



Administrative Report

N.3., File # 25-1648

Meeting Date: 12/9/2025

To: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

From: ANDREW WINJE, PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

TITLE

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING PRACTICES AND POLICIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE CITY'S TREE CANOPY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This item has been prepared in response to City Strategic Plan Goal 5.1 "Advance Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience," and Objective 48 directing staff to, "Inventory the City's tree canopy and present a discussion item to the City Council to determine the best strategies to enhance the tree canopy in the future."

The City's tree count currently includes approximately 11,350 trees, with nearly one thousand trees being planted in the last six years. In recent years, the City has also implemented a tree protection ordinance, achieved recognition as a Tree City, USA, and modernized internal arboricultural practices that demonstrate its recognition of, and commitment to, the enhancement of City trees as a valuable resource for the community. This report provides some context of recent work and explores additional options to further protect and develop the tree canopy within City boundaries through incentives, regulations, educational programs, and other initiatives.

BACKGROUND

The City's tree inventory is generally healthy and diverse. The diversity of the City controlled urban forest includes over 200 species. However, the distribution of tree age, as measured by trunk size, indicates an aged population. Efforts to plant young trees at a steady and even increasing rate, will ensure the City's urban forest continues to provide a beneficial resource to residents and visitors.

In recent years, the City Council has provided considerable direction and support of the City's urban forest resource. Funding has been provided to plant over one hundred new trees each of the last six years, with a total count of 942 planted in the six fiscal years ending in June 2025. Tree removals by staff average 25 to 30 per year, with the net increase conservatively estimated to be one hundred twenty-five trees per year on average over that timeframe. The City also maintains a Tree Replenishment Fund, into which funds are deposited when City trees are removed by private development. Net contributions to this fund have decreased since the passage of the City's Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance in 2023. Intentional spending on urban forest improvements in FY 2023-24 and fewer fines collected since the passage of the ordinance has resulted in a significant depletion of this fund. Deposits are also collected to this fund from contractors working near trees, in the event of damage, and returned if the work is completed without event.

By current count, Public Works staff has identified 2,494 “vacant” tree locations along the City’s parkways. Staff further screens each of the vacant locations by asking several questions such as:

- Is the parkway size and setting suitable for a tree?
- Does the resident want a tree?
- Does the parkway have irrigation?
- Is the resident willing to irrigate it?
- Is there a conflict with aerial or underground utilities?

When funding is available in the City budget, the restitution fund, or through other funding or donation opportunities, trees are typically planted in the spring or fall.

On September 22, 2025, an Administrative Report and presentation regarding the City’s tree canopy was presented at the Public Works and Sustainability Commission (PWSC) meeting. These items provided information on the benefits of a healthy tree canopy, the City’s overall canopy coverage, the diversity and size distribution of City-owned trees, programs used in other jurisdictions to monitor and manage a tree canopy, and a timeline summary of the City’s recent history of advancing tree protection. These items are included as an attachment to this report for reference.

At the PWSC meeting, the Commissioners received numerous written and in-person comments recognizing the value of trees to the community and supporting various ideas and priorities to enhance the City’s tree canopy. Recognizing the importance of the conversation and the need to receive direction from the City Council, the PWSC conveyed their general support for the improvement of the City’s tree canopy and recommended the formation of a PWSC subcommittee to dive deeper into the subject and provide recommendations to City Council.

The PWSC discussion also included a discussion of forward-looking management practices. For example, many agencies have developed Urban Forest Management Plans (UFMP). The UFMP moniker holds different meanings in different jurisdictions, however, the most valuable elements of these plans include: 1) an assessment and measurement of the current tree inventory and establishment of improvement benchmarks over an appropriate schedule; 2) development of practice/policy guidance to educate, direct, incentivize and regulate management of both public and private trees and; 3) establishment of monitoring and review processes for continual improvement amidst changing conditions.

The scope of implementation for these plans can require decades, or UFMPs can be scaled back to address other relevant time horizons. Several examples of UFMPs are included in the PWSC Administrative Report and lend insight into the potential approaches the City could take. The costs to develop these plans also vary significantly depending on the desired scope. Staff estimates a thorough plan forecasting a 40-to-50-year timeline, involving a study of community values and priorities, environmental justice issues, climate change, economic benefit, and other broad topics of relevant concern (similar to the approach taken by Los Angeles County) could require hundreds of thousands of dollars. When scaled to fit Redondo Beach, \$250,000 could reasonably be expected to serve as an upper limit of expected cost to develop a similar plan.

As an alternative approach, the City could rely on “in-house” policy development while making use of

outside services only for those tasks with scope beyond the ability or availability of City resources. For instance, the City may seek services to more accurately assess its urban tree canopy by professionally mapping, quantifying, and analyzing public and private tree cover. This effort could yield maps (visual and digital) containing tree canopy measurements, land cover types, and vegetation density from which canopy cover percentage, canopy height distributions and spatial patterns of tree cover. Depending on whether the LiDAR based source information is taken from publicly available USGS data or collected specifically for the City using drone technology, the cost is estimated to be between \$35,000 and \$65,000. Improvement benchmarks, practice and policy guidance, regulatory changes, and review practices could be developed internally, according to best practices for municipalities and input from the public, nonprofits, and other community stakeholders.

