



Interoffice Memorandum

To: Jennifer Poirrier, City Manager

From: Daniel Slaughter, Assistant City Manager

CC: Michael Delk; Marcus Williamson; Art Kader; Chuck Lane; Matthew Anderson; Ali Ismailoski; Samantha Moullet

Date: 8/28/2023

At the direction of City Council, city staff were directed to review, revise and propose policies to manage Clearwater's urban forest which consists of approximately 20,000 trees. The City Council Strategic Plan provided direction on the desired outcome of the policy and practices recommended by staff, while balancing resource constraints. The primary objective derived from the City Council Strategic Plan is as follows:

Environmental Stewardship: Implement Proactive Solutions and Emerging Technologies for a Sustainable and Resilient Community.

Objective 4.3: Protect the conservation of urban forests and public green spaces to promote biodiversity and reduce our carbon footprint.

In addition to the above primary objective, staff also believes the following objectives from the City Council Strategic Plan are applicable:

Objective 3.1: Support neighborhood identity through services and programs that empower community pride and belonging.

Objective 3.3: Inspire citizen participation through civic engagement and volunteerism to build strong, inclusive, and engaged communities.

Based on the above, staff recommends the following directives to manage the urban forest:

- The City of Clearwater will prioritize the urban forest when addressing the impact of trees on underground utilities, streets, or sidewalks. The City of Clearwater will address conflicts by curving sidewalks, curbs, and rerouting utilities when possible and not cost prohibitive, prioritizing the tree.
- The City of Clearwater will conduct a tree survey on a reoccurring bases and maintain an inventory that includes the location, species, and rating of the tree at a minimum.

- The City of Clearwater will remove dead and decaying trees rated “0” located in the right of way or easements, City of Clearwater Property, and roadway medians. Prior to removal, the City of Clearwater or vendor contracted by the City of Clearwater will notify the adjoining property owners of the planned removal and the reason for the removal.
- The notification process will require staff to 1) make personal contact with a representative of the adjoining property owner, 2) place a door hanger notification at the adjoining property, or 3) attempt to contact a representative of the adjoining property by phone. In addition to above, if the property is in an area represented by a homeowner’s association, the association will also be notified via email by the Neighborhood Services Team. Absent an exigent safety issue, no removal of a tree may commence until either a representative of the adjoining property is contacted, or after 48-hours after all three contact methods are exhausted.
- The City of Clearwater may remove a tree on public property that is not rated “0” when there is a life safety issue with approval from the Public Works Director. Additionally, trees that have shared ownership (partially on private property and in the right-of-way), will require the approval of the Public Works Director and only after consultation with the private property owner.
- A residential property owner is permitted (at their own risk) to conduct trimming, pruning, and maintenance of trees in a manner allowed by City of Clearwater Community Development Code Article 4, Division 12, of trees located in the right of way adjacent to their property.
- The City of Clearwater will address low hanging branches and limbs that create an unsafe condition or interfere with vehicle travel on roadways or pedestrian travel on sidewalks.
- The City of Clearwater’s removal of a tree on private property will be limited to life safety or another emergency.

The City of Clearwater will conserve the urban forest through the following efforts:

- The City of Clearwater seeks to promote the preservation of the urban forest by planting trees at a ratio of five trees planted for every four removed.
- When a tree is removed, the City of Clearwater will first seek to plant a new tree at or within reasonable proximity to where a tree has been removed. If that is not possible, a new tree will try to be located within the neighborhood where the tree was removed. As a last resort, if the prior two options are not possible, the tree will be planted within the same urban forest zone where the tree was removed or in a public greenspace.
- City staff will conduct initiatives to educate the adjoining property representative and inspire citizen/neighborhood participation in caring for a new tree when a new tree is planted near an adjoining property.
- The Neighborhood Services Team, in cooperation with the Public Works Department will create and promote an “adopt-a-tree” program where city staff, homeowner’s associations, and/or residents work in cooperation to plant a tree provided by the City of Clearwater in a proper location on private property, where the resident serves as a steward for the tree and retains responsibility for maintenance of the tree.

- The Public Works Department, Neighborhood Services Team, and Public Communications will work cooperatively to produce materials that educate residents on the “right tree, right place” philosophy, how to determine where the resident’s property line and right-of-way are, and encouraging stewardship of community trees. This includes establishing pact agreements with neighborhood associations so they can obtain recognition from the City of Clearwater for being good stewards of community trees in their respective neighborhoods.
- City staff will identify a list of approved trees for planting and the maintenance and location criteria for each species. When practical, city staff and the adjoining property owner will work together to select the tree. Only specific species will be permitted to be planted in the right-of-way between the sidewalk and roadway.
- The City of Clearwater will continue to meet the requirements to retain recognition as a “Tree City USA” and annually participate in the Arbor Day Tree Giveaway. The City of Clearwater will conduct a communication campaign that informs the public of best practices for planting, maintaining, and protecting the urban forest.

To accomplish the policy and practices described above, the Public Works Department will develop additional operational language to implement this directive. The following activities are currently in progress or will be initiated:

- Public Works Department is currently re-engaging the previously selected vendor(s) to reinitiate the tree survey/inventory/rating of all trees. The survey will be completed annually in one of five zones, so each zone is inventoried and rated once every five years. The vendor previously completed zone 1 and portions of zone 2.
- Public Works Department is currently re-engaging the previously selected vendor to reinitiate the capacity to perform tree & stump removals.
- There is currently a posted invitation to bid for vendors to trim/prune city palm trees.
- Public Works Department will identify the species of trees that will be provided for planting, the planting conditions for each species, and a plan to procure those species.
- Procure a vendor to conduct pruning of trees on city properties and right of ways, including city parks.
- Fund tree replacement program, planting of trees (5 plantings per 4 removals) and the annual Arbor Day from the Tree Management Program & the Tree Replacement Program.

The available budget and funding sources to support the above activities are as follows:

0101312-530300-10	Hardwood tree removal	\$191,800
0101312-530300-20	Palm trimming once per year for all palms in ROW/medians/Parks (some twice a year)	\$188,000
0101312-530300-40	ROW/medians tree trim/prune	\$182,680
Project M2006	ROW Tree management program, removal of diseased trees/tree inventory	\$300,000
SP 181-99970	Tree Replacement Program	\$150,000
	TOTAL FUNDING IN 23/24	\$1,012,480

In conclusion, the proposed directives include the best practices staff has done in the past and corrects practices that created public concern. The intent of the policy is to refine our process to further protect our urban forest and prioritize the tree. Additionally, the new policies empower residents to care for and extend the lives of nearby trees in the right of way and immediately adjacent to a property.

The tree planting activities are designed to maintain our inventory of trees in the City of Clearwater, fulfilling and exceeding the Council's direction to protect and conserve our urban forest. All the described activities will need to be complimented with a robust community engagement campaign. This directive was constructed from feedback from the Environmental Advisory Board, Parks and Recreation staff, Public Works staff, Neighborhood Services, and other citizen feedback.