

City and County of San Francisco



London N. Breed, Mayor
Mohammed Nuru, Director

San Francisco Public Works

GENERAL - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

City Hall, Room 348
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(415) 554-6920 ■ www.SFPublicWorks.org



Public Works Order No: 201771

The Director of Public Works held a Public Hearing on Wednesday, June 5th, 2019 commencing at 5:30 PM at City Hall, Room 416, 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, San Francisco, CA 94102. The hearing was to consider Order No. 201124, the removal of fifty-two (52) street trees (51 Ficus / 1 Brisbane box) with replacement (unless otherwise noted) along 24th Street between Potrero Ave. and Mission St.

Findings:

The Bureau of Urban Forestry (BUF) representative, Chris Buck, gave testimony explaining the decision to remove 52 street trees (51 ficus and 1 Brisbane box) along 24th Street. BUF staff approved the removal of the street trees and the public protested. Mr. Buck explained the problems caused by ficus trees and outlined the department's policy toward removal of ficus trees, which is contained in DPW Order No. 183151.

Initially, the department sought to remove 77 street trees, as stated at the first community meeting for reasons that included poor health and safety concerns (such as instability caused by split branches and trunks). Following multiple community meetings and extensive outreach, based on the large amount of community feedback against the proposed removals, BUF reduced the number of trees proposed for removal from 77 to 52 and proposed experimental/aggressive pruning on 25 of the ficus trees. He noted the requirement that the City replace removed trees, but noted that in this case there are locations where replacement is not possible because of lack of space, interference with utility poles, etc. For that reason, he said that some of the tree basins will be filled in but that trees will be planted in other locations, leading to a net increase of 17 trees along the street. The removed trees would be replaced by red maples and ginkgo trees.

Several written protests were submitted and over 50 people spoke in opposition to the removal of the trees. While a few people acknowledged the need to remove severely damaged or unhealthy trees, the vast majority of speakers detailed the negative effects that the removals would have on the community. Themes that came up repeatedly:

- Such a dramatic loss of tree canopy would have a detrimental health affect due to lack of shade/increased temperatures.
- Removing such a large number of trees runs counter to the City's environmental efforts to reduce global warming.
- The environmental and health benefits of newly planted trees would not be felt for many years, if not decades.



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- The ficus trees are a symbol of the Mission District and hold special significance to residents.
- The City would never propose such a radical removal in wealthier neighborhoods.
- Replacement of the ficus trees with red maples and ginkos ignores the cultural significance of the trees and threatens to speed the gentrification of the neighborhood.
- If the City had maintained the trees properly, the damage would not have been so severe, so the City should fix the problem rather than clear-cutting the trees.
- Technology should be available to maintain rather than cut down the trees.
- If the City decides that the ficus trees need to be removed, this should not happen all at once, but rather the removal should be spread out over time to lessen the impact.

Concerns were raised whether the proposed tree removals had received CEQA clearance. Removal of hazardous and dying trees was considered in the Categorical Exemption granted in the 2014 Urban Forest Plan, (case no 2013.1517E) which also analyzed the cumulative impacts associated with the plan.

Following the hearing, based on the large amount of negative feedback received during public comment, Urban Forestry staff reviewed the 52 trees proposed for removal on site, to see if any additional trees could be retained, and some of the structural issues mitigated through experimental/aggressive pruning. Based on this review, four of the 52 trees proposed for removal will now be retained:

2836 24th St (tree no. 2): Remove very large eastern stem that is being damaged by autos and has a weak attachment, and perform canopy reduction to rest of tree;

2850 24th St. (tree no. 1): Main stem union is wide and the site is not replantable due to the bus zone. The tree has other structural issues, but experimental/aggressive pruning would reduce potential failures;

3200 24th St. (tree no. 1): Remove the large stem damaged by autos. The tree is smaller than the others and if it is retained, along with 3230 (tree no. 1), it would preserve a row of 4 trees;

3230 24th St. (tree no. 1): Relatively small ficus that was heavily shaded by larger tree that failed/split apart during a storm. The tree has large gaps in canopy but could be pruned.

Recommendation:

After consideration of correspondence and testimony provided at the hearing, the decision is to approve the removal of 48 street trees along 24th Street with replacement. There is room to plant an additional 17 street trees along 24th St. which will also be done as part of the replacement tree plantings. The replacement tree sizes will be both 24" box and 36" box size trees, depending on required space from utilities and species availability. The species will be both red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*). The replacement trees and necessary sidewalk repairs shall be completed within three months after the removal of the trees and stumps have occurred. The trees will be removed and the stumps grinded/removed, before the tree contractor moves onto the next block.

List of 48 trees approved for removal on 24th Street:

2700 (removal of 3); 2726-2736 (no replacement/stop sign); 2701-2749 (3 trees); 2752 (no replacement-street light); 2782-2786; 2792-2794 (remove 2, replace 1/stop sign/intersection); 2773-2781; 2751; 2800 (possible replacement/shift bike rack); 2804; 2824-2826; 2836-2838 (tree no. 1); 2839-2847; 2850 (tree no.

2); 2858-2860; 2870; 2872-2876; 2878-2880 (no replacement); 2863-2869 (replace in front of 2871/street light); 2893-2899; 2900; 2904; 2912-2916; 2917-2919 (dead Brisbane box tree); 2966-2970 (remove 2/replace 1 at 2962); 3000-3008; 3013; 3024 (2 trees); 3032-3034; 3041-3047; 3049-3055 (no replacement/stop sign); 3050-3058; 3062-3068; 3069-3075; 3078-3080; 3088-3090; 3156-3158; 3175-3181; 3160; 3260-3264 (no replacement/bus zone); 3278-“3290” (no replacement; bus zone, where plaza begins).

List of 29 trees that were previously being considered for removed, but will be retained, and pruned in an aggressive/experimental manner to address potential stem failures:

2718-2722; 2726-2734 (2 trees); 2701-2749 (tree no. 2 & 3); 2754; 2778; 2790; 2773-2781 (tree no. 2 & 3); 2809; 2833; 2836-2838 (tree no. 2); 2839-2847; 2850 (tree no. 1); 2851-2857 (tree no. 2); 3044; 3035-3039; 3050-3058 (tree no. 2); 3070-3076; 3092-3098; 3166-3168 (tree no. 1 & 2); 3172-3176; 3182-3194 (tree no. 1 & 2); 3200 (tree no. 1); 3225; 3230 (tree no.1)

Appeal:

This order may be appealed to the Board of Appeals within 15 days of August 26th, 2019.

Board of Appeals

1650 Mission, Room 304

San Francisco, CA 94103 (between Van Ness and Duboce Avenues)

Phone: 415.575.6880 Fax: 415.575.6885

Regular office hours of the Board of Appeals are Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. Appointments may be made for filing an appeal by calling 415-575-6880. All appeals must be filed in person. For additional information on the San Francisco Board of Appeals and to view the Appeal Process Overview, please visit their website at <http://sfgov.org/bdappeal/>

X

DocuSigned by:

Nuru, Mohammed

Nuru, Mohammed
Director