



Agenda Report

January 12, 2026

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Department of Public Works
SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF THE MASTER STREET TREE PLAN AMENDMENTS

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Find that the proposed amendments to the Master Street Tree Plan are categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15304 (Class 4) pertaining to Minor Alterations to Land such as new gardening or landscaping, Section 15301 (Class 1) pertaining to Existing Facilities, and Section 15308 (Class 8) pertaining to actions for Protection of the Environment; and
2. Approve the amendments to the Master Street Tree Plan:
 - a. Replace the designated tree species of Italian Cypress tree to Noble Laurel tree for Fairfield Circle; and
 - b. Approve a General Amendment to allow the use of an Alternative Tree Species List under certain conditions in the interest of public safety and promotion of a diverse and resilient urban forest.

MUNICIPAL SERVICES COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:

On October 28, 2025, the Municipal Services Committee (MSC) voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council approve the amendment to the Master Street Tree Plan (MSTP) that would replace Italian Cypress tree with Noble Laurel tree on Fairfield Circle, and approve the MSTP General Amendment with the following comments and questions:

- Provide greater emphasis on shade production and canopy equity within Guiding Principles section of the General Amendment document.
- Clarify that the General Amendment document is a first step and limited in scope to tree species selection, but a broader effort, such as an Urban Forestry Master Plan is underway and will demonstrate the City's commitment to long-term urban forest management.

- Assess whether the Design Commission's recommendations can be incorporated into the General Amendment document.
- Assess what resources are needed for long-term urban forest management.
- Review street tree recommendations from the City's Updated Specific Plans and reconcile with implementation plan of the General Amendment document.
- Tree planting should be prioritized in areas with less canopy coverage.
- Amend fire-prone tree species throughout the City, not only within areas designated by CAL FIRE as fire hazard zones.

ADVISORY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS:

Urban Forestry Advisory Committee

On May 14, 2025, the Urban Forestry Advisory Committee (UFAC) voted unanimously to support staff's recommendation to replace Italian Cypress tree with Noble Laurel tree along Fairfield Circle.

On September 10, 2025, UFAC voted unanimously in support of the version of the Master Street Tree Plan Draft General Amendment as provided by staff.

Design Commission

On September 23, 2025, the Design Commission voted 3 in favor and 3 opposed to support staff's recommendation to replace Italian Cypress tree with Noble Laurel tree along Fairfield Circle. The motion did not pass.

On September 23, 2025, the Design Commission voted unanimously to recommend City Council consider the following related to the Master Street Tree Plan Draft General Amendment:

- Review additional studies to expand the consideration of additional species for inclusion in the Alternative Tree Species List along with appropriate reasoning.
- Approve a general amendment to prohibit planting fire-prone tree species in high-risk fire zone areas of the City, along with an appropriate buffer zone.
- Analyze smaller localized geographic areas of Pasadena to refine the Alternative Tree Species List in order to guide tree planting in specific areas of the City.

BACKGROUND:

The Master Street Tree Plan (MSTP) was first adopted as the Official Street Tree List in 1940 by the Pasadena Park Department and called for specific tree species to be planted on streets throughout the City. As parts of Los Angeles County were annexed into Pasadena and post-World War II subdivisions expanded, older public streets were rebuilt and new ones constructed, adding more street trees into the City's urban forest. By 1976, the City adopted the *Master Street Tree Plan*, aiming to bring greater consistency to the selection and placement of street trees. The current iteration of the MSTP is available on the City's Department of Public Works' webpage, as a GIS map feature.

In March 2025, the Department of Public Works (PW) received a request from a resident of Fairfield Circle to consider replacing the existing Italian Cypress trees with an alternative tree species. The community expressed concern that the columnar form of Italian Cypress tree provides little canopy shade, and that the Cypress foliage poses an elevated fire hazard.

