



COUNCIL REPORT

DATE: October 25, 2022

CATEGORY: Consent

DEPT.: Public Works

TITLE: **El Camino Real Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements, Projects 20-61, 22-29—Heritage Tree Removal and Mitigation**

RECOMMENDATION

Approve the removal of and mitigation for two Heritage trees at a 5:1 replacement ratio with 24” box trees for El Camino Real Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements, Projects 20-61, 22-29.

BACKGROUND

El Camino Real is a State-owned and -operated highway within the jurisdiction of the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Caltrans is planning a large-scale pavement rehabilitation project on El Camino Real from State Route 237/Grant Road to Sand Hill Road in Palo Alto (see Figure 1). The Caltrans project is currently in final design, and Caltrans is in the process of obtaining right-of-entry agreements for portions of the project. Construction is anticipated in summer 2023.

Staff has been coordinating with Caltrans to install pedestrian and bicycle improvements consistent with the City’s El Camino Real Streetscape Plan as part of the pavement rehabilitation project. The improvements include the following:

- Adding bikeway facilities, via parking removal, between Sylvan Avenue/The Americana and the City limits near south of Rengstorff Avenue;
- Upgrading existing City-owned curb ramps for compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements;
- Adding curb extensions at intersections;
- Providing other pedestrian crossing enhancements, such as high-visibility crosswalk markings and advanced stop bars;

- Installing bicycle detection at intersections; and
- Installing three new crosswalks with pedestrian hybrid beacons at Pettis Avenue, Bonita Avenue, and Crestview Drive.

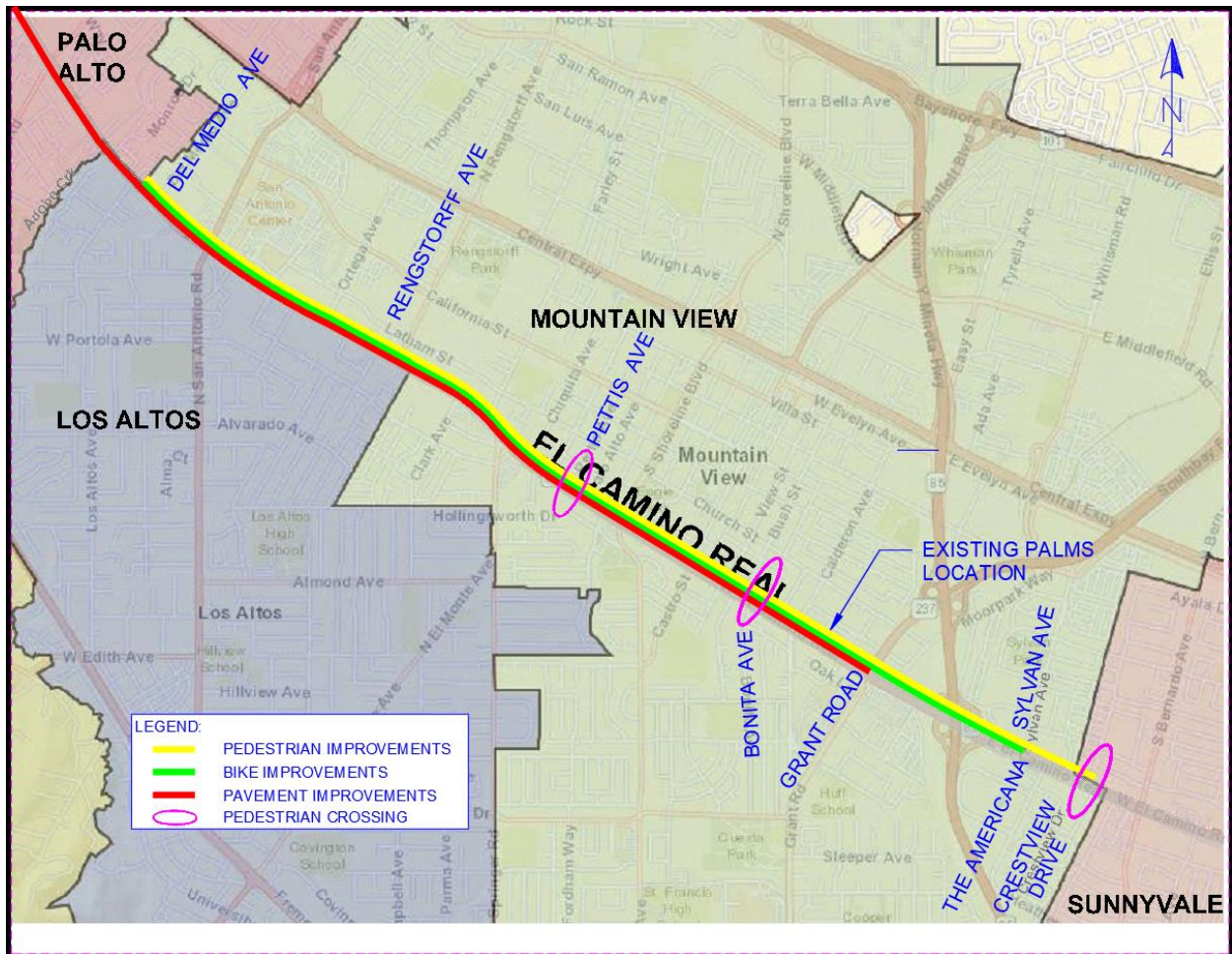


Figure 1: Project Location in Mountain View

On [September 14, 2021](#), Council adopted a resolution to remove on-street parking from Sylvan Avenue to Rengstorff Avenue on El Camino Real and authorized the City Manager to execute two agreements:

- A cooperative agreement with Caltrans in a not-to-exceed total contribution amount of \$6.7 million for the City's share of the costs for the bicycle and pedestrian improvements; and
- A funding agreement with Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) to receive \$4 million in 2016 Measure B Bicycle and Pedestrian Capital Projects Competitive Grant funds.

