

14-1634

MOTION

Residents of Sullivan Canyon, a natural, equestrian-friendly, and unique neighborhood in the Santa Monica Mountains of Los Angeles, have expressed grave concern over a massive private residential development that recently resulted in the removal of dozens of Los Angeles' oldest and most beautiful protected oak trees from the hillside community. The tree removal permit, which cleared the way for the removal of 56 of the protected trees, was issued without adequate public notice, and the inadequate review of the considerable and irreversible environmental impact apparently contradicted the City's own CEQA review process. The approval of the project and removal of the trees exposed significant gaps in the City's environmental review procedures, and raised a number of questions regarding when and how public notice should take place.

The City's Protected Tree Ordinance (Ord. No. 177404) was initially adopted in 1980 to establish clear standards for preservation of specific native trees as vital members of the City's urban forest. Native Southern California trees, including Coastal Live Oaks and Western Sycamores, are ecological treasures, providing unique individual ecosystems, protecting water quality, providing vital shade, and adding to the diversity of our environment and landscape. These trees are not only integral to local habitats, but also constitute significant cultural and historical components of the City's natural topography. The intent of the Protected Tree Ordinance and the policies of the Board of Public Works is to protect these considerable environmental benefits for future generations, but those protections need to be expanded to improve the tree removal approval process, especially as it relates to private property.

In the case of the Sullivan Canyon development, it was discovered that there is no existing community notification requirement for the removal of protected trees on private property, and that City policy allowed for multiple extensions of tree removal permits also without public notice. Additionally, the process did not provide for consideration of the need and impact of the tree removals that were approved by the Board of Public Works as part of the CEQA review for the underlying project. As a result, the Board of Public Works later approved the removal of 56 protected trees, even though the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the underlying project only anticipated the removal of 25.

With the City's ever-changing urban landscape and accompanying development, it is good public policy to ensure that the community, which is affected by these tree removals, be provided advance notice of such proposals and be allowed opportunity to provide input or voice concerns. It is also the right thing to do in defense of our City's few remaining open spaces, and the protection of our natural environment.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Council request that the Board of Public Works require a 30-day public notice and a public hearing for any permit application for the removal of three or more trees on private property; and also require that tree removal permit extensions be limited to one three-month extension after the expiration of the initial 90-day period.

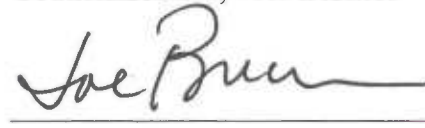
I FURTHER MOVE that the Planning Department, Bureau of Street Services Urban Forestry Division, and any other affected departments, in consultation with the City Attorney, report back on the framework necessary to ensure that such departments and review bodies, including but not limited to the Board of Public Works, create a system for better collaboration to ensure that the review and analysis of potential environmental impacts within their purview occur prior to the completion of CEQA review for a project.

PRESENTED BY:



MIKE BONIN
Councilmember, 11th District

SECONDED BY:



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