




San Francisco Water Power Sewer

Services of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission

525 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102
T 415.554.3155
F 415.554.3161
TTY 415.554.3488

Date: June 29, 2022

To: Suzanne Huang
Project Manager, Project Management Bureau
Jonathan “JP” Streeter
Communication Specialist, External Affairs

From: Jonathan Pettey, Hearing Officer 
Organizational Development Manager, Power Enterprise

Subject: Decision, Tree Removal Hearing for WW-711 Wawona and
Vicente Streets Stormwater and Water Main Replacement

Order on Objections to Proposed Tree Removal

The undersigned convened a public hearing on June 23, 2022, pursuant to Section 806 of the Public Works Code concerning objections to the proposed removal of a street tree on Vicente Street between 29th and 30th Avenues by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (“PUC” or “Department”) in connection with Project No. WW711, Wawona and Vicente Stormwater and Watermain Replacement Project. The undersigned was appointed to serve as hearing officer pursuant to the PUC Acting General Manager’s April 13, 2021 memorandum regarding PUC tree removals.

Findings:

The Department’s presentation was made by Kelley Omran (PUC External Affairs), Saed Toloui (PMB Project Manager), Chris Colwick (PUC Communications), Suzanne Huang (PMB Project Manager), JT Ernst (Contractor), and Jeane Sum (CMB Engineer). In summary, the Department seeks to remove the tree, citing a need to remove sections of the tree’s roots to complete the project and likely the tree will not survive.

The PUC provided an overview of the project scope: Installation of an auxiliary sewer on Vicente Street from Vicente and Wawona Streets to 34th Avenue for increased conveyance of stormwater to mitigate the possibility of flooding, installation of potable emergency firefighting water supply system on Vicente Street from 19th to 25th Avenues, replacement of aged water distribution main at Vicente and Wawona Streets, and curb to curb street paving once finished.

The PUC also provided an overview of reasons for the tree removal. The tree roots are currently pushing up the pavement of the street. The PUC project will

London N. Breed
Mayor

Anson Moran
President

Newsha Ajami
Vice President

Sophie Maxwell
Commissioner

Tim Paulson
Commissioner

Dennis J. Herrera
General Manager

OUR MISSION: To provide our customers with high-quality, efficient and reliable water, power and sewer services in a manner that values environmental and community interests and sustains the resources entrusted to our care.



require excavation and repaving of the street with eight-inch concrete and a new San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (“MTA”) bus pad installation. This will require removal of the tree’s roots. The City’s Bureau of Urban Forestry has opined that the tree will not survive removal of the roots that are growing into the street. The PUC proposes to pay the in-lieu fee rather than replace the tree. Additionally, PUC obtained a tree protection plan for the project that was approved by an International Society of Arborists certified arborist.

PUC shared pictures of notices for the proposed tree removal, posted on the tree for the defined timeframe, and notice of the hearing on objections to the tree removal that were posted on the tree, Department of Public Works (“DPW”) website, and in the SF Chronicle newspaper for the defined timeframe.

Josh Klipp (community member) objected to the proposed tree removal under Public Works Code Section 806(a)(3)(A). Klipp appeared at the hearing and provided a statement on the decreasing size of San Francisco’s urban canopy and the importance of tree for addressing climate change and pollution reduction. Klipp cited self-reported PUC data on the number of trees removed versus the number of trees planted, with replacement not meeting the removal rate. Klipp stated that the Department’s presentation did not include any discussion of alternatives to removing the tree. Klipp also stated that the Public Works Code no longer authorizes payment of an in-lieu fee in connection with the tree removal.

During the public comment period, John Nulty (community member) spoke in opposition of the tree removal, stating the request was not reasonable under Public Works Code Article 16, and that no alternatives to save the tree were provided.

PUC provided a response to Klipp’s and Nulty’s statements. PUC explained that alternatives to the tree removal were determined not feasible after consulting with MTA and after specialists examined the diameter of the roots and how far they extend into the street. Under the new codes the bus pad must be 120 feet. PUC proposed a shorter pad to accommodate the tree, but MTA rejected that request. Because the tree is adjacent to a bus stop where a bus line turns around, other options would have required alterations to the bus route.

Klipp provided a final statement in opposition to the tree removal, citing the importance of trees for stormwater management, and DPW arborists only care about the health of trees. Klipp closed his statements reiterating he heard no options to tree removal, and wants to hear more discussions about the importance of environmental justice.

Decision:

The undersigned concurs with the proposed removal on the basis that the tree will not survive the work required to complete the PUC’s infrastructure project, and it is therefore necessary to remove the tree to complete the project. Given the tree’s growth under the street base, curb, and bus pad, the location of the bus

stop adjacent to the tree, and the MTA's requirements in connection with the new pad for that stop, there does not appear to be another feasible alternative to removal. Accordingly, the proposed removal is approved. Under Public Works Code Sections 806(c) and 806(b)(3)(A), PUC shall pay the applicable in-lieu fee required by DPW.

Appeal:

This Order may be appealed to the General Manager or the General Manager's designee within 15 days of June 29, 2022. Any such appeal shall be submitted in writing to Jonathan Streeter at JStreeter@sflower.org.