



City of Santa Barbara
Parks and Recreation Department

Memorandum

DATE: August 24, 2011

TO: Historic Landmarks Commission

FROM: Nancy L. Rapp, Parks and Recreation Director

SUBJECT: Proposed Historic Designation of Lemon Scented Gum Eucalyptus Trees at the Central Library

The Historic Landmarks Commission is considering whether to recommend to City Council that the Central Library, Faulkner Gallery and the thirteen (13) Lemon Scented Gum Eucalyptus (*Corymbia citriodora*) trees immediately adjacent to the Central Library be designated as Historic Landmarks. The Parks and Recreation Department recommends against including the Eucalyptus trees in the Historic designation and provides the following information for your consideration.

Definition of Historic Tree

The Municipal Code Chapter 15.20.020, defines a Historic Tree as a tree which has been found by the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC), or the City Council to be a tree of notable historic interest and has been designated by resolution of the City Council as an "historic tree".

Age and Condition of the Library Eucalyptus Trees

Tim Downey, Urban Forest Superintendent and City Arborist, has determined that the size and development of these thirteen trees are consistent with having been planted about 80 years ago. In his opinion, the trees are healthy and could remain so for another 80 – 100 years.

Parks and Recreation Commission Comments on Library Eucalyptus Trees

As part of their review of the Library Plaza Conceptual Design at their November 16, 2011 meeting, Parks and Recreation Commissioners made several comments on the Eucalyptus trees. While expressing support for the proposed project and improved public entrance to the Library, several commissioners expressed concerns about the proposed removal of the three Eucalyptus trees most adjacent to the Library plaza itself. Commissioners commented on the beauty of the trees and that the trees were notable skyline trees. Commissioners also talked about how difficult it would be making a decision to remove the trees would be, having to weigh the loss of the trees against the public benefit from an improved Library entrance and other plaza improvements.

Regulation of Trees on City Property

Trees located on City property are regulated under SBMC Chapter 15.20, Tree Planting and Maintenance, or the Street Tree Ordinance. As such, the City-owned trees at the Central Library are currently managed and regulated according to the City's Street Tree Ordinance.

Specifically SBMC 15.20.050 states that the Parks and Recreation Director is responsible for the inspection, maintenance, removal and replacement of all trees planted in public areas (including areas around public buildings), parkway strips, and tree wells. SBMC 15.20.110 related to permitting for planting, maintaining, or removing any trees within a street right-of-way or public area, states that the Director may defer to a consideration and recommendation by the Street Tree Advisory Committee (STAC) and decision by the Parks and Recreation Commission. It has been the Department's long-standing practice to forward tree removal applications to the STAC and Commission accompanied by a staff recommendation. Exceptions to this practice have been limited to trees which pose an immediate public safety concern or which are significantly unhealthy and likely to die.

Regulation of City and Historic Trees within Historic Districts

SBMC Chapter 22, Historic Structures, provides direction on approvals for alteration, construction, or relocation of structures or natural features (including trees) within historic landmark districts. Although 22.22.140 Section B states that City owned property including structures and natural features is within the purview of the HLC, Section D provides an exemption for street trees, City trees, and Historic or Specimen Trees. Specifically, Section D states that any tree planted in a parkway strip, public area, or street right-of-way owned or maintained by the City is processed and regulated pursuant to Chapter 15.20, the Street Tree Ordinance.

SBMC 22.22.140 Section D also makes an exemption for any tree designated as Historic or Specimen, stating that those trees are processed and regulated pursuant to Chapter 15.24, the Tree Preservation Ordinance. Accordingly, SBMC 15.24.060 provides that any requests to place, alter or remove Historic or Specimen trees are to be submitted to the STAC for consideration and recommendation. The STAC recommendation with a staff recommendation by the City Arborist/Parks and Recreation Director would be submitted to the Parks and Recreation Commission for action. The Commission must consider and make findings per SBMC 15.24.080 and 15.24.090 for tree removals.

Criteria for Tree Removals

To provide the greatest protection for the City's Urban Forest, both the Street Tree Ordinance and the Tree Preservation Ordinance require that decisions on tree removals be made according to specific established criteria. The Street Tree Ordinance, Chapter 15.20 (specifically 15.20.110) requires that the Parks and Recreation Commission consider the following when weighing a decision to remove a City tree:

- a) Whether the tree is designated as an historic or specimen tree;
- b) Whether the tree species and placement conform to the "Master Street Tree Plan;"
- c) The condition and structure of the tree and the potential for proper tree growth and development of the tree canopy;
- d) The number and location of adjacent trees on City property and the possibility of maintaining desirable tree density in the area through additional planting on City property; and
- e) Any beneficial effects upon adjacent trees to be expected from the proposed removal.

The Tree Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 15.24, (specifically 15.24.080 and 15.24.090) requires that very specific criteria be considered for tree removals, including:

- a) Whether such tree is designated as an historic or specimen tree;
- b) The potential size of the tree in relation to the size of the lot or building site and the size of the proposed or existing improvements;
- c) The number and size of other trees which would remain upon the building site after the requested removal;
- d) The number and location of adjacent trees on City property and the possibility of maintaining desirable tree density in the area through additional planting on City property;
- e) Any beneficial effects upon adjacent trees to be expected from the proposed removal;
- f) Whether the tree sought to be removed was planted by or with the permission of the applicant or the applicant's co-tenant at the time such tree was planted.
- g) The condition and structure of the tree and the potential for proper tree growth and development of the tree canopy.

In each instance, decisions of the Parks and Recreation Commission are appealable to City Council.

Conclusion

The conceptual plan developed in 2011 for the Library Plaza featured an improved Library entrance and plaza area for public use, and proposed removal of 3 Eucalyptus trees. Through the public review process concerns were expressed about the removal of the trees, in particular the three Eucalyptus trees most adjacent to the plaza and Library entrance. Although the project has been put on hold indefinitely, the HLC is considering including all 13 Eucalyptus trees in a Historic designation of the Central Library and Faulkner Gallery. The assumption is that designating the trees as Historic will provide a greater level of protection for these trees against removal in the future.

Although the Library trees are located within a historic district they are currently regulated by the Street Tree Ordinance described above. The Department's long-standing practice is to refer tree removal decisions to the STAC and Parks and Recreation Commission and strict criteria guides removal decisions. Clearly any decision to remove the Central Library's Eucalyptus Trees, particularly the three trees nearest to the main entrance, will be a difficult one for the Parks and Recreation Commission and others given the age, beauty and skyline aspect of the trees. Any decision will be expected to balance the value of the trees to the City's urban forest with benefits to the public from any proposed project that necessitated the removal.

It is the recommendation of the Parks and Recreation Department that the Eucalyptus trees not be included with a Historic designation of the Central Library and Faulkner Gallery at this time. The trees are currently and appropriately protected by the City's Street Tree Ordinance. For your further consideration, given the strong feelings many people expressed about balancing the value of the trees with a Library Plaza design which best meets the Library's and public's best interests, perhaps it is in the public's best interest to let the discussion take place in conjunction with the proposed project.

cc: Tim Downey, Urban Forest Superintendent
Jill Zachary, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director
Jaime Limon, Senior Planner
Nicole Hernandez, City Historian
Paul Casey, Assistant City Administrator
Irene Macias, Library Director