



## Memorandum

Date: March 9, 2022  
To: Mayor and Council Members  
From: Don Scholl, Director of Public Works  
Subject: Follow-up on Inquiry Regarding Tree Removals

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The purpose of this memorandum is to provide information regarding questions raised by Mayor Pro Tem Vargas during the February 1, 2022 Council meeting about tree removals on certain City properties. Three specific locations where trees had been removed were noted: Ritter Family Ballpark; Plascencia Fields; and the Civic Center Complex. Below are the details about these removals for each site:

### Ritter Family Ballpark (formerly Tracy Ballpark) trees –

Ritter Family Ballpark (previously Tracy Ballpark) was initially constructed in 1946. Since that time, only a few improvements were made, with the last significant infrastructure improvement taking place in 1992.- the installation of then new field lighting. One of the features of the site were the approximately 16 – 20 River She-Oak trees (*Casuarina cunninghamiana*) along Tracy Blvd. These trees were very massive but relatively short because they had been routinely topped by P, G & E tree contractors to prevent the trees from damaging the electrical wires directly overhead. The age of the trees, the fact that they had developed multiple large trunks at the base, and the topping practice noted previously, created weakened trees that began losing large sections of the massive trunks and large limbs in the early- and mid-2000's. The prevailing northwest winds of Tracy meant that the majority of these limbs and trunks fell toward the playing fields - damaging the fences and other amenities at the facility. In 2008, preliminary designs for renovation of the Tracy Ballpark were prepared but the project did not progress. By 2009, the continued tree failures necessitated their removal to ensure public safety and prevent further damage to the facility. Replacement of these trees has not yet taken place because discussion about redesign and/or renovations to the site have not yet provided a long-term design for the park. On February 22, 2022, Council discussed and provided direction on the future of this facility. The outcome of that direction will provide guidance on future tree planting at the facility.

### Plascencia Fields Redwood Tree Removals -

Plascencia Fields was renovated in 2004. Part of that renovation included the addition of a line of Redwood trees along the western edge of the facility. These trees were placed in a six- to

eight-foot-wide area between a storm water conveyance channelway and the backyard fences of bordering residences. Unfortunately, the trees selected at the time, *Sequoia sempervirens* (Coast Redwoods) are ill suited for the warm environment, and the high Boron and Sodium content found in soils in Tracy - and are a high-water use tree. The planting of the Redwoods in an adverse environment created stressful conditions on the trees, and as drought conditions worsened over the years, the trees began to fail and pose a potential fire hazard. Eventually these combined stresses resulted in the demise of the Redwoods and necessitated their removal in February of 2020. We have been experiencing similar losses of these trees in other locations throughout the City due to their poor adaptation to our conditions. (Cities throughout the Central Valley have experienced similar challenges with these trees.) Replacement of these trees is not planned at this time because of the poor accessibility of the area which makes proper maintenance of trees extremely difficult and risky, the difficulty of effectively watering trees in such a location, and the close proximity of the backyards of the neighboring properties. The area will remain vacant and on our scheduled weed control program.

#### Civic Center Complex removals -

In January, 2022, (18) *Pyrus calleryana* (Bradford Pears) were removed in several locations next to City Hall and within the Civic Center campus. Though typically referred to as a species of Flowering Pear, these trees do actually produce small fruit that stain nearby sidewalks and can make the area slick. Bradford Pears are prone to poor limb attachments and structure, aggressive roots that damage nearby walkways and utilities, and dropping of fruit that can make walkways unsafe. Additionally, these trees are relatively short-lived and as they age, are prone to Fire Blight and mistletoe infestation. Unfortunately, this species of tree has been grossly overplanted throughout the city and remain an ongoing issue for the long-term health of our urban forest.

The trees that were removed from the Civic Center site had grown very little since their planting, were in areas immediately adjacent to walkways, and some were planted in a planter bed that was barely two feet wide. Staff had already begun to find the early signs of irrigation system damage and the nearby walkways were being threatened. Fruit from the trees have been an issue with the walkways and surrounding ADA ramps. Lastly, in some locations the other nearby Oak trees were crowding the Pears. Staff has already replaced three of these trees with a more appropriate species – *Ginkgo biloba*. Several more of these, along with other suitable species will be planted this spring and coming fall.

A few additional items of note related to this topic are:

- There are over 35,500 City trees cared for by Tracy's Urban Forestry program.
- Over recent years, City staff, City tree care contractor, and volunteers have planted over 1,000 trees throughout Tracy. Suitability for the Tracy environment and drought tolerance are key criteria used by staff when selecting or approving new trees on public property or in the public right-of-way.
- City crews and the City tree care contractor have trimmed a total of 2,135 trees in various areas throughout the City during the period of July 1, 2021 to February 1, 2022. This is a typical example of our Urban Forestry Division's programmed pruning cycle.
- All tree removals are reviewed by an International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborist.
- The City's Urban Forestry Management Plan (UFMP) will soon be scheduled for presentation to Council. The Plan was presented to the Parks and Community Services

March 9, 2022

Page 3 of 3

Commission in March, 2021 and was scheduled for Council consideration at its October 5, 2021 meeting. On the day before this meeting, one of our reviewing partners expressed hesitancy about several items within the UFMP, and the item was pulled from the agenda. We have now addressed those concerns and will work to get the UFMP back on the City Council calendar for review and approval.