

Summary of Possible and Probable Mature Tree Removals On El Cerrito Public Property

A compilation of statistics based on the
City of El Cerrito Landscape Management Report
(Vallier Design Associates, 2003)

By Ross Tobia, City of El Cerrito Parks & Recreation Commissioner
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About This Summary

The statistics in this summary were compiled directly from counts taken from the El Cerrito Landscape Management Report Tree and Shrub Evaluations. The Original report was released by Vallier Design Associates in January 2003. This summary was prepared solely by Ross Tobia, who was appointed by the El Cerrito City Council to the position of Parks & Recreation Commissioner in December 2002.

The raw numbers used here were taken from the Tree and Shrub Evaluations and entered into an Excel Spreadsheet, which was later reformatted into an Access Database. The spreadsheet and database are available to those who are interested. Entries in the spreadsheet and database are identified by their page numbers. Tree and removal counts were double-checked for accuracy. Tree removal reasons were counted as they were mentioned in the original study. In many cases, more than one comment about a tree was made, and no specific reason for the removal recommendation was given, so for the purposes of this summary I included all of the reasons from the Comments and Recommendations section of the Tree and Shrub Evaluations.

The Author's Recommendations

Overall, 55.5% of the mature trees on City of El Cerrito public property are recommended for "possible future removal" or "probable removal" in the Landscape Management Report. Of a total 768 mature trees, 4.7% (36) are recommended for probable removal, and 50.8% (390) for possible future removal. El Monte Ball Field (12 trees), Hagen to Tapscott Medians (2), and the Shelvin Place to Arlington Boulevard Pathway (5) would eventually have all of their mature trees removed. Huber Park would have 97% (33) of its mature trees removed eventually, 4 of those trees slated for "probable" removal, leaving only 1 mature tree standing in the park. Casa Cerrito Child Care Center would be hard hit with 95.5% (64) of its mature trees removed, leaving 3 trees standing. Canyon Trail Playfield would have 82.9% (97) of its mature trees removed. Most other parks and public spaces would be hard hit as well. Some areas that would have no tree removals are the Central Avenue, Fairmont Avenue, and San Pablo Medians (23 trees total). Kiwansis Park (1 tree), El Cerrito High Tennis Court (2 trees) and Poinsett Park (13 trees) would have no mature trees removed. The City Administrative Offices (3 trees) would have no trees removed.

What would be the time frame of these removals? The city would have to remove more than 85 mature trees every year for the next 5 years to complete the job in that time frame. A time frame of 40 years would require the city to remove more than 10 trees each year to meet the goal. The cost of removing these trees, according to the Landscape management Report would be more than \$340,000. Why should El Cerrito remove so many of its mature trees?

In 87% of the cases where a recommendation for removal was made in the original study, disease and/or insect infestation was given as a basis. Studies past and present, by such bodies as the University of California, show that in many cases tree diseases can be treated successfully and in some cases the trees recover spontaneously themselves over time. Even in the case of Sudden Oak Death, advances are being made in the treatment of the disease and some trees have been found to be genetically resistant to the disease. Contrary to the Vallier recommendations, trees need not be removed due to disease, but should be cared for, treated if possible and allowed to wage a natural fight for survival against the disease or infestation.

In 50% of the cases where a recommendation for removal was made in the original study, the word *hazard* was mentioned. Co-dominant, or double, trunk structures were included in this category. Some tree species are naturally predisposed to co-dominant trunks. These species have adapted and survived for eons in such a state. The individual trees that these species produce likewise stand their whole lives in many cases without cracking or falling. In the case of co-dominant trunks I would say it would be better to monitor these trees from time to time for gross cracking of the trunks and in the cases where this happens, brace the tree or prune it. To remove such trees essentially because of their species or simply because of their trunk characteristics is a mistake. It is true that trees do fall, and in very rare cases actually kill someone or total a home, but at a rate that makes winning the lottery look probable, and driving a car certain death.

