



# Los Angeles Unified School District Office of Environmental Health & Safety Tree Trimming & Removal Application



## I. Purpose

This Tree Trimming and Removal Procedure (Procedure) was developed to ensure the Los Angeles Unified School District (LA Unified or District) is carefully managing its vast collection of trees while remaining in compliance with regulations protecting biological resources and the California Environmental Quality Act. Specifically, compliance with this Procedure will ensure that District activities will not conflict with any locally adopted tree preservation policies or ordinances while ensuring the protection of breeding and nesting habitat of birds protected by the Fish and Game Code, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and bird species of special concern.

District procedure requires that all tree trimming and removals conducted on District property adhere to the procedures outlined in this document. Tree removals on non-District owned properties must adhere to that jurisdiction's ordinance/policy.

## II. Background

The District is obligated to trim and remove trees for public safety, protection of property, create space for new construction, and tree health. Trees are considered an asset to the District, end users, the public and the environment. They provide shade, process carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other potentially harmful gases and release oxygen. They provide a source of food and habitat to wildlife. They also have a monetary value in terms of replacement and maintenance costs. There are trees that are protected by federal, state and city ordinances, while others may be considered culturally significant. Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present and future generations as defined below:

- **Aesthetic:** Trees are of aesthetic value if they reflect important features on District grounds. These trees often visually dominate a place by their size, scale and visual impact. Trees play an important role in elements of school campuses such as main entrances and courtyard/quad areas.
- **Historical:** Trees are often associated with important eras, buildings, events or people. Trees may reflect specific epoch in garden design or landscape architecture.
- **Scientific:** Trees could be rare, vulnerable, endangered or of a great age. Remnant trees from former natural ecological communities may retain valuable habitat and faunal corridors for other endangered and dependent species.
- **Social:** Trees help identify special places. They may have associations with individual people and communities or tell stories of other times and places.

## III. Authority

The California legislature granted school districts the power to exempt school property from local zoning requirements provided the school district complies with the terms of California Government Code Section 53094. On February 19, 2019, the LA Unified Board of Education adopted a resolution to exempt its school property from all local ordinances such as those pertaining to building height, parking, preservation and replacement of trees, construction permits (except those in the public right of way), recordation of parcel maps, signage, site plan review, and inspection.<sup>1</sup> As owner of all school property, LA Unified has complied with Government Code Section 53094 and rendered the local County and City of Los Angeles Zoning Ordinances inapplicable to school property.

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<sup>1</sup> Regular Meeting Stamped Order of Business, Board of Education Report No. 256-18/19. Los Angeles: LA Unified Board of Education, February 19, 2019.

## **IV. Applicability**

This Procedure applies to any activities that impact any tree 4 inches in Diameter at Standard Height, which is measured at 4.5 feet above natural grade located on LA Unified property. This includes removal, relocation, root trimming, heavy equipment working within the dripline, or any act that may inflict damage to the tree or root system, including changing the natural grade of the land.

### **Applicability Exceptions**

Approval is not required for impacts to trees, including protected native trees, under the following conditions:

- Emergency actions
- Removal of dead, diseased, or damaged trees or branches
- Normal pruning and trimming
- Projects limited to interior construction that are more than 5 feet away from the dripline of any tree and/or do not include any ground disturbance

## **V. Procedure**

### **STEP 1: DETERMINE IF THERE IS THE POTENTIAL TO IMPACT TREES**

The project proponent will determine if any trees may be impacted by project activities. Trees causing damage to the campus (trees that may be located too close to buildings, uplifting pavement and concrete, invasive roots, etc.) should also be identified.

If no trees will be impacted, no further action is required. If trees may be impacted, proceed to Step 2.

### **STEP 2: DETERMINE IF A PREVIOUS TREE INVENTORY HAS BEEN COMPLETED**

The project or activity proponent should check with the District's Arborist to determine if a previous Tree Inventory Report with existing tree plot plans or CAD files has been completed for the entire campus or the work area. If a previous Tree Inventory Report does not include existing tree plot plans or CAD files, a new Tree Inventory Report may be needed.

