



CITY OF BEVERLY HILLS STAFF REPORT

Meeting Date: March 2, 2010
To: Honorable Mayor & City Council
From: Ken Pfalzgraf, Parks and Urban Forest Manager *P/23/*
Subject: Lasky Drive Tree Replacement
Attachments:

1. Recreation and Parks Commission Endorsement of Staff Recommendation
2. February 23, 2010 Report to Recreation and Parks Commission

INTRODUCTION

Staff wishes to advise Council of the pending replacement of street trees on Lasky Drive.

DISCUSSION

In 1999, City Council approved the removal of infrastructure damaging Ficus trees on Lasky Drive as part of Street Tree Master Plan Phase II. During the community outreach process for this Street Tree Master Plan, residents chose the Sweetshade tree by majority vote from a palette of potential replacement trees presented by a consultant.

While the physical attributes of the Sweetshade tree are ideal to the narrow parkways and setbacks of Lasky Drive, its performance on the street has been lackluster to say the least. Based on staff's experience with the Sweetshade on Lasky Drive, it has been determined the tree is too delicate to serve in the role of a parkway tree and would not be considered as an appropriate replacement tree in future Street Tree Master Plan projects.

With the final phase of Ficus tree removals approaching, several residents of the street have come forward to say that their patience with the Sweetshade tree has worn thin and that that street deserves a better tree as a replacement for the Ficus.

All residents of Lasky Drive were invited to the May 28, 2009 meeting of the Recreation and Parks Commission meeting to hear discussion regarding a staff recommendation to replace the Sweetshade trees on Lasky Drive with Fern Pine trees before the completion of the final phase of Ficus tree removals. The Commission voted 5-0 in support of the staff recommendation. Several residents of Lasky Drive addressed the Commission at that time, each concurring with the decision of the Commissioners.

During spring of 2010, staff will replace all Sweetshade trees on Lasky Drive with 36" box size Fern Pine trees. Subsequently, during fall/winter of 2010, the remaining Ficus trees on Lasky Drive will be removed and replaced with 36" box Fern Pine trees.

FISCAL IMPACT

The cost to remove the 37 Sweetshade trees on Lasky Drive is approximately \$3,200.00. The cost to install 37 36 inch box Fern Pine trees would be approximately \$25,000.00, making the total cost for the project approximately \$28,200.00. This project would be funded with existing capital improvement project funds designated for miscellaneous tree removal and replacement projects throughout the City (Street Tree Master Plan).

RECOMMENDATION

Staff wishes to advise Council of the pending replacement of street trees on Lasky Drive.


Approved By



CITY OF BEVERLY HILLS
Memorandum

Meeting Date: March 2, 2010
To: Honorable Mayor & City Council
From: Recreation and Parks Commission
Subject: February 23, 2010 -Recreation and Parks Commission Meeting
Lasky Drive Street Master Plan: Sweetshade and Ficus Tree
Replacement

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which reads "Jill Tavelman Collins". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the right of the "From:" field.

The Recreation and Parks Commission unanimously supports staff's recommendation regarding the replacement of Sweetshade and Ficus trees on Lasky Drive.



CITY OF BEVERLY HILLS

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Recreation and Parks Commission
FROM: Ken Pfalzgraf, Parks and Urban Forest Manager *KP*
DATE: February 23, 2010
SUBJECT: Lasky Drive Street Tree Master Plan: Sweetshade and Ficus Tree Replacement

INTRODUCTION

The removal and replacement of trees on Lasky Drive has been calendared for the attention of City Council as a B Item for the Study Session meeting of March 2, 2010.

In addition to serving as a summary of past processes for the convenience of the Commission, this report will be an attachment to the staff report to City Council. The Commission is invited to attend the March 2, 2010 meeting, which is slated to begin at 2:30 pm in Council Chambers. In the event that City Council wishes to formally discuss this matter, it is likely that attending Commissioners will be asked to comment.

As part of a 1999 action to address repetitive root related damage to infrastructure elements, City Council approved Phase II of the Street Tree Master Plan which authorized the removal and replacement of Ficus trees on several streets in the City, including Lasky Drive. As part of the community outreach process, a consultant presented a palette of replacement tree types that would be appropriate to the narrow parkways and setbacks of Lasky Drive. Through a ballot process, residents of the street selected the Sweetshade (*Hymenosporum flavum*) to replace the problematic Ficus trees that were scheduled to be removed in a three phase program.

The Sweetshade has not performed well on Lasky Drive. After monitoring the marginal performance of the trees for several years, in April of 2009, the Commission supported a staff recommendation to replace the struggling Sweetshade trees on Lasky Drive with Fern Pine (*Podocarpus gracilior*) trees. The Fern Pine has performed well in its role as a replacement tree for Ficus trees on several streets in the City, including nearby Durant Drive. The replacement of Sweetshade trees is to occur prior to the final phase of Ficus tree removals on the street.

