



# Information Item

Date: April 29, 2011

To: Mayor and City Council  
From: Barbara Stinchfield, Director of Community & Cultural Services  
Subject: Tree Species Selection Process for Georgina and Marguerita Avenues

## Introduction

Requested by the City Council at its April 12, 2011 meeting, this Information Item provides information about the process for the selection of replacement street tree species along Georgina and Marguerita Avenues.

## Background

In June 2009, the South Coast Air Quality Management District offered a tree planting funding opportunity for cities and counties. Entitled the Tree Partnership, the goal of this program is to increase the awareness of benefits that trees provide in reducing carbon, toxic air pollutants, and greenhouse gases. The program also provides temporary employment opportunities for students to assist in tree planting and community educational outreach about the benefits trees provide. In August 2010, the City of Santa Monica was awarded a grant in the amount of \$198,250. At the [August 10, 2010](#) meeting, City Council approved the acceptance of this grant.

This tree planting project will add 1,000 California native trees to the City's urban forest and is also being undertaken in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service's Center for Urban Forest Research (CUFR). One of the primary objectives of the partnership with CUFR is to record tree growth and to measure the corresponding removal and storage of carbon from the atmosphere by publicly owned and managed trees. Tree Partnership grant funds will enable the City of Santa Monica to complete the planting of 1,000 trees

within the terms of the grant agreement and begin recording data immediately for the CUFRR to use. Data will ultimately be used to measure how Santa Monica's urban forest contributes towards the reduction of greenhouse gases.

Over the past few months, the tree species selection committee of the Council-appointed Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force has been identifying proposed replacement tree species for all street segments in Santa Monica to be included as part of the proposed Urban Forest Master Plan. The Master Plan is currently being drafted and will be reviewed by the community and commissions during the spring and summer and by Council in October 2011. The 1,000 trees from the Tree Partnership have been integrated into this tree species selection planning process and when an appropriate street has been identified, tree partnership species have been included in the list of proposed replacement species.

In identifying proposed replacement tree species, the tree species selection committee looked for areas in the City where canopy could be increased. Site conditions were analyzed on each street segment using criteria such as parkway size, size of the existing canopies, street width, health and condition of existing trees, monoculture or mixed species, and the number of existing trees and current vacancies.

### **Discussion**

As the proposed tree species were identified for the areas north of Montana, the sycamore was designated for Marguerita and Georgina Avenues based on the above criteria. The Canary Island Date Palms that now line Marguerita and Georgina are vulnerable to fusarium, an untreatable fungus, and 32 of the palms are currently in a state of decline. This special condition led staff and the tree species selection committee to decide that the planting of sycamores would not only increase the tree canopy, but also address the vulnerability of the existing palms and provide an alternative when these palms had to be replaced.

Because students had been hired to plant Tree Partnership trees elsewhere in the City and had finished their work ahead of schedule, staff made a decision to proceed with the planting of sycamores on Georgina and Marguerita Avenues. Flyers were created and physically distributed to each home on the two streets in the form of door hangers. The notice explained to the residents the purpose of the project and how it would benefit the environment. It stated:

“As part of the City’s ongoing efforts to improve the local environment, a California native tree will be planted in the parkway adjacent to your home. This new tree is part of a 100 year study by the US Forest Service with the specific goal of recording tree growth for the purpose of measuring carbon sequestration by publicly owned and managed trees.

The site adjacent to your home was selected because of a need for increased canopy cover on this street. The species has been designated by the Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force sub-Committee on street tree species selection. The tree will be planted in the coming weeks by West Coast Arborists, Inc. the City’s tree care contractor. A “T” marked on the top of the curb indicates the approximate location of where the tree will be planted.”

Once it became known that the residents on Georgina and Marguerita did not want sycamores on their streets, two meetings were held with area representatives to hear their concerns and let them know that the planting project had been halted and that sycamores had been removed from the proposed tree species replacement list for their streets. Staff explained the purpose of the project and the rationale for adding canopy to the street, including the challenges with the declining condition of the existing palm species. It was made clear that no trees were being removed at this time. Staff also acknowledged that resident input should have been included prior to taking steps to proceed with the planting.

In response to residents' concerns about preserving the existing street tree theme and a desire to identify an appropriate palm species when replacement is necessary, the tree species selection committee began working on a definition and criteria for streets with significant allees, such as those on Georgina or Marguerita. This process is potentially beneficial because it may give Council parameters for recognizing or creating future significant allees. This information will be reviewed by the Task Force at its public meeting on April 27, 2011 and public input will be taken.

An additional meeting with area representatives is also being scheduled for the end of April to discuss current research on replacement palm species and viable alternatives. In addition, residents have been encouraged to participate in three community workshops hosted by the Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force in May and June to provide additional input.

Workshop participants will be able to view a large map showing all streets in the city and the proposed street tree designations. The map will also highlight the proposed locations for the new Tree Partnership trees. A handout will list all the individual street segments, the dominant tree that currently exists on those street segments, the proposed street tree, and suggested alternates. A photo board will be on display to illustrate the look of the proposed trees. Following a presentation by the Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force, attendees will provide their input to staff and the Task Force on the proposed tree species plan. In addition to the workshops, residents will also be able to provide their input through an on-line survey.

The Urban Forest Master Plan, including the proposed designation of street tree species, will be presented to various City Commissions and Task Forces this spring and summer and to City Council in October 2011.

**Prepared By:** Randy Little, Public Landscape Manager