

Date: November 9, 2022

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager



From: Brent Dennis, Director of Parks, Recreation and Marine



For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Bixby Park Annex Coral Trees**

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### **General Information on Coral Trees**

Bixby Park Annex located on Ocean Boulevard, between Cherry and Junipero Avenues, was home to 10 coral trees (*Erythrina caffra*). Five trees were planted at each of the boundaries, Cherry Avenue, and Junipero Avenue. These trees were originally planted in 1983 by Long Beach Beautify Inc., as a gift to the City of Long Beach and its residents. Over the years the City has worked with various arborists to assess their health and risk to the public. In 2017, the five corals located at Cherry Avenue and Ocean Boulevard were removed and replaced with three Rusty Figs. Since then, the City of Long Beach (City) has been monitoring the remaining five trees.

Corals are soft wooded trees that are naturally brittle and prone to decay. They are susceptible to summer branch drop, a phenomenon resulting in failure and breakage of live branches, due to high temperatures and/or windy conditions. Their multi-trunk which consists of a thicker trunk with several smaller trunks joining the main stem, tend to split apart as the health of the tree deteriorates.

Over the years, cities and counties have found that while beautiful, corals are not always the best fit for coastal environments and public parks. Coastal Development Permits (CDP) and/or Local Coastal Programs (LCP) restrictions protecting nesting birds limit a municipality's maintenance options. Ideally these trees should be pruned in the spring after flowering, and in some cases pruning twice a year would benefit the health of the tree. However, the CDP/LCP restricts all non-emergency tree maintenance to the months of October through December, which is much earlier than recommended for their health.

In addition, many corals are planted too close together in public parks and/or surrounded by grass which requires frequent irrigation and mowing. Extra water needed to maintain grassy areas encourages secondary growth and soft wood cannot support these growth spurts which in turn increase the weight of the branches weakening the overall tree structure. During dry seasons, the weight of the branches/canopy can pull one or all the multi-trunk stems out of the soil.

Due to inherent coral tree conditions, the City has been closely monitoring the health of the coral trees along Ocean Boulevard. Several arborist reports have been commissioned with the

purpose of prolonging the life of these trees, while maintaining public safety. In August 2016, arborist reports recommended the removal of five trees at Bixby Annex.

### **Reforestation Plan**

Prior to the removal of the trees in 2017, the City hired Walter Warriner, Consulting Arborist, to identify a suitable replacement. Through community engagement, staff identified two community priorities which were tree canopy size and the desire that replacement trees be planted as close as possible to the location of the original trees. City experts also identified the ability to thrive in a park setting, tolerance to urban stresses, disease and pest resistance, drought tolerance, maintenance needs, and ability to contribute to wildlife foraging habitat as characteristics to be considered.

The Rusty Fig (*Ficus Rubiginosa*) was chosen as a replacement. Not only does it meet the requirements listed above, but it's also an excellent shade evergreen tree that reaches heights between 35 to 50 feet, with a symmetrical crown which spreads from 35 to 60 feet. Rusty Figs tolerate salt spray conditions, making it a good choice for coastal areas. These trees are fast growing and able to reach heights of 35-ft in 30-years. Branches are resistant to breakage, and once established it can withstand periods of drought and will require minimal maintenance. Its berries attract insects, birds, and urban wildlife.

The proposed reforestation plan, which is the process of replanting trees in areas that have been affected by natural disturbance, includes the continued planting of Rusty Fig trees at Bixby Annex.

The City's Coastal Development Permit (05-08-187) requires a one-to-one replacement for removal of a tree with a no less than 36" box, with a 5-year monitoring plan.

In 2017, the City made the commitment to purchase and plant 96" box trees. The purchase contract shall include a one-year replacement warranty. A 96" box, translates to a 15-foot tree with roughly a 15-foot canopy, speeding up the characteristics desired by the residents while providing an instant wildlife habitat. Rusty Fig's reach their minimum height of 35-feet in 30-years.

### **Current Status of Coral Trees at Bixby Annex**

In January 2017, the City removed the five dead trees on the corner of Ocean Boulevard and Cherry Avenue, and replaced them with three Rusty Figs in the same location. This left five coral trees on the corner of Ocean Boulevard and Junipero Avenue. The City has been monitoring the health of these trees and has commissioned several arborists who have conducted various tree risk assessments. These assessments are based upon standards and practices developed by the International Society of Arboriculture and the Tree Care Industry Association. It includes a rating system to determine the likelihood a tree will fail and the consequences of that failure.

In 2020, based on the tree's advanced level of decay at the base of three of its multi-trunk stems, making this specimen a high risk for failure within a year, the arborist recommended removal. It was removed in December 2020. In June 2022, one of the remaining four trees dropped one of its multi-trunk stems. The City immediately fenced off the perimeter and contacted an arborist to assess the condition of all the trees at Bixby Park Annex. This coral completely fell in August 2022; stump grinding, and removal will be scheduled for completion in November 2022.

The Department of Parks, Recreation and Marine (PRM) is currently working with Great Scott Tree Service Inc., to locate and price two 96" box Rusty Fig trees. The cost proposal is anticipated by the end of the November with planting scheduled in December. Concurrently PRM is working with Tidelands Capital Improvement Program (CIP), who has identified funding and is awaiting documentation to process the required paperwork to purchase these trees.

PRM will work with Tidelands CIP to place funding for the replacement of the remaining trees in the Fiscal Year 2024 CIP budget.

Per the August 2020 report, two of the three remaining trees are low risk for trunk failure, and moderate risk of limb failure. The third tree is at moderate risk for trunk failure and low risk of limb failure, with a possible likelihood of trunk failure within two years. Therefore, the arborist recommends that the City install a tree support system. Staff is currently working on identifying a system that suits the needs of these trees.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (562) 570-3170.

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