BACKGROUND



Figure 1- Ficus tree and surface roots, Lasky Drive

In the past, Ficus trees were a popular street tree choice for many communities in Southern California. The Ficus is a pollution tolerant, fast growing, evergreen tree that seemed to be the answer to all tree choice problems. As time passed, the positive attributes of the Ficus were diminished when the aggressive root system of these trees began to displace infrastructure elements such as sidewalks, drive aprons and curbing (see inset Figure 1).

Faced with the challenges of managing trip and fall risk, funding frequent and expensive repairs of root damaged infrastructure and maintaining some level of equilibrium between tree species in the City-wide tree trimming program, City Council endorsed the replacement of Ficus trees on several streets by approving Phase II of the Street Tree Master Plan Phase in 1999. Prior to City Council approval of this program, City staff conducted community meetings with residents of affected streets in order to gain support for the program and to seek the assistance of affected residents in choosing a replacement tree from a palette of site appropriate tree types presented by an independent consultant.



Figure 2- Arrows showing building setback (yellow) and parkway width (red), Lasky Drive

Residents of Lasky Drive chose the Sweetshade (*Hymenosporum flavum*) as a replacement for the Ficus trees that were slated to be removed in a three phased program in which a third of the trees would be removed at three year intervals. The fastigate shape of the moderately sized Sweetshade was a natural fit for the narrow parkways and short building setbacks of Lasky Drive (see Figure 2).

Due to a delayed acceptance of the project by some residents of Lasky Drive, the program was delay for several years at the direction of City Council. The removal and replacement of one third of the Ficus trees occurred during 2004. One half of the remaining Ficus trees were removed and replaced during 2007. The removal and replacement of the remaining 14 Ficus trees is slated to occur during 2010. The goal of the phased approach to tree removal and replacement is that sudden denuding of shade along a street is avoided and that it gives

replacement trees some time to establish before the removal of all mature trees on the street occurs.

Despite being watered and cared for on a regular basis, the Sweetshade tree has not performed well as a replacement for the Ficus on Lasky Drive. Staff began discussions with several residents of the street about the marginal performance of the Sweetshade trees during the second round of Ficus tree removals during 2007. During those early discussions, staff encouraged the residents to give the Sweetshades some time to establish and hopefully perform as expected.

Unfortunately, the performance of the Sweetshades did not improved significantly. In a January 22, 2008 memorandum to the Recreation and Parks Commission, staff reported ongoing performance problems with the Sweetshade trees, noting that approximately 35% of the trees had been replaced at least once. At that time, the Commission agreed with a staff recommendation to continue to monitor the performance of the trees in hopes that the Sweetshades would perform better if given additional time to establish.

Subsequently, staff met with the Street Tree Master Plan liaison of the Recreation and Parks Commission on March 11, 2009 for a field tour of the Lasky Drive Sweetshade trees. The trees ranged in condition from good to poor (see Figures 3-5), with approximately 60 percent rating in the poor to fair range. As a point of reference, the group also toured nearby Durant Drive. The Ficus trees on Durant Drive were removed and replaced under the same Street Tree Master Plan program that mandated the replacement of Ficus trees on Lasky Drive. Unlike Lasky Drive, the replacement trees on Durant Drive are thriving. At the conclusion of this meeting the Commission liaison agreed that the Sweetshade was not performing as desired and that other options needed to be explored, including considering the Fern Pine tree as a replacement for the struggling Sweetshades on Lasky Drive.



Figure 3- Sweetshade, good condition (no dieback), Lasky Drive



Figure 4- Sweetshade, fair condition (partial dieback), Lasky Drive



Figure 5- Sweetshade, poor condition (total dieback), Lasky Drive

During March 2009, staff mailed notices (attached) all addresses on Lasky Drive (133), advising residents of ongoing failure to thrive problems with the Sweetshade trees. The notice also invited all residents of the street to the April 28, 2009 meeting of the Recreation and Parks Commission where they would be able to address the Commission regarding a replacement tree recommendation to be made by staff at that time.

While having opposing views on the loss of Ficus trees on the street, the two Lasky Drive residents that addressed the Commission on April 28, 2009 both supported the staff recommendation. After hearing the input of the residents, the Commission moved 5-0 to support a staff recommendation to remove the existing Sweetshade trees and replacement them with Fern Pine trees (information sheet attached) prior to the last phase of Ficus tree replacements which was slated for 2010.

In summary, the Sweetshade has a history of poor performance as a replacement for Ficus trees on Lasky Drive, leading to concerns about the appearance and functionality of the street tree canopy in the future. The Commission has endorsed a staff recommendation to replace the ill-performing Sweetshade trees with Fern Pine trees prior to the final phase of Ficus tree replacements which is slated for 2010.

