

## WESTWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

February 12, 2020

Agenda Item #10

Hello, neighborhood council board members,

The members of the Neighborhood Council Sustainability Alliance (NCSA) Trees Committee want to be sure you are aware of a critical opportunity for individuals and neighborhood councils to take a position on the future of our urban tree canopy.

The City of Los Angeles has launched a program to repair our broken sidewalks. As part of a settlement of the Willits class action lawsuit, a sidewalk repair program (SRP) called Safe Sidewalks LA began 3 years ago, and as a result, hundreds of large trees have already been removed, even though an environmental impact report (EIR) had not been conducted. We all want our sidewalks repaired, but we cannot afford to lose our urban tree canopy.

Through this 30-year SRP program, close to 13,000 large, mature trees are projected to be removed and replaced with 15-gallon saplings.

On December 26, 2019, the Sidewalk Repair Program Draft EIR was finally released. Here is a link: <https://sidewalks.lacity.org/environmental-impact-report>. The NCSA Trees Committee has serious concerns that this lengthy report is not informed by science and ignores the City's own Dudek report, which cites tree preservation as critical for the health of our city and its inhabitants.

The goal of this draft EIR is to "streamline" the implementation of the sidewalk repair program and enable trees to be removed without challenge. We have concerns about the rush to remove trees without adequate due process, public involvement, and consideration of more sustainable approaches. We know there are hardscape alternatives to tree removals, such as bulb-outs, that are utilized in other cities to divert the sidewalk around the tree in order to retain it that are not proposed for Los Angeles. Visit

[www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDOT/Trees/TreeSidewalksOperationsPlan\\_final215.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDOT/Trees/TreeSidewalksOperationsPlan_final215.pdf) to learn more.

Although new young trees will be planted, the projected return to the tree canopy baseline as it existed prior to the program will not occur for 30 years. The report ignores or fails to evaluate numerous health and environmental impacts that result from tree removals. These include an increased heat island effect, a decline in air quality, loss of wildlife, and loss of stormwater capture. No mitigation of ecosystem services loss is addressed in this EIR because trees are considered a design element rather than an ecosystem service provider.

Trees take decades to grow to maturity, and the report anticipates a new tree mortality rate of only 8%, which we believe is overly optimistic, particularly given that budget and capacity constraints may make proper maintenance and irrigation of young trees extremely challenging. The City of Santa Monica's chief forester reported at the City of Los Angeles's 2019 Tree Summit that they experience 20% mortality with street tree saplings, and their urban forestry program is highly regarded. The City of Los Angeles's replacement-tree list excludes important large-canopy tree species, and it is the large trees that provide greater ecosystem services than smaller trees. It is these valuable species that are frequent candidates for removal.

We are now in an important public comment period through February 24, and we are asking you to take action:

1. Call your city council office and the Mayor and urge them to shift the City's outdated practices to a modern, ecologically-centered approach that uses sustainable methods and aligns with the public's growing demand for a healthy, leafy, green city.
2. Attend public input meetings for the EIR to make your opinions heard.
3. Submit a written comment about the program.
4. Protect your community and the environment by sharing this information with your friends and neighbors.
5. Agendize this for your neighborhood council meeting. A sample motion is included below. If you need more time for your neighborhood

council to get this done, send a request to extend the public comment period to Shilpa Gupta at [Shilpa.Gupta@lacity.org](mailto:Shilpa.Gupta@lacity.org). (See sample email letter on the NCSA Website Trees section)

**Please publicize and rally people to attend SRP Draft EIR scoping meetings. Make your opinions heard. Ask for changes.**

**SIDEWALK REPAIR PROGRAM DRAFT EIR  
PUBLIC MEETINGS**

**January 29, 2020, 5 pm–7 pm**  
Sunland-Tujunga Branch Library  
7771 W Foothill Blvd, Tujunga, CA 91042

**January 30, 2020, 6 pm–8 pm**  
Watts Senior Citizen Center  
1657 E Century Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90002

**February 5, 2020, 6 pm–8 pm**  
Lafayette Multipurpose Community Center  
625 S La Fayette Park Pl, Los Angeles, CA 90057

**February 6, 2020, 6 pm–8 pm**  
Reseda Recreation Center  
18411 W Victory Blvd, Reseda, CA 91335

**February 12, 2020, 6 pm–8 pm**  
Westchester Senior Citizen Center  
8740 S Lincoln Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90045

**February 13, 2020, 6 pm–8 pm**  
Normandale Recreation Center  
22400 S Halldale Ave, Torrance, CA 90501

**February 15, 2020, 10 am–12 pm**  
Robert Louis Stevenson Branch Library  
803 S Spence St, Los Angeles, CA 90023