



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Date: June 16, 2015
To: Honorable Mayor & City Council
From: Ken Pfalzgraf-Parks and Urban Forest Manager
Subject: Peck Drive Ficus Street Tree Master Plan
Attachments: 1. June 1, 2015 staff report to Recreation and Parks Commission

INTRODUCTION

This report transmits background information on staff's decision to approve a request by residents of Peck Drive through a petition.

DISCUSSION

In 1996, the City Council approved Phase I Street Tree Master Plan of 1996. This plan was formulated to address structural problems and related disease issues in American Elm and Arizona Ash trees on 30 streets in the City. Overall, the plan proved successful in terms of addressing problematic trees while also improving species and age diversity on the affected streets. Changing trees on 30 streets is an ambitious project that cannot be expected to be totally problem free.

On Peck Drive, the Pecan tree the residents chose by majority vote as a replacement for the declining American Elms proved unavailable in size, quality and sufficient quantity when it came time to actually plant trees. Faced with the lack of a dependable stream of Pecan tree nursery stock, staff substituted the Pecan with Idaho Locust, a tree with similar foliage and form characteristics. Unfortunately, the performance of the Idaho Locust on Peck Drive continues to be mediocre at best.

After several years of meeting with residents of Peck Drive and tracking the performance of the Idaho Locust on that street against the performance of other moderate sized tree types on nearby streets, staff agrees that the trees should be replaced with a proven performer that will fit the expectations of the residents as well as the intent of the Street Tree Master Plan.

The June 1, 2015 comprehensive staff report to the Recreation and Parks Commission on this subject is attached. To summarize this report:

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- At present, there are 120 Idaho Locust trees on Peck Drive. Despite being watered and cared for, the trees lag far behind other moderate sized trees on nearby streets both in terms of size, vigor and aesthetic.
- Since 2011, staff has met annually with a group of Peck Drive residents to discuss and document the lagging performance of Idaho Locust trees on the street.
- On October 7, 2014, the Street Tree Master Plan liaison of the Recreation and Parks Commission viewed the trees on Peck Drive, as well as nearby South Camden Drive, to compare the performance of trees on both streets. It was agreed that the Idaho Locust trees on Peck Drive left much to be desired in terms of both vigor and aesthetic.
- An October 28, 2014 staff presentation to the Recreation and Parks Commission documented the ongoing performance problems with the Peck Drive Idaho Locust trees.
- The Peck Drive residents presented a petition to the Recreation and Parks Commission on February 24, 2015 requesting that the Idaho Locust trees be removed and replaced with a more vigorous tree type. The petition was signed by approximately 73% of the addresses on the street with one or more tree sites. Since the petition represented far more than the minimum 50% resident participation requirement, the Recreation and Parks Commission supported the staff recommendation to conduct the public outreach process to choose a replacement tree for Peck Drive.
- Staff kicked off the public outreach process with a meeting for Peck Drive residents at the new Roxbury Community Center during February 2015. The resident held several meetings on their own and requested that staff identify the availability of the 'Drake' variety of the Chinese Elm tree in regional nurseries.
- Two members of the Peck Drive group accompanied the City arborist to a nursery on May 1, 2015 to review the condition of several hundred 'Drake' Chinese Elm trees. Since the trip to the nursery, the Peck Drive Committee has presented a petition that shows that 72% of the addresses on the street with one or more tree sites (78 of 107 addresses) are in favor of removing and replacing the Idaho Locust trees with the 'Drake' Chinese Elm. Again, the number of residents who have signed the petition far exceeds the 50% minimum requirement to move forward with a Street Tree Master Plan project.
- On June 1, 2015, the Recreation and Parks Commission supported the staff recommendation to remove the Idaho Locust trees and replace them with 'Drake' Chinese Elm trees.
- Understanding the volatility in procuring nursery stock, especially with the recent pick-up in new construction, the Peck Drive residents have expressed an urgency that the City procure enough of the 'Drake' Chinese Elms to replace the Idaho Locust trees on their street, even if that means the City buy smaller trees now and have them tended to and upsized until they reach a 36 inch box size and are ready to be planted on the street.

