



MEMORANDUM REPORT

Meeting Date: April 16, 2019

TO: Board of Commissioners of the Los Altos Hills County Fire District

FROM: Fuel Reduction Subcommittee: George Tyson (chair), Duffy Price, with help from Stu Farwell and J. Logan

SUBJECT: Fuel Reduction Subcommittee Report

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Approve the plan for approaching tree removal for 2019-2020
2. Seek consensus on how to approach unspent funds from the 2018-2019 program.

The tree (Fuel Reduction) subcommittee met on 05Apr 2019 with attendance by Tyson and Price, along with Farwell and Logan. The regular operations update on the current tree program will be covered by Stu in his Consultant Report.

Tree Removal Program 2019-2020 Update

Background

- We have fine-tuned the recommendations developed for the 16Apr Commission meeting, and produced two additional documents:
 - **Updated FAQ for Tree Removal**
 - **Administrative Guidelines for Tree Removal**
- These provide greater detail on the process proposed and the planned sequence of events, with key points summarized below

Discussion and Recommendations

- The essential details of the program remain the same as outlined in last month's meeting
- Some new specific details include:
 - With the cutoff on new trees being added as of 19March, the total list stands at 170 sites.
 - The tree removal project will be broken into two main blocks, with the initial blocks being Areas 1-3 (areas West of Hwy 280) and the second block being Areas 4-6 (areas East of Hwy 280).
 - Total spending per site has been modified to allow up to 10% overage over the \$8000 per site, to avoid potential conflicts for those sites that barely exceed that target number.
 - For sites that exceed the limits (3 trees maximum or \$8000, whichever comes first), the priority will be placed on which trees provide the greatest fire danger potential. The initial determination of those trees will be made by the Arborist, with confirmation by LAHCFD.

- The above process has been discussed with Kevin Kielty (further details provided orally at the meeting). Modifications to Kielty's current statement of work for the existing contract (through 30 June 2019) are in progress. The goal is to begin this work as soon as possible.
- All previous RFPs have been managed by Pakpour Consulting. To broaden LAHCFD's contracting approach, other firms (focusing on established Arborist firms with broad tree removal experience) will be contacted in the coming month.

Proposed Action by Commission:

- Affirmation that the current process is appropriate for the next Tree RFP process.

Tree Removal Program 2018-2019 Update

Background

- Due to some site cancellations, the current work by S.P. McClenahan is now expected to be complete in late April, with spending of ~\$70K below the budget for the year

Discussion and Recommendation:

- One option is to use the existing but unspent money from this year to begin work with sites on the current waitlist and therefore provide more continuity of the program and remove more eligible trees.
- Another option is to leave those funds unspent, recognizing that the current program may not provide the most cost-effective way to perform this work.
- We propose leaving the funds unspent, and in effect shift our focus to the new program for 2019-2020.

Proposed Action by Commission:

- We seek general agreement on which path to take for the balance of 2018-2019.

Attachments:

1. **Tree Removal FAQ**
2. **Administrative Guidelines for Tree Removal**



**Los Altos Hills County Fire District
FY2018/19 Residential Program
Dead or Dying Trees and Eucalyptus Tree Removal Program
Issued on April 3, 2019**

The following General Comments and FAQ provide information regarding the FY2018/19 Los Altos Hills County Fire District (LAHCFD) Residential Program established for removal of dead or dying and Eucalyptus trees. Information in the FAQ applies to developments in the FY2018/19 Program and is not indicative of future Tree Removal Programs.

General Comments

Tree removal by LAHCFD is subject to funds available during the fiscal year and in accordance with the program developed for each year. The current Tree Removal Program is a fire prevention measure to benefit the Fire District and its residents. However, the Program does not constitute a guarantee of tree removal per each request or the same program from year to year. Tree Removal Programs can change and adapt as fire prevention measures change and new strategies and priorities for fuel reduction are developed in light of evolving best practices.

Due to the on-going drought and environmental conditions that negatively affects trees, there is a growing number of residents' requests for trees needing to be removed. In FY2018/19, requests from residents for dead tree removals have outstripped the Fire District's budget. Hence, for the current year, the District cannot respond to dead tree removal requests that are received after all funds are allocated.

Property owners are responsible for the care, safety and removal of trees on their property. The District's current Tree Removal Program is designed as a measure to augment fire prevention. It is not a guarantee for individual property owner's dead tree removal. The Program does not replace property owners' obligations for maintenance, safety and removal of dead or dying trees on their property.

