

From: **Casey Maddren** <cmaddren@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Mar 19, 2018 at 1:44 PM
Subject: Proposed Tree Replacement and Planting In-Lieu Fee, CF-16-0461, OPPOSED
To: councilmember.ryu@lacity.org
Cc: cityclerk@lacity.org, nicholas.greif@lacity.org

Re: Tree Replacement and Planting In-Lieu Fee, CF-16-0461

Dear Councilmember Ryu,

I'm writing to express my opposition to the proposed Tree Replacement and Planting In-Lieu Fee.

I realize that under the current system, developers are purchasing replacement trees which then sit in storage because the Urban Forestry Department (UFD) does not have staff to plant them. It may seem tempting to go with the in-lieu fee, since it would cover the cost of labor to plant and water new trees.

But the proposed ordinance is not a solution. It's a quick fix. This will simply make it easier for the Department of City Planning (DCP) to justify the removal of trees for new development. As new projects grow larger and denser, we increasingly see green space and tree canopy sacrificed as a result of reduced open space requirements and reduced setbacks.

I have three objections to this plan.

1. No Monitoring Component

There is no monitoring component. No City agency is charged with assessing results. We have no guarantee that this system will work as promised. Supposedly the current system of requiring developers to replace trees was going to solve the problem. And what actually happened? We have a lot of trees sitting in City-owned storage areas. Some have been sitting in boxes so long that they're no longer viable. And at the same time developers have been cutting down trees and putting hardscape in their place.

2. Lack of Oversight/Accountability for Development Fees

The City doesn't have a good record when it comes to using development fees. You may recall that back in 2015 City Controller Ron Galperin did an audit of fees collected from developers. He found \$54 million that had been sitting in City-controlled accounts for at least three years. This money had been collected, but it hadn't been spent. Unfortunately, City Hall isn't always great about following through.

3. Trees Currently in Storage Will Stay There

While charging the in-lieu fees may lead to a better replacement rate in the future, there's no guarantee that the City will do anything about the trees the UFD currently has in stock. If the budget for the next fiscal year doesn't include funds for additional staff, these trees could easily sit in storage until they die. It's been suggested that non-profits could step in to do the planting. If that's a possibility, why hasn't it already happened?

4. The Ordinance Does Not Address Decline of Urban Forest

This is not a solution, it's a quick fix. In order to find a solution, you have to first identify the problem, and the City hasn't done that. It's proposing in-lieu fees as a way of replacing trees that are cut down for development, but that's really just one aspect of the situation.

The City of LA needs to conduct an inventory of it's entire urban forest.

The City then needs to develop an Urban Forest Management Plan.

Passing stopgap ordinances like this has produced a patchwork of programs that has done nothing to halt the decline of our urban forest.

In spite of the fact that the City has passed a Protected Tree Ordinance (PTO), we continue to see the removal of trees on a large scale, and the continuing decline of our urban forest. The PTO has not been effective, because the City has not followed through. In November of last year Councilmembers Paul Koretz and Mike

Bonin introduced a motion to strengthen the ordinance. This quote illustrates how little the City has done to monitor its effectiveness:

"Unfortunately, trees are not being adequately protected and departments are not working well together to protect them. Trees are being cut before development permits are applied for, trees are not being protected during construction activities, and building permits are routinely issued without the Department of Building and Safety being aware of the presence of protected trees on the affected properties, all resulting in an accumulating net loss of trees, tree canopy and the accompanying ecosystem services across the City."

LA needs a comprehensive, holistic approach to managing our urban forest. We must do a complete inventory of the city's tree canopy, and also an inventory of space available for planting trees. We then need to use this data to develop a unified policy based on actual science that will address all aspects of the problem. Rather than coming up with quick fixes to deal with tree loss caused by new development or sidewalk repair or insect infestation, we need an integrated approach that brings all these things together.

In other words, we need to gather the data, look at the science, and then develop an actual plan.

If we don't do this, our urban forest will continue to decline, and we will suffer the consequences.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
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