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In summary, since being substituted as a replacement for the tree type originally chosen through the public process for Peck Drive as part of the Street Tree Master Plan of 1996, the Idaho Locust has failed to establish itself as a dependable and vigorous shade tree.

After being patient with the tree for nearly a decade, a significant majority of Peck Drive residents have petitioned the City to remove the Idaho Locust trees and replace them with 'Drake' Chinese Elm trees which will be secured in a 36 inch box size for planting in the fall/winter season of 2015/2016 and/or procured in a 24 inch box size and contract grown to produce appropriate sized stock for installation on Peck Drive.

FISCAL IMPACT

The original cost to plant the Idaho Locust trees on Peck Drive as replacements for declining American Elms was \$78,000.

The cost to remove 120 Idaho Locust trees on Peck Drive is approximately \$22,680. The cost to plant 120 Chinese Elm 'Drake' trees would be approximately \$75,000, making the total project cost approximately \$102,480.

The project will be prioritized within, and funded through, the existing CIP allotment for removal and replacement of trees through the Street Tree Master Plan program, meaning that no additional funding is being requested.

RECOMMENDATION

The proposed action to remove the Idaho Locust trees on Peck Drive and replace them with the 'Drake' variety of Chinese Elm is supported both the residents of Peck Drive and the Recreation and Parks Commission. This report is for City Council information only. Unless directed otherwise, staff will proceed with the replacement work.

Steve Zoet
Approved By



Attachment 1



CITY OF BEVERLY HILLS
COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Recreation and Parks Commission
FROM: Ken Pfalzgraf-Parks and Urban Forest Manager
DATE: June 1, 2015
SUBJECT: Peck Drive Tree Street Tree Master Plan

INTRODUCTION

Peck Drive is currently lined with Idaho Locust trees that were planted over a 15 year period as part of the Street Tree Master Plan of 1996. This plan was formulated to replace declining American Elm and Arizona Ash trees on 30 streets in the City. Despite having more than a decade to establish, the Peck Drive Locust trees are not performing in a manner that compliments the goals of the Street Tree Master Plan. In addition, a majority of residents on Peck Drive have asked that the Idaho Locust trees be removed and replaced with a more vigorous tree type.

BACKGROUND

In addition to addressing structural instability concerns that were widespread in the American Elm (*Ulmus Americana*) and Arizona Ash (*Fraxinus velutina* 'Modesto') trees at the time, the Street Tree Master Plan of 1996 sought to markedly improve species diversity on the 30 streets the plan affected, while also promoting age diversity in the new plantings by phasing the tree replacements over a period of 15 years. Modern urban forestry practices seek to limit the likelihood, severity and long term impacts of insect and pathogen activity in City trees by improving species diversity and selecting trees that are regionally appropriate. In addition, increasing age diversity in a population of street trees by phasing tree removal and replacement projects over an extended period of time is a prudent way of avoiding budgetary spikes that can occur when widespread decline and loss impacts an even-aged stand of trees. Generally speaking, the Street Tree Master Plan of 1996 was a success in that species diversity on the 30 affected streets was improved from two to nine species of trees, while the age diversity in the trees was improved by limiting the removal and replacement of trees to approximately 10% of all trees on a street each year until the project was completed. On most streets, this process required 10 to 15 years to complete.

The City of Beverly Hills Street Tree Master Plan process mandates public participation and selection of a replacement tree by majority vote. It is imperative, especially when replacing large numbers of trees, that there is an ongoing availability of nursery stock, in the quantities needed, when the stock is needed. Unfortunately, the tree type selected by Peck residents during the public outreach process proved to be unavailable when it came time to actually remove and replace trees. City staff responded to the unavailability of the tree of choice, Pecan

(*Carya illinoensis*), tree by planting a tree with a similar foliage (pinnately compound) and an overall upright growth habit, the Idaho Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Purple Robe').

