

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEM

5. Claraboya Pine Tree Proactive Removal and Replacement Program

This item starts at 00:07:57 in the archived video.

Cari Dillman, Community Services Manager, provided a PowerPoint presentation.

Manager Dillman and Jeremy Swan, Community Services Director, responded to questions from the Commission related to why two seemingly identical trees could have different outcomes, whether the cause is known why one tree fails over another, if outside expertise could be consulted to take a closer look at the trees and current practices, whether there are ways to identify which trees pose the most risk or if all trees carry the same risk, what a Level 2 assessment would show, if trees with the same low probability of failure can be distinguished, whether Claremont is the only city experiencing this issue compared to surrounding cities, if risk is reduced through tree removal, whether current trimming practices provide a sufficient barrier, how many Claraboya residents responded to the survey, why the survey showed a majority in favor of removal due to nuisance debris while the majority in previous meetings opposed removal, whether the percentage of the area's population that responded to the survey is known, how many Claraboya residents versus non-Claraboya residents responded to the survey and attended the community meeting, whether photos are available showing what 15-gallon trees look like, if risk can be offset through an insurance policy, and whether the probability of a tree falling is known.

Chair Sifuentes invited public comment.

Patricia Cisneros, Senior Administrative Assistant, announced that five written public comments had been received prior to the meeting.

Kenneth Wenzl, Claremont resident, spoke about changing his perspective based on findings from trees that failed, suggested moving to a three-year trimming cycle to help lessen the risk, and noted that a small level of risk may be acceptable given the low probability of failure.

Larry Olin, Claremont resident, emphasized that trees contribute to the area's atmosphere and home values; stated his preference for keeping the trees with better maintenance; noted that some residents neglect tree care; and requested reconsideration of the decision, citing an additional road available in case of emergency.

Allen Allen, Claremont resident, noted that he is a homeowner directly impacted by the trees. Mr. Allen cited safety hazards from debris, disputed the loss in property value if trees were removed, and urged either removal of the trees for safety issues or a three-year trimming cycle if removal is not done.

Pam Stevenson, Claremont resident, spoke in support of keeping the trees, supports a three-year trimming cycle, and reported that most neighbors value the trees despite the mess.

Unidentified speaker, Claremont resident, emphasized public safety concerns from large trees, noted shortened trimming cycles, questioned liability if trees remain, cited the results of the fires in Altadena and Pacific Palisades, and urged the City to take action to ensure the residents' safety.

Valerie Martinez, Claremont resident, appreciated the safety updates and communication through public meetings, acknowledged that doing nothing is bold, and emphasized that keeping the trees has a lot of benefits.

Unidentified speaker agreed that the situation poses significant risk, noted that the survey favors removal, and supports taking down the trees.

There were no further requests to speak.

Chair Sifuentes closed public comment on this item.

The Commission discussed the City Council's direction to staff to develop a removal and replacement program, survey results showing support for tree removal, outcomes of the prior public meetings, and written public comments submitted for this and previous discussions that reflected mixed views. They considered the recommended options, looked into safety possibilities, and asked staff clarifying questions about tree maintenance standards, how the trees are assessed, how often the two arborists inspect them, what the course of action is when Claremont residents call staff about tree concerns, how robust the emergency plan is if trees were to come down, and response time for tree requests.

The Commission encouraged residents to contact staff with any concerns regarding their City trees, and noted that they may bring their concerns before the Tree Committee, as the Tree Committee is an advisory body to the Commission.

Manager Dillman outlined the process by which a homeowner may appeal staff's recommendation not to remove a tree that does not fall into the categories of "Dead/Severely Declining," or "Hazardous," and responded to questions from the Commission regarding the City's emergency response preparations and protocols.

The Commission also noted the City's Emergency Operations Plan, scheduled for adoption in 2026, and suggested keeping the area wildlife in mind when voting on a recommendation.

Commissioner Brower moved to approve Option 1 (Keep with Standard) - No removals will occur unless the tree meets one or more of the required standards for removal, and trimming will continue with the five-year grid trimming cycle, seconded by Commissioner Sifuentes, and failed on a roll call vote as follows:

AYES: *Commissioner – Brower, Sifuentes,*
NOES: *Commissioner – Binder, Mora, Roselle, Scott Toux, Silva*

The Commission continued a discussion about whether to continue with the current tree management approach (Option 1) or to pursue a better long-term solution. One member proposed continuing with Option 1 temporarily while asking staff to return with more information to support a more informed decision and avoid extreme actions like clear-cutting. There was uncertainty about what additional data would be useful. Staff explained that tree management relied on professional judgment rather than precise data.

The Commission continued a discussion on whether increasing tree trimming frequency would reduce risk in the Claraboya neighborhood. Staff explained that more frequent trimming can reduce branch weight and improve airflow, potentially reducing branch failure, but would not necessarily prevent whole tree failure. A three-year trimming cycle was confirmed to meet arborist standards and not harm tree health.

The Commission reviewed Option 4 to increase the trimming cycle for the 207 pine trees in Claraboya from five years to three years, and discussed two funding options: City funding (Option 4(a)) or funding through a special assessment district formed via a Proposition 218 process (Option 4(b)). It was clarified that the proposal applied only to Claraboya and would not affect the rest of the City.

Commissioner Scott Toux moved to approve Option 4(b) - Increase trimming cycle to three years and form a special assessment district under Landscape and Lighting District (LLD) for shortened trim cycle, seconded by Commissioner Roselle, and carried on a roll call vote as follows:

AYES: *Commissioner – Binder, Brower, Mora, Roselle, Scott Toux, Sifuentes,*
 Silva
NOES: *Commissioner – None*