

**CITY OF ALBANY
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda date: February 4, 2008

Reviewed by: _____

Subject: Removal of Monterey Pines from Gill Tract – Status Report

Report by: Ann Chaney, Community Development Director

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Information only. No action is required at this time.

BACKGROUND

Recently the University of California, Berkeley, informed the City of findings from their master arborist and landscape architect, that the Monterey Pines at the Gill Tract had to be removed for reasons of public safety. Specifically, University representatives have stated that most of the Monterey Pines on the property are infected with pitch canker, which causes individual branches to die and leads to a general decline in the health of the tree, and often death.

On January 10, 2008, as an emergency agenda item, the Parks and Recreation Commission received information from UC representatives about the ultimate removal of 317 Monterey Pines, with a plan to remove the trees in two phases. Phase 1 would involve removal of approximately 184 trees, located within 70 feet of the sidewalk adjacent to San Pablo Avenue and Buchanan Street. Removal of Phase 1 trees was anticipated to start on January 28. Phase 2 involves approximately 133 trees, but removal of these trees is unfunded at this time. The Commission felt the University could have done a better job in preparing the Albany community of this plan given that the stand of trees at the Gill Tract is an Albany landmark. According to UC representatives, more than 150 other trees at the Gill Tract will remain. These include cedar, redwood, palm and eucalyptus trees.

On January 22, 2008, the City Council considered a recommendation from the Parks and Recreation Commission that the Mayor send a letter to the University of California, Berkeley, urging the University to provide the City with advance communication and opportunity for involvement before removing the second phase of Monterey Pines. Following extension testimony and discussion on this issue, the City Council directed the City Attorney to talk with UC Berkeley immediately about entering into a Tolling

Agreement. The Council also authorized staff to work with UC staff to negotiate a modification to the plan based on the input received from the community.

ANALYSIS

Because of the Council action, and University's tree removal start date of January 28, City staff promptly requested an on-site meeting with UC staff. Thus, on January 24, Council Member Wile, the City Administrator, Community Development Director, and City Arborist, surveyed the tree conditions with UC's Campus Landscape Architect, Master Arborist, and Community Relations Assistant Director. From a City standpoint, the purpose of the site visit was to collectively identify healthy trees that could remain in Phase 1, rather than remove all the Monterey Pines regardless of health.

During the field inspection, City representatives observed clear evidence of canker in the Monterey Pines, along with poor structure in the body of the trees, as well as beetle and fungi infestation. Even a tree that appeared from a distance to be healthy, showed signs of the disease or the beginnings of die-out. Based on these observations, it was difficult to argue that the trees in Phase 1 should be saved. However, the City raised a number of concerns and requests for commitment that have been conveyed to the University, and for which the City is currently negotiating. The City will continue these discussions with the University and report the progress to the City Council.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

None.

Attachment

Tree removal plan diagram (submitted by University staff)