In 42% of the cases where a recommendation for removal was made in the original study, the basis was the poor condition of the tree or that the tree was experiencing dieback or decline. Also included in these recommendations were the basis of drought stress and bad pruning. Low vigor, drought stress (lack of water), bad pruning, and poor condition were mentioned in conjunction with 50% of the recommendations for “probable” removal. Again, if the city’s trees are in poor condition, care for them. Don’t cut them down. When humans get old and sick we don’t kill them, we care for them. Don’t remove these trees until they are dead, and improve the quality of maintenance to avoid this situation in the future.

In 9% of the cases where a recommendation for removal was made in the original study, it was mentioned that the trees showed no observable problems, were not diseased, or were vigorous. In fact, in Cerrito Vista Park, the Vallier study recommends the possible removal of 12 mature trees “with no significant problems observed”, and no other reasons for removal.

In 6% of the cases where a recommendation for removal was made in the original study, the basis was inappropriate location. Some of these trees are extending over a fence, residence or playground. The question really is, is the tree about to break apart and fall on the house or the children. I talked to one citizen about this and he mentioned a Redwood tree that had recently been removed from behind the El Cerrito day care co-op, and mentioned that it had been blocking the sun and was dirty. He said that he thought it was too bad, but that the tree was unfortunately in the wrong location. I bet it predated the building it was unfortunately near. Poor planning led to the death of that tree. Poor planning is preventable.

In 5% of the cases where a recommendation for removal was made in the original study, the basis was sidewalk damage or potential sidewalk damage. I talked to one horticulturalist who thought the price of a slab of concrete every twenty years was small in comparison to the beauty, shade and vigor of a longstanding, living tree. Of course some people complain that an already crumpled piece of concrete makes it hard for someone with mobility problems to get past. It would seem in those cases that its time to replace the concrete slab with due care for the roots of the trees.

In 5% of the cases where a recommendation for removal was made in the original study, the basis was that the tree was the wrong species, volunteer or non-native. One citizen of the community recently told me that Eucalyptus trees stand as homes for the struggling Monarch Butterfly. Although the Eucalyptus species is non-native, the Monarch butterfly is not and might altogether leave El Cerrito if its home is removed.

In 0.5% of the cases where a recommendation for removal was made in the original study, the basis was the trees were dead. I have spoken with 2 knowledgeable citizens of this community with years of horticultural experience and they have both told me independently that the only reason to remove a tree is because it’s dead. Dead trees should be removed. Trees that

pose a clear and imminent hazard should be pruned, or removed in the most severe circumstances. Trees that are living, even if they are diseased and infested, in poor condition, in the wrong place, raising the sidewalk, non-native, undesirable, and especially if they are healthy should be allowed to stand until they succumb to a natural death.

Summary of Reasons For Possible & Probable Mature Tree Removals And Tree Inventory & Disposition

A compilation of derived statistics based on the City of El Cerrito Landscape Management Report (Vallier Design Associates, 2003)
By Ross Tobia, Parks & Recreation Commissioner

| Reasons For Proposed Mature ¹ Tree Removals | | | |
|--|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Reason | # Removals ² | % of 426 Proposed Removals | % of 768 EC Mature trees |
| Disease/Insects | 370 | 86.9% | 48.2% |
| Structural Defect/Hazard | 171 | 40.1% | 22.3% |
| Dieback/Decay/Decline | 142 | 33.3% | 18.5% |
| Poor Condition/Poor Maintenance | 38 | 8.9% | 4.9% |
| No Problem/Healthy | 34 | 8.0% | 4.4% |
| Inappropriate Location | 27 | 6.3% | 3.5% |
| Sidewalk Damage | 20 | 4.7% | 2.6% |
| Species Inappropriate/Non-Native | 19 | 4.5% | 2.5% |
| Damage To Tree | 4 | 0.9% | 0.5% |
| Dead | 2 | 0.5% | 0.3% |
| Not Desirable | 1 | 0.2% | 0.1% |

¹ These trees included 108 trees in multi-tree stands listed as "semi-mature to mature", which is 14.1% of the total trees considered here.