FAQ

1. Who has the current contract with LAHCFD for tree removal; when does the contract end?
Answer - McClenahan Tree Service. Contract for services ends June 30, 2019.
2. Are the funding and measures for a new tree service contract in place for FY2019/20?
Answer - Funding of \$2M was approved by the LAHCFD Board of Commissioners for the Dead or Dying Tree and Eucalyptus Tree Removal Program (Tree Removal Program) from July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019. All funds have been allocated and trees have been scheduled for removal through June 30, 2019. Work on the scheduled trees is currently in progress. Funds for the Tree Removal Program for July 1, FY2019/20 are in

the pending budget and are contingent on approval of a program that will likely feature modification from the current Tree Removal Program (see #3 below).

3. What is the wait list of sites wherein residents have requested trees to be removed but funds are not available for this current year?

Answer – As of 3/19/2019, 160+ sites were on the wait list for tree removals pending budget approval and program design for FY 2019/20. To extend limited District funds and to focus District efforts on the highest fire risk, the planned program for those sites on the wait list as of 3/19/2019 is to limit tree removal to dead and dying conifers or eucalyptus trees regardless of their health, and to limit each site to a maximum of three trees or total cost to the District of \$8,000, whichever comes first. More detailed specifics will be implemented in a new contract bid process to be implemented by approximately July/August 2019.

4. If I am on the wait list (prior to 3/19/2019), when can I expect to have my trees removed?
Answer – The District will begin site evaluations in the April/May timeframe, with an expected start of tree removal after acceptance of a successful bid by a qualified tree contractor. The goal will be to begin as soon as possible and complete the work by June 2020. Specific schedules cannot be developed prior to site evaluations and contract approval.

5. What if I submitted my tree request after 3/19/2019?

Answer – The District will collect these requests but makes no guarantee that the Tree Removal Program will continue beyond those scheduled in #3 above

This FAQ will be updated in accordance with budget, program and operational considerations and reissued as updates in the program are determined by the Los Altos Hills County Fire District Board of Commissioners.

Administrative Guidelines for Tree Removal – 2019-2020 (DRAFT)

Prepared by G. Tyson on behalf of Fuel Reduction subcommittee, 10Apr2019

The goal of the next contract for tree removal in LAHCFD is focused on fuel reduction to minimize fire risk and magnitude, while balancing the District's budget capabilities. All trees remain the responsibility of the property owner and tree removal by LAHCFD is a non-mandated extra service that the District may revise or terminate at any time. The following guidelines have been drafted to support LAHCFD's arborist in performing the initial step in the process – site evaluations and tree identification.

Continuing Process – from previous Tree Removal Contracts

- LAHCFD residents have self-identified trees that are proposed to be removed by LAHCFD. A total of 170 requests were received by the deadline of 19March2019.
- The cards so submitted will be provided to the Arborist for evaluation of proposed trees.
- The arborist will contact residents and arrange for site visits to confirm and catalog these proposed trees. Eligible trees must have a minimum diameter of 8" when measured at 48" height.

New Criteria – Eligible Trees

- In addition to the above, eligible trees are restricted to either dead or dying conifers, or eucalyptus trees regardless of their health. These trees are considered to be of highest fire danger.
- To ensure a more balanced access to the program, each site is limited to a total of three trees or \$8000 District cost (the latter as estimated by the current tree program matrix). An overage of up to 10% on total cost for a site will be allowed.
- If the site exceeds the limits noted above, a process to identify which trees will be included will be followed, as described in the next section.

Overall Process Outline

- The overall process is expected to proceed in two separate contracts, so as to speed the initial work and break the contracts into reasonable sizes. LAHCFD considers properties west of Highway 280 to be at a higher priority for wildland fuel reduction and specifies that the first group of sites/trees will be in Areas 1, 2, and 3, and the second group in Areas 4, 5, and 6.
- Upon initial contact with the resident, the Arborist will explain the above tree limits with the resident and make an initial judgment if the site qualifies. It is understood that residents are often unaware of tree size and species, and the Arborist evaluation will be done even if the qualification is unclear from initial contact.
- Upon site visit, the Arborist will make a judgment on which trees qualify, formally log and tag those trees, and take a photograph for later reference. Selection of trees will be made based on fire risk. The Arborist will also note any other trees that the resident proposes but are beyond the scope of this program, to provide a reference for any later fuel reduction programs by LAHCFD. The Arborist will inform the resident that these are tentative conclusions and are subject to later review.
- Upon completion of each phase of the project, the Arborist will meet with LAHCFD (specific personnel to be determined by the General Manager) to confirm the list of trees and sites and prioritization based on fire risk.
- The timeline for this determination is May 24 for Areas 1-3 and June 30 for Areas 4-6).

- LAHCFD will send a letter/email to each resident whose trees/site were evaluated to inform them of eligibility and the next steps in the process, including estimates of timing.
- The above list will be incorporated into an RFP process for Tree Removal for each major block of work.