

February 18, 2014

LA City Councilman Mike Bonin
City Hall
200 N. Spring Hall, Room 475
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Council File #14-0019 – Street Tree Policies and Guidelines

Dear Mr. Bonin;

Thank you again for your proposed consideration of comments to review guidelines in the City's trimming of parkway trees. In advance of the upcoming committee review, I would like to add comments for formal inclusion in the file referenced above.

Los Angeles is like a great many large, urban, continuously growing cities in the United States. Our City manages to provide a solid platform for an incredibly diverse, highly mobile, consumption oriented population.

What makes us truly different is that a great part of the world knows who we are – and actually watches what we do here. It puts a unique pressure on our citizens and our governing bodies to do more -- not only for ourselves, in a given moment – but for the profile and life of the City to come.

Habitat; a word overused perhaps in many instances – but not here. It's not just about the trees, it's about quality of life. In this instance, the trees and what they do for us – shade our streets, beautify our homes, clean our air – is a part of our future, one that is actually under our control. This is a City that undergoes change and is flexible enough to grow with the times; we must now change the way we think about habitat if we are to protect the future of the City. For these trees are living habitats – they also provide critical sites for feeding, hunting, breeding and protection of countless species, some of them endangered and some of them under protected status. Species diversity is an accepted benchmark for a healthy environment. It is also the canary in the mine; when a city makes choices that drive populations in the direction of a decrease in species diversity, that city may be in trouble for its human inhabitants as well.

Others have commented on the importance of providing stable breeding areas, in the form of tall, mature trees with good canopy and foliage for raptors that are increasingly losing environment outside of the city of Los Angeles due to incursion and destruction. The simple fact is that urban centers and the urban forests may eventually provide the *only* way for these birds, and other birds to maintain stable populations. There are too many of us. We are growing and we are decimating the breeding stocks through habitat destruction in wild areas all around the city. Here is food, water, a new kind of life – perhaps the only one left for many of our birds.

Here is habitat.

It is time to re-evaluate the meaning of this word; it is time to create guidelines that are in line with the situation we face now and in coming years. Other cities are doing this. Pasadena is actively involved in preserving its mature, tall trees for *canopy* – they have fewer cars, fewer people, yet are already gaining ground on an 85% canopy coverage for city streets,

parks, and residential spaces. One can only imagine if we could do the same – imagine the increase in cooling shade, the clearing of air, the increase in vital habitat for birds that simply have nowhere else to go. If the Pasadena canopy coverage could be mirrored here, it is possible we might be able to change the microclimate of the basin in a remarkable way.

Importantly, the Pasadena Forestry Division will not trim or prune any tree if there is *any nest* in the tree, regardless of its activity – it is the policy of the Forestry Division to skip the tree entirely.

To reflect the growing need to protect and preserve, I propose a change in the language of the guidelines currently used by the City – in *all* its departments. I propose that the Audubon Guidelines on tree preservation be accepted, and that text to address *sensitive habitat* be added to broaden and strengthen the Audubon Guidelines. I propose that in the Guidelines for tree maintenance, the City acknowledge that the presence of nests is only the *first* evidence used to determine whether that tree is being used for breeding. I propose that language be added that any evidence of *successive use*, provided in the form of direct observation by a resident and/or a biologist be pivotal in the guidelines regarding the trimming of trees. Only dead branches or those posing significant safety risks should be pruned; canopies and remaining branches must be left intact. I propose the addition of staff to the Urban Forestry Division in the form of an unencumbered Biologist, Habitat Specialist, or Diversity Specialist to help the City preserve *sensitive habitat*, and that preservation be an enforceable policy of the Guidelines. I propose we use our change in policy guidelines not to decrease habitat and destroy canopy but to use them to benefit the habitats in our trees and our own habitat as well. The timing is critical as the Metro Lines are actively proceeding in construction that may directly and irrevocably destroy parkway habitats.

It is time to acknowledge the presence of sensitive habitat in our urban forest; other cities are already doing so. Los Angeles leads the way in arts, in entertainment, in confronting head – on the challenges of growth, diversity, freedom, and tolerance.

It is time for us to lead the way again.

Respectfully,

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