

March 10, 2025

Dear Cari,

Thank you for following up on my request to have the city's Canary Pine in front of my Charleston Drive house removed and replaced with something safer. I read your message that:

“Staff has the authority to remove trees if they are in an advanced state of decline, immediately hazardous, or structurally unstable. Currently, the tree in front of your home does not meet these criteria.”

Regardless of many people's good intentions meant to save trees, the city is using the wrong criteria to evaluate the appropriateness of the Canary Pine in front of my house. The need for its removal is a matter of economic and personal safety, not the health of the tree. The tree has grown very tall, and two instance of very strong winds in the past three years have proven that there is a significant probability of it being blown over, causing severe risk to my property and to the health and safety of my family. The Canary Pine, having grown to its current size, is obviously the wrong type of tree to be in front of a nearby residential house where strong winds are an issue. Waiting for a potential city report to be issued in hopefully two years' time, which might allow bureaucratic boxes to be ticked, and the tree removed, just allows the danger to persist. The city knows this and the city staffer who stopped by my house agreed that this is the wrong tree for the area.

Below I make a number of important points:

1. While no one knows when the next strong winds will occur, whether in a few years or next week, the strong winds will come. Obviously the city cannot predict when the next strong winds will recur. But without being able to predict the next strong winds, how can the city claim that this tree is not “immediately hazardous?” The claim that it is not “immediately hazardous” is false by being based on impossible to know assumptions. Whenever such winds might recur, the tree puts my house and my family in imminent danger. The highest obligation the city has to its residents is to protect its citizens’ safety rather than preserving a tree that is the wrong type for the location. Preventative measures need to be taken now before a catastrophe occurs, not after something terrible has happened.
2. The risk of the Canary Pine being blown over onto my house is not hypothetical, even if the tree itself is deemed healthy. Please let me give you some background information on the last two strong wind events. Both of these winds came from the north. The first occurred several years ago when Claremont experienced a citywide wind event. Two very close trees on Charleston Drive were blown over. A tall Canary Pine planted on the north side of Charleston Drive, across from my next-door neighbor to the east of me on the south side, fell across the Charleston Drive, then across my neighbor’s front yard. It nearly reached onto their porch. If the tree had been planted on the south side of Charleston, as is the Canary Pine in front of my house, the fallen tree would have caused serious damage or would have

crushed the house. Two houses to the west of my house, on the south side of Charleston, the winds blew over a Canary Pine that had been planted on south side. Fortunately, it had been planted near to the property line between two houses and landed between them. Still, it caused damage to one of the house's garage. The Canary Pine in the front of my house is planted at approximately the north-south midpoint line of my property. There is a 100% certainty that if it is blown over by winds from the north it will hit my house down the center, from the front to the back. The house would be demolished and there is no place in the house where one could be safe. The neighbors' previously fallen trees were the same species, planted at the same time, in the same type of soil, affected by the same winds. If being blown over can happen to those trees it can happen to the tree in front of my house.

3. A second recent strong wind event occurred this past January. The winds caused the tall pine to sway dramatically forward and back. Based on its tilting, the tree directly in front of the house appeared to be at risk of falling. Does the city know the underground root structure and tree strength well enough to know that this could not happen? Obviously not, because the roots are hidden, and my neighbors' trees fell. Standing on my front porch the tree swayed directly above/over the front of the house and over my head. There were loud booms as hard green pinecones fell from the trees and smashed onto the house and the cars. Due to the danger, my family and I evacuated the house and went to stay with my sister who lives in Ventura.

4. As we were loading up the cars, we saw that falling pinecones had already smashed our Tesla's windshield (see photos below), marked another car's windshield, and dented our third car. We have not yet been able to afford to replace the Tesla windshield. These cars were parked in the driveway. Are we to be asked to wait for the next damage from falling pinecones? With the wind behind them and falling from height, these heavy, hard, green pinecones hit with serious force. If they had hit any of us in the head as we loaded the cars to evacuate, with their force being strong enough to smash a windshield, a direct hit could have been fatal. For the sake of argument, if the risk of a large Canary Pine falling on one's house during a wind event is only a "minimal" 2%, no one in their right mind would voluntarily be willing to accept the risk and stay inside. Would someone in their right mind be willing to stand under the tree with high velocity and heavy green pinecones falling on them? Based on my observations, and with trees having already fallen on my close neighbors' properties, a two percent (2%) risk is a low estimate.
5. One might consider strong wind events to be a fluke. After the first event several years ago, I was hoping that was the case. I first moved to Claremont in 1959, and at that time I couldn't recall a similar event. However, now that we have had a second episode of powerful winds two months ago, it is clear that these types of strong winds are inevitable and cannot be considered rare. Altadena and Palisades have had recent tragic experiences with strong winds. The strong winds increased danger to the trees may be due to changing weather or climate patterns, or perhaps

because the Canary Pines have grown taller and catch more wind. The Canary Pines are a known and proven hazard. One can love and support Claremont's trees, as I do, yet see the clear danger. There are over 20 trees on my property. I like trees, but the Canary Pine needs to be cut down and replaced.

6. The tree in front of my house is tall, heavy, and is quite substantial. The city staffer that stopped by to speak with me, after you received my email, estimated that the tree might be 60 or 70 feet tall. Based on my own imprecise geometry, estimating angles and distances from the ground, I calculated that it might be as tall as 80 feet. The tree is only 37 feet from my house. Whether it is actually 60 or 80 feet tall, it is a massive tree posing great and proximal danger to my home.

7. As discussed with your staffer, and as he acknowledged, there is inadequate distance between such a large and tall tree and my house. While planting decisions were made 50 years ago when the house was constructed, by now the impropriety of the tree has become obvious to the city. The city knows that the Canary Pine is the wrong type of tree for my residential area. I was told that there was an ongoing study, perhaps to be completed over the next two years, in order to decide on what to do. This report could provide eventual bureaucratic "cover" for taking the necessary action that some might find objectionable. But I live in my house every day. It is wrong for the city to pass to me an obvious and seriously

known risk of its tree, along with its potential liability, to my family and me. Please cut down the tree and solve the problem now, not delay until it might be too late.

8. I believe that the risk of a catastrophic tree fall due to strong winds is increasing over time, as the tree grows taller. I am not a tree expert, and I don't know how tall the tree will eventually grow. But I do know that it is visibly taller than it was 10 years ago. Most of the tree's pine needles and foliage are on the top half of the tree and there are no nearby geographic features that block the top from being hit by strong winds. Torque created by strong winds puts pressure on its ground roots directly proportional to the height of the tree. The taller the tree, the more pressure. I suspect that increasing tree height might have been a contributing factor behind my neighbors' trees falling several years ago in strong winds. According to Wikipedia, *Pinus Canariensis* can grow to a height of 98 feet to 131 feet tall. Trees can live for over 100 years, with trees in San Diego and Monrovia still alive after 125 years. The tree in front of my house has been well watered with roots under my lawn facilitating its growth and longevity. Growing taller increases the danger.

Claremont has the ability and responsibility to solve this problem. All that's needed is the political will. This tree is a hazard, and the city has an obligation to remove it.

Sincerely yours,

David Brownlee

616 Charleston Drive