Within several years of the planting of the first Idaho Locust trees, residents began to express their concern that the new trees did not seem to be establishing well. Ten years later, despite some trees being removed and replaced, there continues to be concerns that the Idaho Locust will never perform well enough to provide anywhere near the environmental benefits its predecessor, the American Elm, had. In summary, a decade of experience with this tree type on Peck Drive shows that the Idaho Locust simply does not perform well in a heavy clay soil, which is the condition on Peck Drive and in other parts of the City.

DISCUSSION

Since 2011, Urban Forestry Division staff has met annually with a group of Peck Drive residents to review the lagging performance of the Idaho Locusts on the street. In spite of the best efforts of the City to replace struggling trees and the Peck Drive property owners to water the trees regularly, the Peck Drive Idaho Locust trees fail to thrive.

On October 7, 2015, the Street Tree Master Plan liaison, consisting of Commissioners Anderson and Friedman, visited Peck Drive to see the condition of the Idaho Locust trees firsthand. During that visit, the Commissioners were able to compare the Peck Drive trees with another tree type on an adjacent street (South Camden Drive), which were planted as part of the same Street Tree Master Plan. While being different types of trees, both trees are known to have a moderate growth rate which produces a moderate sized tree at maturity. The difference between the Peck Drive Idaho Locust and the South Camden Drive Chinese Flame trees was marked in terms of both vigor and size (see examples of both tree types at Fig. 1, 2).



Figure 1-Idaho Locust tree
Peck Drive



Figure 2-Chinese Flame tree
South Camden Drive

An October 28, 2014 staff presentation to the Commission documented the performance of the Peck Drive Idaho Locust trees in comparison to the Chinese Flame trees on nearby South Camden Drive. Despite both trees being planted over the same time period (i.e. 1997-2010); the Peck Drive trees lag significantly behind the South Camden Drive trees in terms of diameter, which is a commonly recognized measure of tree vigor (see Fig. 3).