² Note that if a tree had more than one removal reason, the tree was listed twice in this table

| Tree Inventory & Disposition | # Mature Trees | % Of Total Mature Trees |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Total Possible Future Tree Removals: | 390 | 50.8% |
| Trees Not Removed | 342 | 44.5% |
| Total Probable Tree Removals: | 36 | 4.7% |
| Total Mature Trees on EC Property: | 768 | 100.0% |

Summary of Reasons For Probable Mature Tree Removals And Tree Inventory & Disposition

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| Reasons For Probable Mature Tree Removals | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Reason | # Removals² | % of 36 Probable Removals | % of 768 EC Mature trees |
| Dieback/Decay/Decline | 22 | 61.1% | 2.9% |
| Disease/Insects | 22 | 61.1% | 2.9% |
| Poor Condition/Poor Maintenance | 18 | 50.0% | 2.3% |
| Structural Defect/Hazard | 5 | 13.9% | 0.7% |
| Damage To Tree | 3 | 8.3% | 0.4% |
| Species Inappropriate/Non-Native | 3 | 8.3% | 0.4% |
| Inappropriate Location | 2 | 5.6% | 0.3% |
| Dead | 2 | 5.6% | 0.3% |
| No Problem/Healthy | 0 | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Sidewalk Damage | 0 | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Not Desirable | 0 | 0.0% | 0.0% |

² Note that if a tree had more than one removal reason, the tree was listed twice in this table

| Tree Inventory & Disposition | # Mature Trees | % Of Total Mature Trees |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Total Possible Future Tree Remova | 390 | 50.8% |
| Trees Not Removed | 342 | 44.5% |
| Total Probable Tree Removals: | 36 | 4.7% |
| Total Mature Trees on EC Property: | 768 | 100.0% |

Possible & Probable Tree Removals Sorted By Location

A compilation of derived statistics based on the City of El Cerrito Landscape Management Report (Vallier Design Associates, 2003)

By Ross Tobia, Parks & Recreation Comissioner

| Location | Total Mature Trees | Possible Removals | Probable Removals | Total Removals | Possible Removals as % of Total Trees | Probable Removals as % of Total Trees | Total Removals as % of Total Trees |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Arlington Park | 118 | 64 | 9 | 73 | 54.2% | 7.6% | 61.9% |
| Ashbury Avenue Medians | 23 | | 12 | 12 | | 52.2% | 52.2% |
| Blake Street and Manor Circle Pathway | 9 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 11.1% | 11.1% | 22.2% |
| Canyon Trail Playfield | 117 | 96 | 1 | 97 | 82.1% | 0.9% | 82.9% |
| Casa Cerrito Child Care Center | 67 | 64 | | 64 | 95.5% | | 95.5% |
| Castro Tennis/Picnic Area and Field | 3 | 2 | | 2 | 66.7% | | 66.7% |
| Central Avenue Medians | 11 | | | | | | |
| Central Field | 35 | 7 | | 7 | 20.0% | | 20.0% |
| Cerrito Vista Field and Picnic Area | 95 | 15 | | 15 | 15.8% | | 15.8% |
| City Administrative Offices | 3 | | | | | | |
| Community Center | 55 | 21 | 1 | 22 | 38.2% | 1.8% | 40.0% |
| El Cerrito High Tennis Court | 2 | | | | | | |
| El Cerrito Library | 8 | 3 | | 3 | 37.5% | | 37.5% |
| El Cerrito Senior Center | 3 | 1 | | 1 | 33.3% | | 33.3% |
| Ell Monte Ball Field | 12 | 12 | | 12 | 100.0% | | 100.0% |
| Fairmont Avenue Medians | 6 | | | | | | |
| Fairmont Park, Field and Day Care Center | 22 | 14 | 2 | 16 | 63.6% | 9.1% | 72.7% |
| Hagen to Tapscott Medians | 2 | 2 | | 2 | 100.0% | | 100.0% |
| Harding Park and Field | 24 | 12 | | 12 | 50.0% | | 50.0% |
| Huber Park | 33 | 28 | 4 | 32 | 84.8% | 12.1% | 97.0% |
| Ohlone Greenway | 53 | 23 | 3 | 26 | 43.4% | 5.7% | 49.1% |
| Poinsett Park | 13 | | | | | | |
| Public Safety Office | 4 | 1 | | 1 | 25.0% | | 25.0% |
| Richmond/Elm/Blake Kiwansis Park and Islands | 1 | | | | | | |
| San Pablo Avenue Medians | 6 | | | | | | |
| Shevlin Place to Arlington Boulevard Pathway | 5 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 80.0% | 20.0% | 100.0% |
| Tassajara Park | 38 | 20 | 2 | 22 | 52.6% | 5.3% | 57.9% |

