

Committee Member Sifuentes moved to approve the Consent Calendar, seconded by Vice Chair Binder, and carried on a roll call vote as follows:

AYES: ***Committee Member – Binder, Sifuentes***
NOES: ***Committee Member – None***
ABSENT: ***Committee Member – Brower***

1. Tree Committee Meeting Minutes of October 15, 2025
Approved and filed the regular Tree Committee meeting minutes of October 15, 2025.

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEM

2. Claraboya Pine Tree Proactive Removal and Replacement Program

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

Manager Dillman and Jeremy Swan, Community Services Director, responded to questions from the Committee regarding the value of planting 24"-box trees over 15-gallon trees, the effect on fire risk of removing Canary Island pine trees, the ability to predict which trees would have fallen during the windstorms, how removals would be prioritized in a phased removal, whether survey responses from Claraboya residents were weighted over those from other community members, how many residents changed their opinion after the survey period, how the issue came before the City Council and why the City Council directed staff to develop a removal and replacement program, why the Sustainability Committee did not recommend Option 3, whether a three-year cycle would be considered overtrimming, whether the City has any history of forming a special assessment district, how enhanced maintenance prevents a tree from falling in a windstorm and if it would be possible to quantify the reduction in risk of failure, the trim history of the pine trees that fell during the 2022 windstorm, how many pine trees fell in Claraboya during both windstorms, Los Angeles County Fire Department response protocols, whether staff has considered the potential for property damage during the removal process, whether stumps would be removed as part of the removal process, whether residents would be able to pay for trees larger than 24"-box size, the effect of the various options on local wildlife, possible effects of removal on property values, why safety wasn't included in the survey, whether staff has had communication with residents regarding the street tree list, and whether staff would find an additional survey helpful.

Chair Brower joined the meeting at 6:34 PM.

Vice Chair Binder invited public comment.

Senior Administrative Assistant Ross announced that two written public comments had been received on this item.

Fred Roth expressed concern that the justification for removing the trees is primarily ingress/egress issues in an emergency situation and asked why no statement on that subject from an emergency response agency was included in the report. Dr. Roth suggested evaluating the loss of environmental benefits, along with the cost of removal and replacement.

Jason Annigian, Claremont resident, stated that one of the reasons he bought his house was the trees in the area, and that it is the responsibility of the residents to manage the nuisance debris. Mr. Annigian supports an additional survey and finds the idea of removing all of the pine trees to be “anti-Claremont.”

Kenneth Wenzl, Claremont resident, supports the enhanced trimming option to mitigate risk from falling pinecones but does not support forming a special assessment district to cover the additional costs.

Valerie Martinez, Claremont resident, spoke against the full removal of the trees because of the ecosystem they support, and she supports either taking no steps or enhanced trimming. Ms. Martinez stated that Claraboya residents are aware of fire danger and take steps to prepare and reduce risk.

Connie Fuentes, Claremont resident, asked why eucalyptus removals are not being considered, as they are more flammable than pine trees.

James Manifold, Claremont resident, feels that the real issue is not tree failure due to winds and resulting ingress/egress challenges, but rather fire danger because the resin in pine trees causes them to explode. Mr. Manifold cautioned that there is limited time to respond and evacuate in case of emergency.

Unidentified speaker, Claremont resident, stated that she lost her home in the 2003 fire but that the two pine trees sustained no damage and are still standing. She enjoys seeing the pine trees when driving up Mountain Avenue and feels their loss would be unimaginable.

Larry Olin, Claremont resident, stated that the loss of street trees in other areas has directly affected the value of those homes, and he feels that the same thing could happen in Claraboya if the trees were removed. Mr. Olin acknowledges that this is a difficult issue and complimented the Committee for asking insightful questions.

Sorrel Stielstra, Claremont resident, supports the validity of the safety concerns expressed by other residents and feels there is serious potential for loss of life or property. Ms. Stielstra feels that none of the options presented are sufficient and called for an evidence-based evaluation of risk with the participation of public safety experts and emergency responders. Because the trees are a community asset, Ms. Stielstra recommended a broader urban forest strategy to manage the trees Citywide, rather than for a specific neighborhood.

Unidentified speaker, Claremont resident, agreed with comments from a previous speaker stating that the trees are a fire hazard. While a tree itself may not fall, winds may carry flying needles and embers and spark fires. The speaker states that a tree falling across Mountain Avenue could trap residents from up to 215 homes. He spoke in favor of the survey and doesn't feel it necessary to issue a second one.

Lilia Hawkins, acknowledged the serious fire danger and encouraged further investigation into strategies to address fire risk, safety, and emergency exit plans. Ms. Hawkins stated that trees are essential for a healthy, climate-resilient city and that the benefits of trees, including Canary Island pines, are substantial.

Unidentified speaker spoke in support of keeping the trees and stated that the residents should be responsible for making their own preparations for emergencies without destroying the environment.

John Niero, Claremont resident, stated that removal of the trees would lead to the loss of a huge ecosystem and the many environmental benefits they provide. He understands the safety concerns but stated that Mountain Avenue is not the sole ingress/egress—Johnson's Pasture is a viable escape route if necessary. Mr. Niero stated that residents have a responsibility to develop their own safety plans and that we shouldn't make drastic decisions based on a worst-case scenario.

There were no additional requests to speak

Vice Chair Binder closed public comment.

The Committee discussed the City Council's original concern about ingress/egress issues if a tree falls during a fire and how the resulting survey and conversation have veered away from the focus on safety and fire issues, whether the Committee should stick to their focus of evaluating whether the trees pose an immediate danger versus the requirements in the *Tree Policies and Guidelines Manual* for non-emergency removals, the environmental impact of removing the trees, that the enhanced trimming options would not necessarily reduce the risk of whole tree failure, the fact that the trees are currently healthy and that the arborists are available to assess them at any time, the possibility of arranging for special collection of pinecones and needles, having an emergency response agency provide input and evaluate an evacuation plan for the neighborhood, and offering enhanced trimming to one neighborhood over others.

Director Swan responded to questions raised during Public Comment and stated that the proposed enhanced (three-year) trim cycle would reduce the number of pinecones in trees and that the eucalyptus trees in Claraboya are privately-owned and not City trees.

Chair Brower moved to recommend that the Community and Human Services Commission approve Option 1 (Keep with Standard). The motion died for lack of a second.

The Committee discussed the possibility of obtaining an emergency response plan from an emergency services agency before presenting the item to the Community and Human Services Commission.

Director Swan stated that the Emergency Preparedness Ad Hoc Committee recently completed preparation of a City Emergency Operations Plan for presentation to the City Council in early 2026.

Chair Brower moved to recommend that the Community and Human Services Commission approve Option 1 (Keep with Standard), seconded by Vice Chair Binder, and carried on a roll call vote as follows:

AYES: ***Committee Member – Binder, Brower, Sifuentes***
NOES: ***Committee Member – None***

ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair Binder adjourned the meeting of the Tree Committee at 8:12 PM. The next regular meeting of the Tree Committee will be held on December 19, 2025.

Chair

ATTEST:

Recording Secretary