DISCUSSION

After advising City Council on March 2, 2010, staff will make arrangements for the tree care contractor to replace all Sweetshade trees on Lasky Drive with Fern pine trees in a 36" box size. This work will be scheduled during early spring so as to avoid establishing the trees during hot weather. The final phase of Ficus tree replacements will be scheduled for late fall of 2010. At that time, all remaining Ficus trees on Lasky Drive will be removed and replaced with Fern Pine trees in a 36" box size.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS

The cost to remove the 37 Sweetshade trees on Lasky Drive is approximately \$3,200.00. The cost to install 37 36 inch box Fern Pine trees would be approximately \$25,000.00, making the total cost for the project approximately \$28,200.00. This project will be funded with existing capital improvement project funds designated for miscellaneous tree removal and replacement projects throughout the City (Street Tree Master Plan).

SUMMARY

As part of the community outreach process in the development of Phase II of the Street Tree Master Plan of 1999, residents of Lasky Drive chose the Sweetshade tree by majority vote as replacement for Ficus trees on the street.

Despite having the physical attributes that fit the narrow parkways and short building setbacks on Lasky Drive, the performance of the Sweetshade thus far shows that it is delicate and not suited to the role of a parkway street tree. This lackluster performance has resulted in concerns over the long-term appearance of Lasky Drive from several residents.

The Recreation and Parks Commission supports the staff recommendation to replace all Sweetshade trees on Lasky Drive with Fern Pine trees. The Fern Pine (*Podocarpus gracilior*) has been used as a replacement for Ficus trees with success in recent years on both nearby Durant Drive and along Chevy Chase Drive in the northwestern area of the City. Mature Fern Pines can be found along Arden Drive in the flats area of the City.

The cost for this replacement program is estimated at \$28,200.00 and would be funded from existing sources.

Staff will schedule the replacement of the Sweetshade trees for early spring of 2010 and will complete the final phase of Ficus tree removals on Lasky Drive during late fall of 2010.

Attachments:

March 9, 2009 notice to Lasky Drive residents
Fern Pine Tree Information Sheet

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
455 N. Rexford Drive
Beverly Hills, CA 90210-4817
(310) 285-2536
FAX: (310) 385-0840



STEVE MILLER, DIRECTOR

March 25, 2009

Re: Invitation to attend the April 28, 2009 Recreation and Parks Commission meeting regarding the poor performance of Sweetshade replacement trees on Lasky Drive

Dear Resident:

As you may recall, Beverly Hills City Council approved the removal and replacement of problematic Ficus trees on Lasky and Durant drives as part of the Street Tree Master Plan during July 1999. This action came after a series of public meetings focusing on the repetitive infrastructure damage caused by mature Ficus trees on both streets. As part of a balloting process, residents of Lasky Drive chose the Sweetshade tree (*Hymenosporum flavum*) as the replacement tree for their street from a palette of potential replacement trees presented by a consultant landscape architect.

The Sweetshade seemed an appropriate choice for Lasky Drive, given that its physical characteristics are a good fit for the narrow setbacks at the majority of structures on the street. Unfortunately, the tree has not performed as desired. In spite of being watered and cared for on a regular basis, Sweetshade trees continue to decline and are lost. A significant number of the trees have been replaced and continue to do poorly. Those trees that are not in decline have not performed in a manner that meets the long-term expectations of residents of the street. When compared to Durant Drive, where the Fern Pine (*Podocarpus microphyllus*) was used to replace Ficus trees, one can see firsthand that the Sweetshades of Lasky Drive are just not performing well.

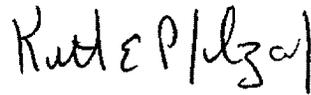
As a resident of Lasky Drive, you are cordially invited to attend the April 28, 2009 meeting of the Recreation and Parks Commission. At this meeting, staff will make a brief presentation regarding the history of the Street Tree Master Plan program on Lasky Drive, focusing on the poor performance of the Sweetshade trees. Staff will then seek the input of residents and Recreation and Parks Commissioners on a solution that includes the removal and replacement of the Sweetshade trees with a site appropriate replacement tree type that has a proven performance record.

We look forward to seeing you at the Tuesday April 28, 2009 meeting of the Recreation and Parks Commission. The meeting will begin at 2:00 pm and will be held in Room 280-A on the second floor of City Hall at 455 North Rexford Drive. Parking is available in the Library parking

structure, located on the east side of North Rexford Drive, midway between North Santa Monica Boulevard and Burton Way. After parking, exit the parking structure on the west side and cross North Rexford Drive. As you enter City Hall at ground level on the North Rexford side, an attendant will check you in and direct you to the Room 280-A, located on the second floor of City Hall.

