

RESOLUTION NO.

WHEREAS, the urban forest has social, environmental, cultural, economic, historical, aesthetic, and health benefits for the citizens of Austin; and

WHEREAS, the urban forest is an essential part of the City's infrastructure that city policy seeks to protect; and

WHEREAS, the urban forest canopy provides shade that reduces energy bills, removes air pollutants, and creates more livable and beautiful neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, in 2006 the City Council established the Tree Task Force in order to address concerns by the Hyde Park, Hancock, and Eastwoods Neighborhood Associations with Austin Energy's tree trimming and removal program; and

WHEREAS, the final Recommendations of the Tree Task Force (May 8, 2006) contain several agreements by Austin Energy, which respond to the strong desire of Austin neighborhoods to preserve their trees to the maximum extent possible; and

WHEREAS, these agreements include the sharing of vegetation work plans with neighborhoods in order to provide selective pruning options on a tree-by-tree basis and offer line redesign and relocation options; and

WHEREAS, Austin Energy also agreed to investigate and implement less aggressive trimming strategies; and

WHEREAS, in 2007 the City Council passed a resolution establishing the Climate Program and directed the City to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, emphasizing that tree preservation is an important means of achieving carbon sequestration to reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions; and

WHEREAS, in 2010 the City Council unanimously adopted the Heritage Tree Ordinance, which increased the protection of Heritage trees (24+ inches in diameter), including prohibitions against excessive pruning; and

WHEREAS, Austin Energy intends to extensively prune a group of live oak trees, including protected and Heritage trees, located immediately west of Swearingen Drive underneath 138 kiloVolt (kV) transmission lines; and

WHEREAS, These trees are prominent components of the only park serving the Gracywoods and adjacent neighborhoods of north Austin; and

WHEREAS, In order to meet safety requirements, these live oak trees were severely pruned in 2004 and received maintenance pruning in 2009, but remain healthy and continue to sprout vigorously following pruning;

NOW,

THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY OF AUSTIN URBAN FORESTRY BOARD

That the City Council is strongly encouraged to consider the following recommendations of the board:

In order to both maximize the health of these trees and minimize the amount of foliage that is removed, the City Manager shall direct Austin Energy to take following interim steps:

1. This year, only prune the sprout growth that is expected to enter, within the next two years, the critical clearance zone between the tree tips and the transmission lines at their lowest expected sag point. The critical clearance zone shall be carefully defined for each affected tree. Austin Energy shall perform no pruning on sprouts growing at an angular direction away from the transmission lines, while using loppers to cut no more than half the length of sprouts growing directly toward these lines.
2. Remove less foliage on a two-year pruning cycle rather than more foliage on the current four-year cycle. Avoid cutting back to the main trunk, and instead make pruning cuts to direct future growth away from the critical clearance zone.
3. Provide a three-inch layer of mulch out to the drip line of each live oak tree.
4. Remove dead wood and stubs from each live oak tree.
5. Instruct the Parks and Recreation Department staff to avoid grass mowing in areas with exposed roots.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the City Council consider directing the City Manager to bring a proposal for a long-term solution to resolving conflicts between transmission line clearance and the Gracywoods trees, including long-term options for raising the transmission lines so that significantly less pruning is performed in future years on these live oaks. Firm and independent cost estimates are needed before alternative funding options can be explored. At a minimum, detailed cost assessments that also take into account changes in maintenance pruning methods and costs, shall include the following two scenarios:

1. Replace the two existing lattice structures on either side of Swearingen Drive with taller transmission support structures for the 138 kV transmission lines. This assessment shall include itemized costs, along with relevant logistical information such as the additional line clearance that would be achieved and the amount of lead time required once authorization is given.

2. Leave the two existing lattice structures in place, but add a third taller structure in between. This will likely be a lower-cost option. As with the first scenario, the assessment for this option should include detailed itemized costs, the additional line clearance obtained, and the necessary lead time for construction completion.