



Bob Blumenfield, Chair
Public Works and Gang Reduction Committee
Los Angeles City Hall
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councilmember.blumenfield@lacity.org

VIA EMAIL ONLY

September 3, 2020

Re: CF 13-1339 Adding Mexican elderberry & Toyon to the Protected Tree Ordinance

Dear Chair Blumenfield,

While greatly appreciating the current efforts to strengthen and expand protections for trees on both public and private property, the Community Forest Advisory Committee ("CFAC") is deeply concerned at the continued delay in the process to add the native plants Mexican elderberry and toyon to the list of protected species in the City's Protected Tree Ordinance. While this amendment remains stalled, biodiversity and wildlife habitat continue to be lost at an alarming rate, never again to be recovered.

This amendment has now been in process for more than six years, but despite concerns over the lack of Urban Forestry staff capacity and available on-site space for mitigation plantings, we urge you to move forward and not let perfect be the enemy of the good. Lack of staff capacity is real and needs to be addressed in the budget. Limitations of space and ensuring mitigation plantings go back on or near the removal site are also real issues, but the smaller stature of the new species allows them to be planted in side yards or other spaces that may not be suitable for an oak or sycamore. Toyon also tolerates shade and may be planted as understory. The area available for mitigation plantings of these two new species therefore would not necessarily compete with the area needed for planting the current four protected tree species. We understand that mitigation trees unable to be planted back on site due to space restrictions have also recently been directed to

the Department of Recreation and Parks for planting in area parks. In short — where the will exists, solutions can be found.

Continued delays come with significant and irreparable real-world costs. Developers and landowners are well aware that this amendment is in process. Shocking and extensive preemptive cut-downs of sizable, important examples of these two species are taking place throughout our hillsides. This is not because owners have imminent (or even any) development plans, but simply to avoid a future possibility of having to account to the City for these native species once they are given protected status.

The proposed amendment has received intensive work and attention from the Department of City Planning, the Urban Forestry Division, CFAC, the City Attorney's office, and the original proponents of Councilmember O'Farrell's motion. It has also — as evidenced by the Council File and records of public hearings — enjoyed repeated, significant, and vocal public participation and support by constituents, as well as by such advocates for the preservation of native habitat, biodiversity, and wildlife as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Hillside Federation, and Citizens for Los Angeles Wildlife ("CLAW").

Important City policy should not be left languishing and our hillside biodiversity left open to profound destruction through delays over details that can be resolved. As the City's urban forestry advisory body, we appeal to you to schedule this amendment for its Committee hearing and recommend to the City Council that these two native species be added to the list of protected species as a matter of urgency.

Respectfully,



Shelley Billik
Chair, Community Forest Advisory Committee

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