



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 5270)

Report Type: Consent Calendar

Meeting Date: 3/9/2015

Summary Title: Contract Amendment with West Coast Arborists, Inc. and related Budget Amendment Ordinance

Title: Approval of Amendment No. 1 to Contract #C13148075 with West Coast Arborists, Inc., for an Additional Amount of \$182,410 for a Third Year of a Three Year Term for a Total Amount Not to Exceed \$1,232,410 for Tree Pruning and Removal Services; and Adoption of a related Budget Amendment Ordinance in the General Fund

From: City Manager

Lead Department: Public Works

Recommended Motion

Staff recommends that Council consider the following motion:

1. Approve and authorize the City Manager to execute, Amendment No. 1 to Contract C13148075 with West Coast Arborists, Inc. for an additional amount of \$182,410 for the third year of a three-year term for a total amount not to exceed \$1,232,410 for Tree Pruning and Removal Services and;
2. Adopt the attached Budget Amendment Ordinance (BAO) in the amount of \$160,490 (Attachment A) to provide an appropriation for a contract increase for Tree Pruning and Removal Services.

Background

The increased workload listed below has put a strain on Urban Forestry staff capacity to complete pruning work requests in a timely manner, and has created an 8-12 month backlog of requested pruning work. In order to compensate for this deferred maintenance, meet the annual goal of pruning 5,054 trees, and regain the high level of service expected from the City's residents, an increase of

\$182,410 to the contract is recommended. This amount will allow WCA to assist with outstanding pruning work orders, and eliminate the backlog in service request pruning from FY 2014 and the anticipated backlog from FY 2015.

The Department of Public Works, Urban Forestry Section is responsible for maintaining the health of 35,378 City-owned trees. Tree pruning is the most important maintenance task for keeping this population healthy. The purpose of tree pruning is to improve tree structure, enhance vigor, and maintain safe conditions for all motorists and pedestrians as they move through the street corridor. The benefits from an established tree pruning program on a regular cycle include:

- § The enhancement of tree condition and shape, and preservation of value
- § A reduction in service request calls
- § A reduction in the number or severity of storm related damages
- § A reduction in power line clearance related interference
- § A reduction in the number of trees which undergo drastic changes in their appearance from before to after pruning
- § A reduction in future pruning costs due to less work required on each tree and less wood waste generated

Successful tree maintenance is achieved through pruning all City-owned trees on a rotating basis and also involves removing trees when necessary. Within the urban forestry profession, documented studies have shown that a five to seven-year pruning cycle is optimal for maintaining tree condition and value, along with being cost-effective for a community; therefore, the City is divided into manageable areas with approximately 5,054 trees per area in order to ensure every tree is pruned once every seven years.

Public Works Urban Forestry Division's pruning activities include cyclical pruning and request pruning, and both pruning activities occur all year long. Cyclical pruning consists of scheduling all parkway trees within a specific area of the City for pruning, and is currently contracted to West Coast Arborists, Inc. (WCA). The City is in the second of a three-year contract with WCA totaling \$1,050,000; and approved by Council on January 14, 2013 (staff report # [3252](#)). The contractor performs tasks of cyclical pruning by area, tree removal, and stump grinding with the goal of completing three of six designated pruning areas at the end of the

three year contract term. Should an emergency or other priority situation arise, contract crews from WCA are utilized in other areas of the city as well as part of request pruning. Request pruning activities are completed by City of Palo Alto Urban Forestry staff, and subject to needs such as storm damage or clearance issues. This same staff is involved in routine tasks such as tree limb pickups, pull-tests, injections as well as seasonal projects including tree plantings and assisting with events that often detract from request pruning.

Discussion

Cyclical and Request Pruning Progress

In FY 2013, the combined pruning efforts by City staff augmented by contracted services met the target pruning goal of 5,054 trees. In FY 2014, the target pruning goal fell short of the goal to maintain a seven-year cycle by 758 trees, only reaching 85% of the goal. In FY 2015, the target pruning goal for the first half of the fiscal year fell short of the goal by 250 trees and this trend is anticipated for the second half of the fiscal year, as well. This would mean only reaching 90% of the goal.

A number of factors contributed to this goal shortage and backlog including:

1. Drought. Three years into what may be California's worst drought in nearly four decades is showing in the street tree population, causing stressed-tree symptoms, tree decline and death. Cutbacks in residential watering have worsened conditions for the trees as well. Unfortunately, this is a trend that is forecast to continue due to the cumulative effects of drought on tree health over time. This drought stress strongly correlates to an increase in the number of maintenance tasks that further defer work from the pruning program including increases in:
 - a. Tree Removals. The number of trees removed by City and contracted crews rose by 48% from FY 2013 to FY 2014 likely due to the effects of years of drought.
 - b. Stump Removals. The increased stump grinding associated with tree removals depleted contract funds and reduced the amount of anticipated tree pruning.
 - c. Tree Inspections and Requests. In FY 2014 there was a 45% increase from 1,343 to 1,948 in inspections conducted by in-house staff due to declining health of City trees likely associated with drought.

