



**MEMORANDUM**

Community Services Department

**DATE:** September 8, 2021

**TO:** Urban Forestry Board

**FROM:** Jakob Trconic, Forestry and Roadway Manager  
John R. Marchant, Community Services Director

**SUBJECT:** Heritage Tree Appeal – 1134 Nilda Avenue

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**RECOMMENDATION**

Adopt a Resolution of the Urban Forestry Board of the City of Mountain View to Deny the Appeal, Uphold Staff’s Decision, and Allow the Removal of One Heritage Tree at 1134 Nilda Avenue, to be read in title only, further reading waived (Attachment 1 to the memorandum).

**BACKGROUND**

Article II, Protection of the Urban Forest, Sections 32.22 through 32.39, of the Mountain View City Code (MVCC or Code) was established to preserve large trees (Heritage trees) within the City of Mountain View. The preservation program contributes to the welfare and aesthetics of the community and retains the great historical and environmental value of these trees. The Code requires a permit to be obtained prior to removal of a Heritage tree, and City staff, under the authority granted in the Code to the Community Services Director, has been designated to review and approve, conditionally approve, or deny removal permit applications. Under the Code, there are specific criteria for the removal of a Heritage tree. The determination on each application is based upon a minimum of one of the conditions set forth in the Code (Attachment 2).

MVCC Section 32.31 allows any person aggrieved or affected by a decision on a requested removal to appeal the decision by written notice within 10 calendar days after the notice of the decision is posted or mailed.

## **Heritage Tree Removal Request**

An application to remove a *Sequoia sempervirens*, commonly known as and herein referred to as Coast redwood, at 1134 Nilda Avenue was submitted by the property owner on April 28, 2021 (Attachment 3).

The applicant had marked the following reason for removal of the tree on the application:

*The condition of the tree (with respect to age of the tree relative to the life span of that particular species), disease, infestation, general health, damage, public nuisance, danger of falling, proximity to existing or proposed structures, and interference with utility services.*

The applicant also provided comments on the application stating, in part: “Significant interference with utility lines. PG&E has sporadically trimmed the tree but only at the top resulting in stunted growth and torture of the tree. The branches continue to tangle around the power, cable and phone lines, causing them to sag and creating a hazard not just for us but also for other residents on the street.”

Staff approved the removal of the tree. Notice of the City’s decision was posted on May 17, 2021 (Attachment 4). An appeal was filed by a neighbor opposing the removal of the tree (Attachment 5).

## **ANALYSIS**

The typical native range of Coast redwoods is approximately 470 miles along the Pacific coast of North America with the most southern grove in Monterey County, California and the most northern grove in southwestern Oregon. They usually grow in the mountains where precipitation rates are higher than inland areas. Coalescence of coastal fog accounts for a considerable part of the trees’ water needs. In their native range, they typically live 1,200 to 1,800 years, and in urban settings, they typically live 150 to 200 years.

Staff estimates this Coast redwood tree to be around 60 to 70 years old. PG&E has topped the tree at approximately 25’ from the ground due to overhead power lines and trims back the new sucker growth on an annual basis.

### **Staff's Evaluation**

When evaluating Heritage Tree Removal Applications, staff considers if the reason(s) for removal on the application match what is observed in the field. If the reason(s) meet the criteria, staff evaluates whether issue(s) regarding the tree can be reasonably mitigated.

Based on the inspection and evaluation of the tree, staff approved the removal based on utility power lines interference (Figure 1) and because the tree has been topped.

