


**CITY OF LOS ANGELES**  
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

**DATE:** October 22, 2015

**TO:** Energy and Environment Committee

Attention: Office of the City Clerk  
City Hall, Room 395

**FROM:**  Nazario Saucedo, Director  
Bureau of Street Services

**SUBJECT: CITY COUNCIL INSTRUCTION FOR BUREAU OF STREET SERVICES  
TO REPORT RELATIVE TO HEALTH OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES  
TREES – CF 15-0467**

**SUMMARY**

This report is responsive to a Councilman Paul Koretz motion (CF 15-0467) regarding the health of the City of Los Angeles' trees. The Bureau of Street Services (BSS) is directed to report to City Council regarding the health of the City's trees and develop an urban forest management plan.

Per the Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC) Sec. 62.161-62.176, the Department of Public Works (DPW), BSS has jurisdiction and control over the trees contained in the COLA's streets. These trees, commonly referred to as street trees, are a subset of the urban forest that contains trees, plants, shrubs, and other vegetative material contained on private property, parks, State parkland, City facilities, and wildland areas.

The BSS exercises management responsibility over the street trees and, in coordination with the Department of City Planning (DCP), the native trees, referred to as "protected trees," as proscribed in LAMC Sec. 46.01-46.06 and Sec. 17. According to the United States Department of Agriculture Tree Canopy Assessment (January 2008), the City's urban forest contains approximately ten million trees. A subset of the urban forest are approximately 700,000 street trees contained within the City's dedicated public rights-of-way (PROW). The native tree population, mainly contained in mountainous areas, was not included in the Tree Canopy Assessment and therefore these population statistics are unknown.

The BSS authority over protected trees resides only in the power to issue protected tree removal and replacement permits. Therefore, the ability to influence this portion of the urban forest relative to health, pest infestations, and climate change is very limited. Therefore, unless otherwise specifically stated, the information and recommendations contained in this report pertain exclusively to the street trees under the control of the BSS.

## RECITAL

Trees provide a myriad of benefits, from here on referred to as ecosystem services, including but not limited to stormwater retention and control, heat island reduction, carbon sequestration, particulate matter trapping, energy use reduction, and shade. The City's urban forest is currently exposed to the effects of multi-year pest infestations, prolonged drought, and climate warming. Drought effects are currently most evident on trees not receiving some form of irrigation. The two most prevalent pest infestations at this time are *Xylella fastidiosa*, commonly referred to as Oleander Leaf Scorch and a fungus, *Fusarium euwallacea*, spread by the Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer, both of which are infecting numerous tree species. The effects of increasing ambient temperatures due to climate warming are not currently easily detectable, however; the cumulative effects of these stressors places significant impacts on the urban forest including tree decline and sometimes death.

The BSS assumes the prolonged drought may cause severe stress and death in the urban forest. The Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) reports as many as 14, 000 of their park trees are dying or have died due to drought. Based upon observation, the trees residing in the City's freeway greenspaces show significant signs of drought stress. However, at this time the BSS opines the majority of the street tree population is not experiencing severe drought stress.

The BSS opines that street trees are not exhibiting significant drought effects since a large percentage of the population are in areas that continue to be irrigated. However, the BSS realizes continued drought without respite will assuredly manifest itself in impacts to the street tree population.

The *Xylella* infestation is directly impacting the health and vitality of many street trees, particularly in the valley. *Xylella* effects numerous species including but not limited to American Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), White Mulberry (*Morus alba*), Camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*), and Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*). These species also comprise approximately ten percent of the street tree population. At this time, there is no known cure for this infestation and therefore the loss of a significant portion of the street tree population is possible.

Street trees are unique in that they are in a PROW that includes other infrastructure elements: overhead power lines, street lights, signage, traffic signals, fire hydrants, driveways, curbs, and sidewalks. Street trees often conflict with other infrastructure elements, the most prevalent being sidewalk conflict. Tree and sidewalk conflict often results in sidewalks that are cracked, uplifted, and buckled. Since most sidewalk damage is a result of tree conflict, the impact to the COLA's street tree population may be significant as tree removal will most certainly be required in many locations.

The BSS opines determining how to move forward, given the stressors being placed on the street tree population, requires assessing the current condition of the street tree population. The BSS has initiated a comprehensive assessment utilizing accepted methods and criteria based upon urban forest sustainability models. The assessment criteria include tree and age diversification, health, tree stocking rate (number of available tree sites with trees planted relative to the total number of tree sites), and tree maintenance.

Upon the street tree condition assessment completion, the BSS will develop a street tree sustainability plan. The sustainability plan will specifically address all of the stressors and impacts currently impacting the street tree population as well as incorporate public participation and outreach, investigating the necessity for code changes, necessary resources, and the future street tree population outlook.

### **FISCAL IMPACTS**

No fiscal impacts at this time.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Direct the BSS to develop and publish a State of the Street Trees Report.
2. Direct the BSS to develop a Street Tree Sustainability Plan.

NS/RL:rl