongly opposed. Other types of ground covers and shrubs or bushes were either discouraged or not permitted because they obstruct free pedestrian passage between the street and sidewalk. The same policies did recognize the need for other types of ground covers to be consistent with existing plants in a particular neighborhood as long as it was kept in a neat and trimmed manner to avoid overgrowth onto the sidewalk or gutter. Lastly, department policies stipulate that permits are required for all parkway installations (including grass parkways).

These guidelines are still generally followed. Over the years, grass within parkway areas has come to be accepted as a de facto "standard" by City staff and the City has not required property owners to obtain permits for grass installed in parkways. In recent years, Department of Public Works landscape architectural staff imposed additional safety considerations such as, clear line-of-sight for pedestrians and motorists, disabled access and cyclists.

Staff encourages and promotes the use of drought tolerant plant materials or water permeable decorative pavements as viable alternatives to turf provided appropriate permits are obtained that include contingencies for on-going maintenance and liability. Department landscape architectural staff continues to review all permit requests/proposals and approves or denies parkway landscaping proposals on a case by case basis in accordance with these guidelines.

From both design and species diversification perspectives, it is not desirable to codify and limit plant species for parkway plantings or landscaping in general to a set list of "approved" plant or paving materials. A codified, limited set of plant or pavement materials stifles design options and prevents the use of new and perhaps better plant materials in the future. Limited mono-cultures of plant materials also open the door for potentially larger and costly future problems from species specific vectors (diseases and infestations). Examples of species specific vectors include the bacterial Oleander Leaf Scorch and Glassy Winged Sharp Shooter, an insect that uses Eucalyptus trees as its host, both of which adversely affected the City's landscape in recent years.

It is much more desirable to provide performance based guidelines for parkway installations and allow property owners the option and flexibility to use appropriate plant or pavement materials that meet current performance based criteria. In this sense, the parkway landscaping policies developed in the 1960's and 1970's along with staff policies developed since then are still applicable because once again, there are no restrictions on the types of plant materials allowed within parkways provided the property owner has obtained the appropriate permit(s) from the Department of Public Works, Bureau of Engineering. The appropriate permit for parkway landscape improvements is typically a Revocable Permit or a Revocable Permit issued in conjunction with either an "A" or "B" Permit.

New challenges affecting parkway plantings include proposed Federal disabled access policies and impending standards being developed to support those policies. Once officially adopted, those policies and standards will require parkways that accommodate disabled access where curb side parking is allowed. These Federal policies will affect allowable plant materials in parkway areas in a manner that is yet to be fully determined. City staff will continue to monitor such developments and adjust permitting guidelines and requirements for parkway landscape improvements and plant materials in particular, as appropriate.

Respectfully Submitted by:



*to* WILLIAM A. ROBERTSON, Director  
Bureau of Street Services



*for* GARY LEE MOORE, City Engineer  
Bureau of Engineering

WAR/RRO/HSL/LMO:lo

File: 09-01-29 CF-08-3127 Allowable Parkway Plant Materials

Cc: George Gonzalez, Urban Forestry Division

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