If a previous Tree Inventory Report is not available, proceed to Step 3. If a previous Tree Inventory Report is available, incorporate the information into the project design and proceed to Step 3c, Tree Impact Report Contents.

### **STEP 3: COMMISSION A TREE INVENTORY REPORT**

The project or activity proponent shall have a Tree Inventory Report prepared by a Certified Arborist. The project or activity proponent should consult with School administrators and, where additional input is needed, alumni or any other member of the community with knowledge about the presence of any culturally significant trees or trees that are important to the community that are located within the work area. The project or activity proponent shall bring a copy of the site survey (which may already include some tree locations) to determine if proposed activities may impact trees. If only a limited number of trees have the potential to be impacted, an email confirmation from the District's arborist confirming the species of the tree and whether it is protected is sufficient.

#### ***a. Arborist's Qualifications***

The Tree Inventory and Tree Impact Reports must be prepared by one of the following:

- An In-house (LA Unified) Tree Maintenance Personnel Certified Arborist
- A person with at least four (4) years of experience in the business of transplanting, moving, caring for and maintaining trees who is a certified Arborist with the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) and:
  - (a) holds a valid California license as an Agricultural Pest Control Advisor or
  - (b) is a California-licensed Landscape Architect or
  - (c) is a registered consulting Arborist with the American Society of Consulting Arborists.

**b. Tree Inventory Contents**

A Tree Inventory is conducted to document the existing trees within the work area. The Tree Inventory should contain the following:

- Tree Number (unique tree number to appear on demolition, grading, and site plans and by way of an aluminum embossed tag affixed to the tree trunk – when access allows)
- GPS Coordinates – if a site plan showing the tree locations is not available
- Tree species (Botanical and Common Name)
- Color Photographs
- Trunk Diameter at Standard Height
- Height and Canopy Spread (approximated using intervals of 10 feet)
- Health and Structural Condition
- Identify as “Native” or “Planted” tree, if possible
- Tree protection status<sup>2</sup>
  - CEQA Scenic<sup>3</sup>
  - Historic Monument<sup>4</sup>
  - City of Los Angeles Significant Tree<sup>5</sup>
    - Or relevant/applicable City
  - City of Los Angeles Protected Tree<sup>6</sup>
  - County of Los Angeles Oak Tree Ordinance<sup>7</sup>

**c. Tree Impact Report Contents**

After completing the project design, results of the Tree Inventory should be used to determine impacts to trees located within the work area. The Tree Impact Report will contain the results of the Tree Inventory and the following:

- Proposed Disposition (Preserve/Remove)
- Tree Protection Plan (Note: a *Tree Protection Plan* applies to **all** trees within the project site during construction. This is different than *Tree Protection Status* and *Protected Trees*, which applies specifically to trees protected by ordinance)

If the project or activity impacts protected tree(s), the Tree Impact Report will include:

- Recommended Mitigation Measures
- General Replacement Guidelines
  - Newly planted trees should be a 24” box or larger at planting

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<sup>2</sup> This list may vary for other cities. For the District, this definition also includes trees that have been described as retaining some site-specific relevance to the school campus or alumni as a memorial or otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> A CEQA scenic tree is highly visible, prominent and possesses unique or distinctive aesthetic qualities due to its size, structure, unusual specimen, etc.

<sup>4</sup> List available at: [http://bss.lacity.org/urbanforestry/index\\_cultural.htm](http://bss.lacity.org/urbanforestry/index_cultural.htm) City of Los Angeles list available at: [http://bss.lacity.org/urbanforestry/index\\_cultural.htm](http://bss.lacity.org/urbanforestry/index_cultural.htm)

<sup>5</sup> The definition of a significant tree varies according to the relevant City of Los Angeles Specific Plan.