If you are unable to attend this meeting and have comments you wish to be formally presented during the meeting, or if you have any questions prior to the meeting, please contact me by telephone at (310) 285-2537 or via email at Kpfalzgraf@beverlyhills.org.

Sincerely,

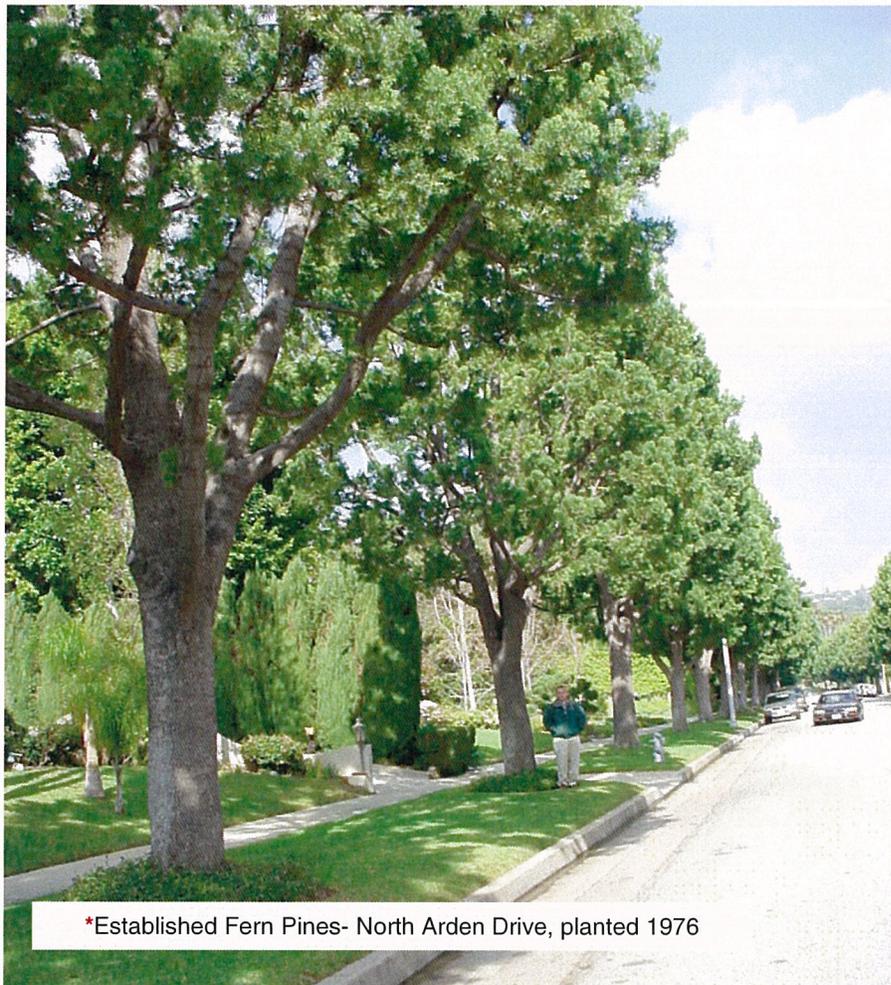
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Pfalzgraf". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical line through the middle of the name.

Ken Pfalzgraf
Parks and Urban Forest Manager



Tree Information Sheet

Podocarpus/Fern Pine (*Podocarpus gracilior*)



*Established Fern Pines- North Arden Drive, planted 1976



*Fern Pine, Greystone Mansion, installed as 36" box November 2005



*Fern Pine, Charleville at South Hamel, installed as 36" box November 1999

The Fern Pine (*Podocarpus gracilior*) is native to east Africa. The common name of this tree is misleading, since the tree is an evergreen hardwood and not a pine. The 2 inch long, lance shaped leaves of the Fern Pine are light green when young, maturing to bluish green. Long lived in the California landscape, the slow growing Fern Pine can reach 60 feet in height and spread to 40 feet in width. Becoming increasingly popular as a parkway tree, the Fern Pine has a reputation of providing fine textured cleanliness in the landscape, while remaining generally free of insect, disease and root conflict problems. Since trees are male and female, male trees are planted to avoid the messy fruit drop that accompanies female trees. After train pruning when young to develop proper structure, the pruning requirements of the Fern Pine are minimal.

The Fern Pine tree is available in 36-inch box size containers. At the time of installation, a 36 inch box Fern Pine tree would be approximately 10 feet tall, with a crown spread of approximately 5 feet.

Examples of mature Fern Pine trees can be found on North Arden Drive. Younger Fern Pine trees can be found along Charleville Boulevard (east of Robertson Boulevard) and along Durant Drive where the Fern Pine was selected by residents of the street as a replacement for problematic Ficus trees.

***Note:** As a reference for scale, the individual in the photographs is approximately 6 feet tall.