Staff, through coordination with Council District 7, met with residents in March 2025 and proposed the following alternative tree species as potential replacements: Strawberry, *Arbutus unedo*, tree and Noble Laurel, *Laurus nobilis* tree. Both tree species were found by staff to be size-appropriate for the narrow parkway along Fairfield Circle. Both tree species were also found to support biodiversity and provide ecological value, both criteria of which has been expressed to be important factors in considering tree species replacements. After the neighborhood meeting, residents were asked to complete a survey of which tree species they preferred. The majority of the residents selected Noble Laurel as the preferred replacement species.

The Fairfield Circle amendment request and survey findings from the community were presented to UFAC by PW staff at its regular meeting on May 14, 2025. UFAC voted unanimously to support staff's recommendation replacing Italian Cypress tree with Noble Laurel tree along Fairfield Circle.

The Fairfield Circle amendment request was presented to the Design Commission at its meeting on September 23, 2025. The Design Commission voted 3 in favor and 3 opposed to support staff's recommendation. The motion did not pass. The Design Commission was concerned that too few replacement tree species were considered when staff met with residents of Fairfield Circle.

Fairfield Circle is a narrow, sloped parkway. Only 22 properties have frontage along Fairfield Circle. Initially, six potential replacement trees - of which two are California-natives - were presented to staff by Campion Walker, the landscape design representative for 851 Fairfield Circle (Attachment A). When staff met with Fairfield Circle residents in March, the list of six replacement species was reduced to two options: Strawberry, *Arbutus unedo*, tree and Noble Laurel, *Laurus nobilis*, tree. Interested residents were then asked to indicate their preferred replacement species through a mail-in survey. (Attachment B). In summarizing the background of this amendment request in the Design Commission staff report, staff omitted the details of the six, pre-selection tree species, but articulated this detail in the meeting. This process to amend the designated tree species for Fairfield Circle, and the residents' selected

replacement species of Noble Laurel tree, has been coordinated with Council District 7 and is consistent with the Department's process for amending the City's Master Street Tree Plan (Attachment C).

MSTP amendment requests, such as the request to amend the designated tree species for Fairfield Circle, are received by the Department periodically. The process can be arduous, and at times consensus cannot be reached amongst residents. Additionally, concerns have been raised that the current MSTP is not keeping pace with modern advancements in arboriculture and urban forestry management.

The Department has developed a MSTP General Amendment to preserve the vast majority of current tree species designations. It also addresses concerns about integrating tree species that are less prone to flammability and promote climate resilience and ecological biodiversity. Staff presented a concept and update of the General Amendment to UFAC at its May and June regular meetings, respectively.

The General Amendment will adopt the following guiding principles and an Alternative Tree Species List that will be used under the conditions described below:

1. Public Safety – if the current MSTP designated tree species has characteristics more prone to flammability (such as *Eucalyptus*, *Pine*, *Cypress* and *Palm* species), then staff should utilize a tree species from the Alternative Tree Species List.
2. Tree Species Diversity – if the planting work will use an existing tree species that is of concern due to the 10-20-30 rule, staff should utilize a species from the Alternative Tree Species List. The 10-20-30 rule recommends hedging the forestry diversity to no more than 10% of any single species; 20% of any single genus; and 30% of any single family in order to avoid a catastrophic loss from a pest or pathogen that thrives on certain trees. At this time, Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*); Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) and Camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*) are all close to the 10% species threshold.
3. Placemaking – if the planting work is within one of the City's recently Updated Specific Plan areas, and the current designated species is concerned to be poor performing, staff may utilize the tree species recommended in the Appendix section of each respective Specific Plan.

The Alternative Tree Species List is aggregated from current recommendations in arboriculture and urban forestry management that promote climate resilient tree species, trees that promote ecological biodiversity and planting native tree species. See Section 5 in the MSTP Draft General Amendment (Attachment G).

UFAC unanimously voted to support the MSTP General Amendment at its September 10, 2025, meeting.

The Department then presented the MSTP General Amendment to the Design Commission at its meeting on September 23, 2025. The Design Commission voted unanimously to

recommend City Council consider the MSTP General Amendment with consideration of their recommendations.