- d. Watering. Staff time spent irrigating existing trees has increased due to the need to provide more water to young trees.
 - e. Wood Disposal. The amount of wood generated from the increased removals has required staff to allocate more time to sectioning and disposing of the wood.
 - f. Administrative Duties. The increase in tree removals has increased staff time spent on the required removal notification process, correspondence with residents, completing paperwork and data entry.
2. Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs). In FY 2014, Urban Forestry staff collaborated with CIP projects including the golf course, the Adobe Creek Pedestrian Bridge, El Camino Park, and the Magical Bridge playground, dedicating time to diligently prepare tree inventories, update databases, and prepare areas for landscape renovation by providing tree removal services. Collectively this amount was \$21,920. These expenses are being charged against the aforementioned projects, however the staff time spent on these projects contributed to the lower than anticipated number of trees pruned.
3. Development Review Process. Staff became increasingly more involved in Development Review processes in FY 2014. Staff involvement in development services oversight included completion of 334 tree protection fencing inspections, review and comment for 212 planning applications, and issuance of 66 permits related to removal or work on protected or regulated trees. Landscape reviews and building permits were reviewed and provided with comments. Staff time spent on the development review process is recovered through Development Services fees.

Resource Impact

The attached Budget Amendment Ordinance will allow for the FY 2014 and projected FY 2015 backlog in tree pruning to be addressed by West Coast Arborists. The Budget Amendment Ordinance would increase the funding in the Public Works Department General Fund allocation for contractual services in the amount of \$160,490, and be offset by a reduction to the Budget Stabilization Reserve. The increase to the contract exceeds the amount of the Budget Amendment Ordinance as a portion of the work performed by the contractor

(\$21,920) will be charged to a variety of capital projects.

Policy Implications

This recommendation does not represent any change to existing City policies.

Environmental Review

The recommended action is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301(h) (maintenance of existing landscape).

Attachments:

- A - BAO - Arborists BAO (DOCX)

Ordinance No. XXXX

ORDINANCE OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PALO ALTO AMENDING THE BUDGET FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2015 IN THE GENERAL FUND, INCREASING THE BUDGET FOR THE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT BY \$232,990 TO SUPPORT CONTRACTUAL STREET TREE PRUNING, OFFSET BY A CORRESPONDING REDUCTION TO THE BUDGET STABILIZATION RESERVE.

The Council of the City of Palo Alto does ordain as follows:

SECTION 1. The Council of the City of Palo Alto finds and determines as follows:

A. Pursuant to the provisions of Section 12 of Article III of the Charter of the City of Palo Alto, the Council on June 16, 2014 did adopt a budget for Fiscal Year 2015; and

B. The Department of Public Works Urban Forestry Section is responsible for maintaining the health of 35,378 City-owned trees, with tree pruning being the most important maintenance task for keeping the tree inventory healthy; and

C. The purpose of tree pruning is to improve tree structure, enhance vigor, and maintain safe conditions for all motorists and pedestrians as they move through the street corridor; and

D. It has been determined that a five to seven year pruning cycle is optimal for maintaining tree condition and value. Tree pruning services in the City of Palo Alto are performed by both City staff as well as contractors. The City is currently in the second year of a three year contract for tree pruning services with West Coast Arborists totaling \$1,050,000; and

E. In Fiscal Year 2014, the City fell short of its goal by pruning only 4,296 trees, 758 below the target of 5,054. In the first six months of Fiscal Year 2015, the City fell short of the goal by 250 trees. This pace is expected to continue in the second half of the year; and

F. Factors contributing to the reduction in trees being pruned include the drought, capital improvement projects that have required the attention of staff and the contractor, and increased staff time associated with development related activities; and

G. Increased funding is being requested to eliminate the backlog of tree pruning that accumulated in Fiscal Years 2014 and 2015.

SECTION 2. The contractual services allocation for the Public Works Department Street Trees Division is hereby increased by the sum of One Hundred Sixty Thousand, Four Hundred and Ninety Dollars (\$160,490) in the General Fund. This increase is offset by a reduction to the Budget Stabilization Reserve by a corresponding amount.

SECTION 3. As provided in Section 2.04.330 of the Palo Alto Municipal Code, this ordinance shall become effective upon adoption.

SECTION 4. The Council of the City of Palo Alto hereby finds that this is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act and, therefore, no environmental impact assessment is necessary.

INTRODUCED AND PASSED: Enter Date Here

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTENTIONS:

NOT PARTICIPATING:

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

APPROVED:

Senior Assistant City Attorney

City Manager

Director of Administrative Services

Director of Public Works