In 2023, the City adopted a Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance ([RBMC Title 5 Chapter 11 <https://ecode360.com/42652812>](https://ecode360.com/42652812)) that comprehensively addresses City owned trees in the public right of way, at City parks, and on City-owned (or controlled) properties. The Ordinance provides restrictions on the indiscriminate removal of public trees, improper pruning (of roots or crown), and other damage to public trees. The Ordinance also regulates requests to remove trees for development and non-development purposes, sets violations and penalties, and empowers staff to develop a list of favored and disfavored trees to be used in public spaces. The City also regulates tree trimming by Cable Franchisees attempting to clear their aerial lines ([RBMC Section 11-3.506 <https://ecode360.com/42661779>](https://ecode360.com/42661779)) and trimming in the Harbor/Pier area relative to concerns for nesting by threatened bird species ([RBMC Section 10-5.1900 \(g <https://ecode360.com/42660378>](https://ecode360.com/42660378))).

The development of the Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance identified ways the Public Works Department might improve their practices and those of the City's tree maintenance vendor. Implementation of those best practices, in concert with hiring of an Urban Forestry Manager/Arborist, have improved the City's overall practices. The City Budget has not allowed the City to fully fund the full scope of recommended tree maintenance in the last few years. Crews have adopted a "smart prune" practice to identify trees that can be serviced with reduced service levels in order to allow a larger number of trees to be serviced each year. Staff has also identified older trees needing additional pruning to reduce risk and promote good structure. Eventually, full pruning will be needed to protect the canopy of the City's most mature trees. Additional funding would also allow development of a young-tree pruning program to develop well-structured trees at an early age, which reduces risk of limb failure and tree removals in the future. Investing in planting more trees and improving the health of the City's largest trees are both important elements to enhancing the City's tree canopy.

City-owned property covers approximately 27% of the City's total area, which means that, much of the City's tree canopy resides on private property. Options to regulate privately owned trees are not without controversy and, if advanced, may impact property owners and developers ability to build, while also requiring greater administration and oversight by City staff.

The City currently has limited ability to control tree removal and require tree installation for private properties undergoing development or redevelopment. The City's development code for both the Coastal Zone and the inland areas includes landscaping regulations requiring the installation and maintenance of approved landscapes according to the State's Model Water Efficiency Landscape Ordinance (MWELo) - codified beginning with Section 490 of Chapter 2.7 of Division 2 of Title 23 of the California Code of Regulations. The MWELo requires submittal and approval of a landscape

plan when there is a ground disturbance of 500 square feet for residential properties and 2,500 square feet for commercial properties. The MWELO triggers additional City landscape requirements which can be found in RBMC [Section 10-2.1900 <https://ecode360.com/42656482>](https://ecode360.com/42656482) and [Section 10-5.1900 <https://ecode360.com/42660377>](https://ecode360.com/42660377) (Landscaping Regulations) for the inland and coastal zones, respectively.

The Landscaping Regulations provide guidance and standards for the installation of vegetation and require the planting of trees in the public right-of-way, where available, or on private property depending on site conditions (in practice one new front yard tree per new residential unit). The City Council could consider whether the RBMC should be amended to increase the landscape requirements and include a greater number or type of tree be planted on private property as a condition of approval for a development application where possible. Another strategy to consider is whether the City should require a permit to remove trees on private property. A permitting system would allow the City to apply standards for tree removal, while also requiring that the property owners plant new replacement trees. This type of program would require additional City personnel to administer and enforce.

In recent years, however, the State has disallowed certain local requirements on housing related development projects and that trend must be considered when evaluating any new ordinances regarding development. Under State law, the City cannot adopt any new development standards that may have an adverse impact on housing density. Any new regulations requiring on-site trees should avoid dictating the design and/or location of a residential building. If the Council chooses to adopt an ordinance requiring on-site trees as a condition of development, then staff recommends that trees be located in appropriate setback areas only. The setback requirements are established in the Zoning Code and could provide space for new trees.

When the City was developing its Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance, staff had prepared, but later deleted at direction of City Council (January 17, 2023), draft language to address private property tree protection and preservation. This information is included for reference as an attachment. However, while regulating trees on private property can be an effective strategy to support increasing the tree canopy, it would impact property rights and, as mentioned above, would require additional resources to administer. Given current staffing levels, it would be difficult to administer, monitor and enforce rigorous new regulations.

There are other educational strategies that are voluntary, but could help develop and promote a culture of tree canopy awareness among the City's residents. Design guides for parkways and front yards could be developed for residents. Details for incentive programs (tree giveaways, planning relief options in the code) could also be flushed out through additional discussions, utilities, and non-profits. Education on the benefits, establishment, and care of shade trees could be added to the City website, and be amplified through the efforts of community-based organizations. Citizens for Redondo's Trees is one such organization that has been active in supporting development of the City's tree protection policies. This organization is also working to organize and recruit more residents to assist with improvements to tree canopy in the City. In meetings with staff, this organization has shared several ideas regarding education, monitoring of parkways, code modification and enforcement, and City programming. Some of these are beyond the City's current capacity to implement, but some are worthy of further consideration. Their presentation to staff is included as an attachment.

Staff recommends the City Council discuss and receive and file the information in the report, and

provide direction, if any, on how to prioritize, and potentially pursue the identified tree canopy policy options.

COORDINATION

This report was prepared by the Public Works and Community Development Departments, with input from the PWSC and Citizens for Redondo's Trees, which made helpful contributions to the development of the City's recently adopted Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance.

FISCAL IMPACT

Preparation of this report is within the Adopted FY 2025-26 Budget for each contributing Department. Depending on Council direction, costs to take next steps and fully implement policy and practice changes vary considerably. Currently, there is no specific funding appropriated to develop additional resources or programming to enhance the City's tree canopy. It should be noted that the Public Works Department's operating budget includes funding for the planting of approximately 100 new trees per year.

APPROVED BY:

Mike Witzansky, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

- Administrative Report - Public Works and Sustainability Commission September 22, 2025
- Draft Ord - January 2023 Draft Ordinance Language, including Private Property Trees
- Citizens for Redondo's Trees Idea Package, November 2025