



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: PARKS

File #: 23-258

Board Meeting Date: 4/25/2023

Special Notice / Hearing: None

Vote Required: 4/5ths

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director

Subject: Implementation of the Parks Department's Tree Risk Management Program

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve an Appropriation Transfer Request (ATR) to increase Intrafund Transfers by \$3,000,000, Salaries and Benefits by \$470,000, and Services and Supplies by \$2,530,000 for the implementation of the Parks Department's Tree Risk Management Program ("Program").

BACKGROUND:

At the April 11, 2023, meeting of the Board of Supervisors ("Board"), the Parks Department's report regarding storm damage in the San Mateo County parks system was accepted by the Board.

The report detailed how the San Mateo County parks system sustained significant amounts of damage during the first quarter of 2023 due to the unprecedented levels of precipitation, wind speeds, and wind gusts experienced. Specifically, almost every park has experienced flooding, landslides, erosion, and/or falling trees causing catastrophic damage to trails, roads, picnic sites, campgrounds, parking lots, and other facilities.

Additionally, the report stated that initial assessments conducted by staff indicate there are several factors that contributed to the magnitude of damage sustained in the County's parks system. First, throughout the system, trees had been stressed by extended drought conditions, leaving many weak, susceptible to root rot, and unable to withstand the severe storms experienced. Second, the volume and frequency of precipitation received resulted in elevated ground-saturation levels for long durations of time. This reduced the ability for trees' root systems to hold in high-wind events. Third, as trees either fell or were removed to reduce threats to public safety during storm events, the remaining grove structure changed, causing some trees to be directly exposed to wind for the first time.

Based on the discussion at the April 11, 2023, Board of Supervisors meeting, and the threat that hazardous trees pose to life and property given current conditions in the park, the Parks Department ("Department") is developing a Tree Risk Management Program ("Program").

DISCUSSION:

During recent storm events, trees in the County's parks system were uprooted and dropped limbs causing damage to facilities and infrastructure. Many trees in the parks system have likely had their root systems compromised, leaving them vulnerable.

The Program will be developed using a portion of the proposed funding; ongoing funding will be provided by the Department's annual allocation of Measure K. With the initial allocation of funding, the Department would hire a limited term arborist to develop the Program and complete the highest priority projects. Ongoing hazardous tree remediation will continue to be part of the Department's standard operation procedure.

The Program would focus on mitigating hazardous trees and identifiable tree risk to park visitors, staff, and neighbors by identifying high-use areas, managing the trees in these areas that present threats, and determining how to restore these areas to a more natural and safer condition. The Department defines high-use areas as picnic sites, campsites, playgrounds, parking lots, restrooms, visitor centers, boundaries with private residences, and other areas in the parks where people go, congregate, and stay. For the purposes of this Program, CuriOdyssey would also be considered a high-use area.

This Program is focused on mitigating the potential health and safety risk posed by hazardous trees, and is not intended to clear cut forests, unnecessarily remove trees from parks, or adversely impact ecosystems by removing native and ecologically beneficial trees.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE:

Measure	FY 2023-24	FY 2024-25	FY 2025-26
Number of hazardous trees removed from the County parks system	1,400	1,400	1,000

FISCAL IMPACT:

Non-Departmental Services will reimburse the Parks Department for costs associated with the Program in an amount not to exceed \$3,000,000. Of the one-time allocation, approximately \$470,000 will be spent on Salaries and Benefits resulting from adding one limited term arborist over a three-year period, and \$2,530,000 will be spent on costs associated with contract services. The ATR increases Salaries and Benefits, Services and Supplies, and Intrafund Transfers in the Department's FY 2022-23 Adopted Budget. Unspent appropriations will be included in future budgets.