



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

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Agenda Item Number: {{item.number}}

Agenda Date: September 23, 2024

In Control: Planning and Community Development Committee

DEPARTMENT: Parks & Recreation Department

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Homer Garcia III

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT:

Council Consideration Request (CCR) on the establishment of an Oak Wilt Tree Replacement Program

SUMMARY:

Councilmember Marina Alderete Gavito submitted a Council Consideration Request (CCR) proposing the establishment of an Oak Wilt Tree Replacement Program to assist homeowners in replacing oak trees lost to oak wilt with native non-oak trees. This briefing provides an overview of the current status of oak wilt in our community and lays out potential options for program development.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Oak wilt is a fungal disease that impacts oak trees by disrupting their water transport system, eventually leading to the death of the tree. Oak wilt has caused widespread damage in parts of Central Texas, and its presence in San Antonio remains primarily limited to communities on San

Antonio's North & Northwest Sides where a robust urban canopy exists.

Efforts to address oak wilt in San Antonio date back to 2003, when City Council enacted an ordinance aimed at controlling its spread. This ordinance mandated that all wounds on oak trees be sealed within 30 minutes and prohibited the transport of infected firewood into the city. In 2016, the Parks and Recreation Department launched an oak wilt prevention program to further support these efforts, focusing primarily on public education and strategic adjustments to brush collection services during the peak oak wilt transmission period.

ISSUE:

The Council Consideration Request (CCR) seeks to address future potential oak wilt impacts by replacing trees lost to the disease.

In response, City staff is proposing a voucher program aimed at assisting in the replacement of trees lost to oak wilt. The program would offer vouchers to homeowners in or within a prescribed distance of an oak wilt-affected area. These vouchers will be redeemable at local nurseries for purchasing replacement trees. This approach will provide homeowners with flexibility over the replacement process.

The voucher system stands out from other Urban Forestry programs by offering several unique benefits:

- **Homeowner Preference:** By giving residents the flexibility to choose their tree, the voucher program promotes greater homeowner involvement and helps to ensure participation from those who are committed to replacing and caring for lost trees.
- **Targeted Resource Allocation:** The program will focus on areas where oak wilt is currently present or could potentially spread, ensuring that resources are used responsibly and effectively.
- **Flexibility in Use:** Homeowners can apply the voucher to different tree species, with the exception of trees classified in the *Quercus* (oak) genus. This allows for program adaptability based on the homeowner's specific needs.
- **Proactive Canopy Preservation:** This program provides a proactive solution that allows the City to support tree replacement before larger losses occur in the affected communities. This approach helps preserve the urban canopy, which contributes to reducing the urban heat island effect and enhances energy efficiency for homes.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This item is for briefing purposes only. Program funding is proposed to come from the Tree Mitigation Fund.

ALTERNATIVES:

An alternative to the proposed voucher program is to take no further action on private properties at this time and continue to focus efforts on outreach and education.

RECOMMENDATION:

City staff recommends proceeding with implementation of the proposed voucher program which would require a solicitation process scaled to available budget based on the guidance and feedback of the Planning and Community Development Committee.