Possible & Probable Tree Removals Sorted By Percentage of Trees Removed

A compilation of derived statistics based on the City of El Cerrito Landscape Management Report (Vallier Design Associates, 2003)

By Ross Tobia, Parks & Recreation Comissioner

| Location | Total Mature Trees | Possible Removals | Probable Removals | Total Removals | Possible Removals as % of Total Trees | Probable Removals as % of Total Trees | Total Removals as % of Total Trees |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| El Monte Ball Field | 12 | 12 | | 12 | 100.0% | | 100.0% |
| Hagen to Tapscott Medians | 2 | 2 | | 2 | 100.0% | | 100.0% |
| Shevlin Place to Arlington Boulevard Pathway | 5 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 80.0% | 20.0% | 100.0% |
| Huber Park | 33 | 28 | 4 | 32 | 84.8% | 12.1% | 97.0% |
| Casa Cerrito Child Care Center | 67 | 64 | | 64 | 95.5% | | 95.5% |
| Canyon Trail Playfield | 117 | 96 | 1 | 97 | 82.1% | 0.9% | 82.9% |
| Fairmont Park, Field and Day Care Center | 22 | 14 | 2 | 16 | 63.6% | 9.1% | 72.7% |
| Castro Tennis/Picnic Area and Field | 3 | 2 | | 2 | 66.7% | | 66.7% |
| Arlington Park | 118 | 64 | 9 | 73 | 54.2% | 7.6% | 61.9% |
| Tassajara Park | 38 | 20 | 2 | 22 | 52.6% | 5.3% | 57.9% |
| Ashbury Avenue Medians | 23 | | 12 | 12 | | 52.2% | 52.2% |
| Harding Park and Field | 24 | 12 | | 12 | 50.0% | | 50.0% |
| Ohlone Greenway | 53 | 23 | 3 | 26 | 43.4% | 5.7% | 49.1% |
| Community Center | 55 | 21 | 1 | 22 | 38.2% | 1.8% | 40.0% |
| El Cerrito Library | 8 | 3 | | 3 | 37.5% | | 37.5% |
| El Cerrito Senior Center | 3 | 1 | | 1 | 33.3% | | 33.3% |
| Public Safety Office | 4 | 1 | | 1 | 25.0% | | 25.0% |
| Blake Street and Manor Circle Pathway | 9 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 11.1% | 11.1% | 22.2% |
| Central Field | 35 | 7 | | 7 | 20.0% | | 20.0% |
| Cerrito Vista Field and Picnic Area | 95 | 15 | | 15 | 15.8% | | 15.8% |
| Central Avenue Medians | 11 | | | | | | 0.0% |
| City Administrative Offices | 3 | | | | | | 0.0% |
| El Cerrito High Tennis Court | 2 | | | | | | 0.0% |
| Fairmont Avenue Medians | 6 | | | | | | 0.0% |
| Poinsett Park | 13 | | | | | | 0.0% |
| Richmond/Elm/Blake Kiwansis Park and Islands | 1 | | | | | | 0.0% |
| San Pablo Avenue Medians | 6 | | | | | | 0.0% |

More Specific Reasons For Tree Removal

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| Reasons For Removal Used In This Summary | More Specific Reasons Listed In Vallier Study |
|--|--|
| Dieback/Decay/Decline | Dieback, decline, decay |
| Disease | Disease/Insect, Ips activity, RTB |
| Structural Defect/Hazard | limb/trunk defects, hazard, girdling root, poor stability |
| No Problem/Healthy | no problems observed, not diseased, vigorous, No RTB |
| Sidewalk Damage | sidewalk displacement, potential sidewalk damage |
| Damage To Tree | freeze damage, canopy damage, damaged |
| Poor Condition/Maintenance | low vigor, drought stress, badly pruned, poor/marginal condition |
| Species Inappropriate/Non-Native | non-native, wrong species, volunteer |
| Inappropriate Location | extending over fence/residence/playground, bad location, median renovation |
| Not Desirable | not desirable |
| Dead | dead |