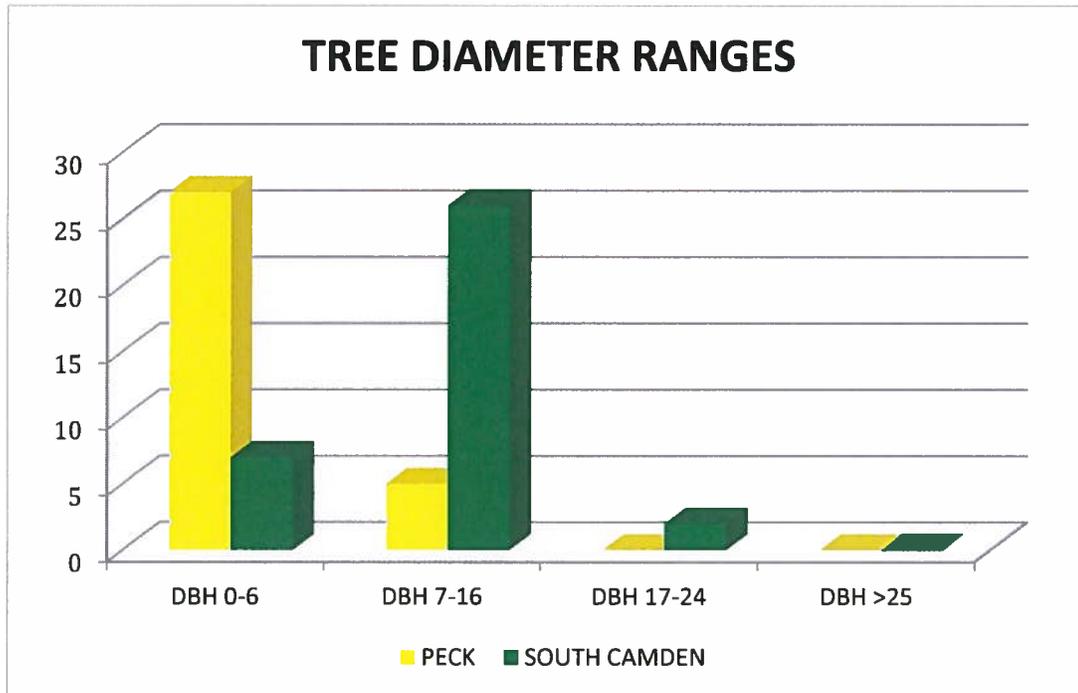


Figure 3-Tree trunk diameter comparison Peck Drive v South Camden Drive

The Street Tree Master Plan requires that more than 50% of the residents of a street must support the change of a tree type on a street. Having been patient for a number of years, the residents of Peck Drive presented the Recreation and Parks Commission with a petition at the February 24, 2015 meeting. The petition, represented approximately 73% of the tree sites on the street (78 of 107 addresses with one tree or more), sought to have the Idaho Locust trees removed and replaced with a more vigorous tree type. Based on the past lackluster performance of the trees and the widespread resident support for their replacement, the Commission supported the staff recommendation that a public process be held to identify a replacement for the Idaho Locust trees on Peck Drive.

On February 6, 2015, staff held a public meeting at the Roxbury Community Center for the purpose of reviewing available nursery stock to identify potential replacements for the 120 Idaho Locust trees on Peck Drive. The meeting was attended by 23 residents, representing 16 addresses on Peck Drive. With no one tree type available in the quantity necessary to replace all 120 trees with a 36 inch box size tree at once, the group considered several tree types available in quantities of at least 60 trees. Towards the end of the February 6 meeting, several residents commented that the process seemed to be dictated by which trees were available in nurseries, at that particular time, and not so much about which tree might be the best for Peck

Drive. The attendees agreed that, instead of rushing to choose a tree that might not prove best for the street, residents would continue to meet as a committee and work to select preferred tree types which would then be passed along to City staff for a determination of availability.

In April 2015, the Peck Drive committee contacted City staff to report that the residents of the street were most interested in the 'Drake' variety of the Chinese Elm tree as a replacement tree for Peck Drive. On May 1, 2015, the City's urban forester accompanied two Peck Drive residents to a nursery in Camarillo to inspect several hundred 'Drake' Chinese Elms. At that time, the available stock included several hundred 24 inch box sized trees and approximately 50 trees in the desired 36 inch box size.

Since the trip to the nursery, the Peck Drive Committee has presented a petition that shows that 72% of the addresses on the street with one or more tree sites (78 of 107 addresses) are in favor of removing and replacing the Idaho Locust trees with the Drake Chinese Elm.

Understanding the volatility in procuring nursery stock, especially with the recent pick-up in new construction, the Peck Drive residents have expressed an urgency that the City procure enough of the 'Drake' Chinese Elms to replace the Idaho Locust trees on their street, even if that means the City buy smaller trees now and have them tended to and upsized until they reach a 36 inch box size and are ready to be planted on the street.

FISCAL IMPACT

The cost to remove 120 Idaho Locust trees on Peck Drive is approximately \$22,680. The cost to plant 120 Chinese Elm 'Drake' trees would be approximately \$75,000, making the total project cost approximately \$102,480.

The project will be prioritized within, and funded through, the existing CIP allotment for removal and replacement of trees through the Street Tree Master Plan program, meaning that no additional funding is being requested.

SUMMARY

Since being substituted as a replacement for the tree type originally chosen through the public process for Peck Drive as part of the Street Tree Master Plan of 1996, the Idaho Locust has failed to establish itself as a dependable and vigorous shade tree. After being patient with the tree for nearly a decade, a significant majority of Peck Drive residents have petitioned the City to remove the Idaho Locust trees and replace them with 'Drake' Chinese Elms.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Recreation and Parks Commission accepts the petition to replace the Idaho Locust trees on Peck Drive with Drake Chinese Elms and that the Commission supports staff's intention to seek the City Council's approval of this project in an upcoming study session meeting.