In March 2022, the Los Altos City Council adopted a resolution approving removal of on-street parking on El Camino Real from Rengstorff Avenue to the Palo Alto city limit and supporting installation of buffered bike lanes on this segment of El Camino Real as part of Caltrans' pavement project.

ANALYSIS

Curb Alignment and Tree Removal to Enable Class IV Protected Bikeway Between Bay and Montgomery Streets

The curb at 96 West El Camino Real creates a constraint for the installation of a continuous Class IV protected bikeway on westbound El Camino Real between Bay Street and Montgomery Street. The curb extends into the street around two existing palm trees (see Figure 2), and these palms need to be removed to allow the curb to be realigned for the Class IV bikeway. In coordination with Caltrans to help avoid delays for the pavement project, the City has agreed to remove the two trees as a separate City project in advance of the Caltrans project. Once the trees are removed, Caltrans will realign the curb with their project and a 4' wide tree-well area, consistent with other El Camino Real locations, will be available for the City to install new trees.



Figure 2: Two Existing Canary Island Date Palms at 96 West El Camino Real

Staff evaluated both removal and transplant options for the palm trees and recommends removal of these two palms after consulting with the arborist and specialized tree transplanting companies. The factors considered for transplanting the palms included the health, size, and accessibility of the trees, as well as an accessible nearby location to transplant the trees. It was determined that these two palm trees are not good candidates for transplanting because of their height and maturity and safety concerns when transporting them on public roads.

Urban Forestry Board

On [May 11, 2022](#), staff presented to the Urban Forestry Board (UFB) the tree mitigation ratio, size, and planting locations. Staff recommended a 2:1 tree replacement ratio with 24” box trees, where two trees are to be located in the new planting area at the site and two trees in the nearby center median island of El Camino Real. The tree species will be consistent with the El Camino Real Streetscape Plan tree palette and will include one or more of the following: scarlet oak, Valley oak, Western redbud, or toyon.

The UFB members stated that these palms were very old, tall, and visible and, therefore, should have a greater replacement ratio than is usually provided for Heritage trees. The UFB approved a motion to recommend to the City Council a mitigation replacement ratio of 5:1 with 24” box trees, with two trees located in the new planting area at the site and eight trees in the center median of El Camino Real, where space is available.

The City’s typical protocol for Heritage tree replacement is a 2:1 ratio using 24” box trees, and this ratio is used to estimate the costs of tree mitigations when establishing the construction budget for a capital project. It is also used to help identify feasible location sites for the replacement trees, which are incorporated into the project’s design plans. Significant changes to the number of tree replacements can create the need to increase the project budget and/or delay the project by requiring changes in the design plans. In this case, since there are only two Heritage trees being removed, the project budget can accommodate the higher replacement ratio of 5:1, staff has identified available locations along El Camino Real for these tree plantings (see Figure 3), and the higher ratio will not delay the project. Therefore, staff is recommending the UFB’s recommended 5:1 ratio for these two trees to the City Council.



Figure 3: Recommended Tree Mitigation Locations

Project Schedule

If Council approves the recommended action, the tree removals will be completed before summer 2023, when Caltrans is expected to begin the pavement rehabilitation project. Installation of the eight new trees in the El Camino Real median island will be coordinated with the Caltrans construction schedule, and installation would be either before or after the Caltrans project.

In September 2022, the City received an informal development application to redevelop the existing site at 96 West El Camino Real with a 70-unit affordable apartment building. An informal application is preliminary in nature, and it is unknown whether the proposed development project will move forward. Should the development project move forward, the frontage sidewalk improvements would be widened to accommodate the El Camino Precise Plan standards of a 12' sidewalk with tree wells. The timing of the development's construction completion would likely take place after the Caltrans project, and staff recommends the installation of the two new trees at the site take place after these improvements are completed. This may result in a delay between the curb realignment by Caltrans and installation of new trees. Should the development project submit a formal application before the Caltrans project is completed, staff will coordinate with the development team to ensure the trees are installed after completion of the development. Should the proposed development project not proceed, staff would have the two trees installed at the project site after Caltrans completes the curb realignment and pavement rehabilitation project.

Environmental Clearance

In May 2020, as part of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process for the El Camino Real Streetscape Plan, the certified arborist report prepared by HMM confirmed that these two palms are Canary Island date palms and are classified as Heritage trees with circumferences of 88". The palms' removal and replacement recommendations were included in the CEQA documentation under Categorical Exemptions, Section 15301—Existing Facilities, Section 15302—Replacement or Reconstruction, and Section 15303—New Construction of Small Structures and filed with the County of Santa Clara in September 2021.

FISCAL IMPACT

The El Camino Real Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements are funded out of the following two Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects:

Project	Budget	Funding Sources
20-61—Design	\$1.3 million	Construction/Conveyance Tax Fund
22-29—Construction	\$6.4 million	Measure B Grant Construction/Conveyance Tax Fund Transportation Reserve

Project 20-61 is being used for City project management and design costs as well as the City’s share of Caltrans’s design costs. Project 22-29 will be used to help fund the City’s share of Caltrans’s construction costs. The approximate cost for tree removals and mitigation planting is \$35,000. The project has sufficient funds for the recommended action.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Direct staff to replace the palm trees at a 2:1 replacement ratio.
2. Provide other direction.

PUBLIC NOTICING

In addition to the standard agenda posting, staff posted notices on the Heritage trees identifying them for removal and provided information for attending this meeting. Notices were mailed to property owners and residents within 750' of the project site.

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File (20-61)