<sup>6</sup> City of Los Angeles Municipal Ordinance 177,404

<sup>7</sup> County of Los Angeles Municipal Code Section 22.56.2050

- Tree species must be of appropriate size at maturity for the space planted
- The selection must be made from the LA Unified Approved Plant List or approved by the LA Unified Tree Maintenance Supervisor
- Mitigation Ratios – protected trees or shrubs on LA Unified’s property should be replaced at a 4:1 ratio.<sup>8</sup>

**d. Report Distribution**

Provide any surveys or submittals prepared by a third party to the District’s arborist and Office of Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS) CEQA Manager.

If trees will be trimmed or removed, proceed to Step 4.

**STEP 4: TRIMMING OR REMOVING TREES**

If the project or activity requires the removal of any live trees, a Tree Removal Application must be completed and provided to OEHS (attached). If the impacted trees are not protected, signatures from the Region Superintendent and the School Principal [or their designee(s)] are required.

Tree trimming or removal shall be avoided during the avian breeding and nesting season (February 1<sup>st</sup> through August 31<sup>st</sup>) whenever feasible.

**Tree trimming or removal outside of avian breeding and nesting season (September 1<sup>st</sup> through January 31<sup>st</sup>)** may proceed without a nesting bird survey.

**Tree trimming or removal during avian breeding and nesting season (February 1<sup>st</sup> through August 31<sup>st</sup>)** requires a nesting bird survey to proceed.

- The project proponent shall coordinate with the OEHS to schedule a nesting bird survey to be completed within 3 days of trimming or removing of any tree(s).
- Trained District personnel, or a Qualified Biologist under contract with the District, shall conduct a nesting bird survey to detect any breeding or nesting behavior in or within 300 feet of the work area (limited to District property).
- If no active nests are identified, OEHS will provide written approval to remove the tree(s).
- If an active bird nest is found, the tree trimming or removal must be delayed until the nest is no longer active. OEHS will monitor the situation and advise the team when it can proceed.

**If an active bird nest is found by the tree trimming or removal workers,** activities must be halted and OEHS contacted at (213)241-3199. If an inactive nest is observed, it should be left in place whenever feasible.

- Birds and their nests cannot be removed from the school grounds unless there are special circumstances. Injured birds may be transported to a local veterinarian or the California Wildlife Center at 26026 Piuma Road, Calabasas California. Call the Center’s hotline first at (310) 458-9453.

If protected trees will be impacted, proceed to Step 5.

**STEP 5: IMPACTING PROTECTED TREES**

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<sup>8</sup> LA Unified’s mitigation ratio is consistent with the City of Los Angeles’ mitigation ratio requirements.

If the project or activity requires the removal of any protected trees, or the trimming of any branches of a protected tree that are more than 2 inches in diameter, a Tree Trimming and Removal Application must be completed and provided to OEHS (attached). When the impacted trees are protected, signatures from the Director of OEHS, Director of Maintenance & Operations, Region Superintendent and School Principal [or their designee(s)] are also required along with the Region Superintendent and School Principal.

The District should avoid impacting any healthy protected tree(s) whenever feasible. If impacts cannot be avoided, the project or activity proponent shall coordinate with the OEHS CEQA Project Manager to ensure adequate mitigation replacement ratios have been incorporated into the project design.

## **VI. PROTECTED NATIVE TREE AND SHRUB LIST**

Protected native trees which measure four (4) inches or more in Diameter at Standard Height:

Protected Trees:

- Oaks
  - Valley oak
  - California live oak
  - Canyon oak
  - Mesa oak
  - Interior live oak
  - All other indigenous oaks excluding scrub oak
- Southern California black walnut
- Western sycamore (aka California sycamore or California plane tree)
- American sycamore
- California bay

Protected Shrubs:

- Mexican Elderberry
- Toyon

*This definition shall not include any tree grown or held for sale by a licensed nursery, or trees planted or grown as a part of a tree planting program. However, trees that have been planted as replacements for protected trees that have been removed shall be protected.*