

Communication from Public

Name: Community Forest Advisory Committee (CFAC)
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Council File No: 13-1339
Comments for Public Posting: Please see attached letter.



Bob Blumenfield, Chair
Public Works and Gang Reduction Committee
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012-4801

councilmember.blumenfield@lacity.org

VIA EMAIL ONLY

March 14, 2020

Re: CF 13-1339 Mexican Elderberry / Toyon / Adding to Protected Tree List

Dear Chair Blumenfield,

While greatly appreciating the many efforts currently underway to strengthen and expand protections for trees on both public and private property, the Community Forest Advisory Committee (“CFAC”) is deeply disappointed and concerned at the latest delay in the process to add the native plants Mexican elderberry and toyon to the list of protected species in the City’s Protected Tree Ordinance. As you will be aware, this joint-committee matter was due to be heard at the Planning and Land Use (“PLUM”) Committee on September 17, 2019. Instead, that hearing was postponed and the item was referred to your Committee.

Reasons offered for the delay — that some implementation details are yet to be settled — are ultimately inadequate to further postponing an amendment that has now been in process for over six years. The City Forest Officer has pointed to in-house concerns over the lack of Urban Forestry staff capacity and available on-site space for mitigation plantings. Lack of staff capacity is real and needs to be addressed in the upcoming budget. CFAC is joining Tree People in a forthcoming budget letter that includes a request for “Funding to support the Urban Forestry Division of the Bureau of Street Services to have dedicated crews for effective tree protection enforcement.” Limitations of space and ensuring mitigation plantings go back on or near the removal site are also

real issues, but the smaller stature of the new species allows them to be planted in side yards or other spaces that may not be suitable for an oak or sycamore. Toyon also tolerates shade and may be planted as understory. The area available for mitigation plantings of these two new species therefore would not necessarily compete with the area needed for planting the current four protected tree species. We understand that mitigation trees unable to be planted back on site due to space restrictions have also recently been directed to the Department of Recreation and Parks for planting in area parks. In short — where the will exists, solutions can be found.

Continued delays come with significant and irreparable real-world costs. Developers and landowners are well aware this amendment is in process. Shocking and extensive preemptive cut-downs of sizable, important examples of these two species are taking place throughout our hillsides. This is not because owners have imminent (or even any) development plans, but simply to avoid a future possibility of having to account to the City for these native species once they are given protected status. While this amendment remains stalled, biodiversity and wildlife habitat thus continue to be lost at an alarming rate.

The proposed amendment has received intensive work and attention from the Department of City Planning, the Urban Forestry Division, CFAC, the City Attorney's office, and the original proponents of Councilmember O'Farrell's motion. It has also — as evidenced by the Council File and records of public hearings — enjoyed repeated, significant, and vocal public participation and support by constituents, as well as by such advocates for the preservation of native habitat, biodiversity, and wildlife as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Hillside Federation, and Citizens for Los Angeles Wildlife ("CLAW").

Important City policy should not be left languishing and our hillside biodiversity left open to profound destruction through delays over details that can be resolved. As the City's urban forestry advisory body, we appeal to you to schedule this amendment for its Committee hearing and recommend to the City Council that these two native species be added to the list of protected species as a matter of urgency.

Respectfully,



Lynnette Kampe
Interim Chair, Community Forest Advisory Committee

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