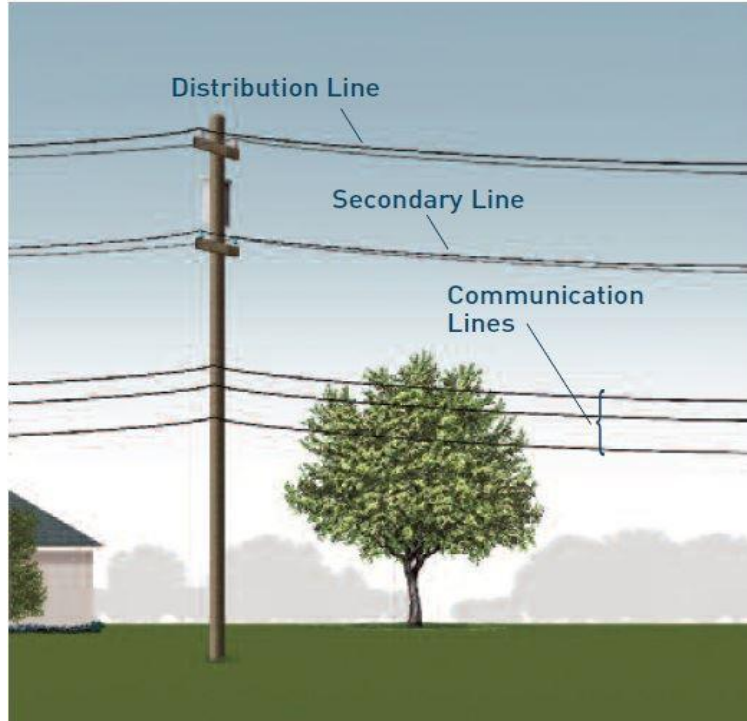


**Figure 1: Tree Proximity to Power Lines**

The conflict between trees and aboveground utilities (power lines) is an ongoing issue revolving around competition for space. As trees grow, their branches get taller and their crowns wider. Aboveground utilities are required, by Federal mandate, to have a specific clearance zone for safety.

### **Secondary Lines**

Secondary lines are positioned above communication lines and below the highest-voltage distribution lines (Figure 2). Typically, these secondary lines carry 240 volts of electricity to homes and businesses. PG&E performs vegetation clearance on these lines when strain and abrasion are evident.



**PG&E is not responsible for communication lines.**

**Figure 2: Power Line Layout**

### **Distribution Lines**

Distribution lines deliver electricity to neighborhoods and are generally supported by wooden poles. The voltage of these lines generally range from 4,000 to 21,000 volts. PG&E uses directional pruning techniques to maintain customer trees to adhere to safety requirements.

Unfortunately, this tree was planted directly under the utility lines. Coast redwoods are tall trees that typically reach heights of 70' to 90' in urban settings. PG&E has topped this tree at about 25' in order to maintain clearance and must trim it back annually to prevent issues with the primary and secondary lines. PG&E recommends no planting directly under power lines unless there is confidence the tree will not mature to a height in direct contact with utility lines.

Staff observed that the secondary lines are still in close proximity to the top of the tree, even after PG&E's recent pruning (Figure 3). While this tree is unlikely to cause a major power disruption because the distribution lines are clear, it may be possible for fast-growing, poorly attached new sucker growth to break and arc the secondary lines, potentially catching the tree on fire and creating a safety issue for residents.



**Figure 3: Tree Proximity to Secondary Lines**

### **URBAN FORESTRY BOARD**

The Parks and Recreation Commission serves as the Urban Forestry Board (Board) for heritage tree appeals under MVCC Section 32.26. The Board must consider whether to uphold staff's decision and deny the appeal or overturn that decision using the criteria set forth in MVCC Section 32.35. The Board must support its decision with written findings. Staff has provided the Board with a draft resolution with findings upholding staff's decision to allow removal of the tree. If the Board overturns staff's decision and denies removal of the tree, staff recommends the Board make their findings orally, and staff will include the findings and decision in this meeting's written minutes.

### **SUMMARY**

Staff recommends allowing the removal of the tree based on its location under utility power lines, fast rate of growth, and the safety concerns surrounding the secondary wires.

JT-JRM/AF/6/CSD/224-09-08-21M

- Attachments:
1. Resolution
  2. Mountain View City Code – Article II, Protection of Urban Forest
  3. Heritage Tree Application – 1134 Nilda Avenue
  4. Heritage Tree Posting Notices – 1134 Nilda Avenue
  5. Heritage Tree Appeal Letter – 1134 Nilda Avenue