The Design Commission expressed concern that the proposed Alternative Tree Species list felt arbitrary and lacked background as to why certain tree species were selected. The Alternative Tree Species List combines recommendations from the University of California, Davis (UC Davis) *Climate Ready Trees Study* (Attachment D) and the Pasadena Audubon Society's *Recommended Modifications to Pasadena Street Tree Policy* (Attachment E) which references work from California State University, Los Angeles' (Cal State LA) Urban Ecology Center.

The UC Davis Climate Ready Trees study tracked the performance of underutilized tree species against different environmental stressors, such as drought tolerance, wind tolerance and disease and pest susceptibility in three different climate zone: Central Valley, Inland Empire and Coastal region. The Climate Ready Trees study was started in 2015 and is intended to be a 20-year study. Pasadena Audubon's Recommended Modifications to Pasadena Street Tree Policy was produced and provided to the Department in 2021. Pasadena Audubon's recommended tree species is based on demonstrated suitability as a Southern California street tree, non-invasiveness, medium to low allergenicity and root damage, and supports biodiversity, local food webs, and bird habitat based on data gathered from Cal State LA's Urban Ecology Center.

The Design Commission and members of the public at the September 23 meeting also expressed interest in incorporating additional native tree species into the Alternative Tree Species List. However, the environmental benefits of native tree species remains subject of debate within the arboricultural and urban forestry communities. Five California native tree species, nonetheless, are currently proposed in the Alternative Tree Species List. Additional native tree species recommended by the Theodore Payne Foundation (Attachment F) were reviewed by staff but determined to be impractical for the following reasons: the species is already commonly used; the species is not size-appropriate for most parkways; the shape and form is more shrub like or multi-trunk; or the species is noted to have elevated allergenic concern.

The MSTP guides what tree species are planted throughout the City, and as such, is limited in scope. The MSTP General Amendment is intended to incorporate best management practices for species selection and identify opportunities to utilize the Alternative Tree Species list under specific conditions. The MSC comments from the October 28, 2025, meeting have all been incorporated and highlighted in Attachment G. The MSTP General Amendment is the first step in a broader effort to develop a comprehensive Urban Forestry Master Plan that is anticipated to be presented to City Council in FY 2027.

It is important to note that the adoption of either the Fairfield Circle Replacement Tree Species, or the MSTP General Amendment will not authorize staff to remove live, healthy public trees. The replacement tree species will be planted as conditions allow and existing trees meet thresholds for removal.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

The Fairfield Circle MSTP Amendment and the MSTP General Amendment are consistent with the City's General Plan Land Use Element which calls for preservation of historic resources, environmental sustainability and citizen participation. Both amendment requests are also consistent with the City Council's goals that promote public safety, improve public infrastructure and increase sustainability.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

The proposed amendments to the Master Street Tree Plan are categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15304, Class 4 pertaining to Minor Alterations to Land such as new gardening or landscaping, and Section 15308, Class 8 pertaining to Actions by Regulatory Agencies for the Protection of the Environment because these actions are authorized by local ordinance to assure the maintenance, enhancement and protection of the environment with procedures for protection of the environment.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Fairfield Circle MSTP Amendment and the MSTP General Amendment are expected to have negligible fiscal impact on the Department's operating budget. The cost for tree planting material is not expected to significantly change due to the use of the Alternative Tree Species List.

Respectfully submitted,



GREG DE VINCK, P.E.
Director of Public Works

Prepared by:



Thanos Gauthier
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Approved by:



MIGUEL MÁRQUEZ
City Manager

Attachments:

- A. Fairfield Circle Replacement Tree Species by Campion Walker
- B. Fairfield Circle Community Survey
- C. Procedure to Process Amendments to Master Street Tree Plan
- D. UC Davis Climate Ready Tree Study
- E. Recommended Modifications to Pasadena's Street Tree Policy by Pasadena Audubon
- F. Native Trees for Urban Gardens by Theodore Payne Foundation
- G. Master Street Tree Plan Draft General Amendment