



CITY OF FORT BRAGG

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COUNCIL COMMITTEE ITEM SUMMARY REPORT

MEETING DATE: July 14, 2022
TO: Public Works and Facilities
FROM: C. O’Neal; Assistant Director
AGENDA ITEM TITLE: Discuss Potential Formation of a Tree Advisory Committee and Tree Preservation Ordinance and Make Recommendation of City Council Directing Staff to Prepare Regulatory Framework

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW:

Council Member Albin-Smith approached staff regarding the creation of a Tree Advisory Committee and Tree Preservation Ordinance, requesting this item come forward. Albin-Smith provided some sample documents including a summary document of an Advisory Committee and a sample Tree Preservation Ordinance (attachment 1 & 2).

While the City does not currently have a tree preservation ordinance, there are several policies within the General Plan intended to protect, preserve, and plant native tree and plant species. Many communities have tree preservation ordinances with policies ranging from protection of public trees and encouraging new plantings, some mainly focus of safety and hazard mitigation inspections, while others restrict removal of any tree on public or private property without a tree removal permit. A tree ordinance in the City of Fort Bragg would ideally fall somewhere in-between these two models with the goal of controlling the removal of trees to preserve the beneficial impacts that trees provide including preventing erosion, maintaining property values, and for their aesthetic, natural, and historic value. Within the context of our existing codes, do we have the tools necessary to achieve this goal? In addition to the General Plan Policies, other existing City codes, which regulate vegetation protection, planting, and removal, include; Model Water Efficiency Landscaping Ordinance (MWELo), Weed Abatement, Fire Mitigation, and land use Landscaping codes.

Process and Timeline

Study Session and formation of Tree Advisory Committee
Define Goals, policies, and programs

Planning Commission Meeting(s) to prepare Ordinance
Attorney review
Approval by Council prior to Codification
Citywide tree evaluation, mapping, and planning
Permit processing protocol for tree removal
Calculate permitting fees and additional timeline to process permits
Maintenance of protected trees
Notification and appeal process for protected tree removal
Enforcement

Implementation and Enforcement

The resultant ordinance would ultimately determine how much staff time and resources would be necessary to prepare and implement such a ruling. Estimates from other Cities necessitated up to three (3) additional full time staff members for creation and implementation of a tree ordinance. Most Cities with tree ordinances have a full Parks and Recreation Department, a staff Arborists, and/or a Forestry Management Team. The proposed ordinance will add additional duties and responsibilities to the City's Planning, Code Enforcement, Engineering, and Maintenance Crew staff to review and inspect various types of planning applications, development permits, and maintain the program.

In an effort to further understand and quantify the potential impact of creating an ordinance and tree preservation database, staff reviewed publicly available tree canopy mapping tool provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd645759.html. According to the 2018 Urban Tree Canopy mapping dataset, census tracts within the City of Fort Bragg average 22%-24% tree canopy with approximately 1,700 acres of canopy. Evaluating, cataloging, and determining the "heritage" value of existing trees alone (as proposed by the tree advisory committee memo) is a significant undertaking.

Where does this ordinance fall within the scope of City priorities? From what fund, should costs be covered? What subject matter experts should be brought in to consult?

RECOMMENDATION:

Make recommendation to City Council if the Committee recommends staff pursue preparation of regulatory framework for tree ordinance.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Sample Tree Advisory Committee Summary
2. Sample Tree Preservation Ordinance
3. Urban Tree Canopy Map