



Staff Report

DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION REGARDING THE HOLIDAY TREE PROPOSAL

Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

Summary

The Parks and Recreation Department was asked to provide a recommendation to the City Council to determine what costs would be associated with lighting one of the trees in Twin Pines Park as a way of marking the Holiday season, and to suggest which tree would be best for this purpose.

After examining the options, Staff recommends that the City Council consider one of the three options listed below and provide direction to Staff for their preferred selection:

1. **Large Redwood Tree at Ralston Entrance:** This large tree, approx. 90' high, is the one visible from the steps of City Hall. It is one of the most impressive trees in the park, due both to its size and its placement on the border of Twin Pines Park with Ralston Avenue.
2. **Large Tree in the parking area between Manor House and City Hall:** The large tree can also be seen from City Hall
3. **Redwoods and Bushes surrounding City Hall and the Twin Pines Park Complex:** Closer to City Hall than the other options, the small size of the trees makes this a less expensive option.

Background

Preliminary research by staff determined that there are two general types of companies that decorate large, outdoor trees with lights:

- **Tree companies.** These companies have the equipment (aerial lifts) and staff with experience working with trees. Some of them have experience installing strands of lights in large trees, but that is the extent of their participation – they do not provide the lights, test them, connect them to power, or provide service and maintenance after installation.
- **Lighting companies.** These companies generally do provide the lights, test them, connect them to power, and provide service and maintenance after initial installation.

Staff contacted companies of both types to find the estimated costs that appear later in the report.

Having a nearby source of power for the lights will be the responsibility of the City when

dealing with either company. The types of lights recommended for use with large outdoor trees are designated in the industry as C-7 (approx. 2" long) or C-9 (approx. 3" long). These lights are much brighter than the mini-lights that one might be familiar with from home use, and so are much better suited for large trees. They are available in several holiday colors, but clear lights are often recommended as the tree can then be lit for other, non-holiday occasions where clear lights may be more appropriate. They are also outdoor-only lights, and withstand exposure to the elements much better. They do, however, require greater power to operate. In general, anywhere from 3-8 20-amp circuits would be required to power the lights, depending on the size of the tree and the number of bulbs to be lit.

The Parks and Recreation Commission conducted a public meeting to discuss and provide input regarding the proposed Lighted Holiday Tree at their October 4, 2006 meeting. Staff presented the following three options:

1. Decorate the Large Tree at the Ralston entrance.
2. Decorate the Large Tree located in the parking lot.
3. Decorate the trees and bushes in front of City Hall.

Discussion

After looking over various possible trees in the Park, the following areas stand out as the best possibilities:

1. *Large Redwood Tree at Ralston Entrance* – as discussed earlier, this 90' high tree is visible from the steps of City Hall (and from the Council Chambers.) It is one of the most impressive trees in the park, due both to its size and its placement on the border of Twin Pines Park with Ralston Avenue. In terms of impact on people looking at the tree, this would be the most effective. However, the size of the tree does make it more difficult to decorate with lights, which will in turn increase the cost of decorating it. There is also no convenient source of power near this area, which will require the City providing power there for the lights.
2. *Tree In The Parking Area Between the Manor House And City Hall* - while not as impressive as the large tree described above, this tree is also of a substantial size, and can be seen from City Hall (though as it is off to the side, it is not as noticeable.) The location is not as nice as the Ralston entrance tree, as it is in the middle of a parking area, and the tree is not really visible until you enter the parking area for City Hall. It does have easier access for workers when stringing lights, and being smaller will require less overall lights, reducing costs. Power can likely be supplied from the pole light near the tree.
3. *Smaller Redwoods/Bushes Surrounding City Hall and the Twin Pines Park Complex* - closer to City Hall than the other options, the small size of these trees makes this a less expensive option. With trees of this size, mini-lights could be used, and power for this area should be available from City Hall and the various building in the Twin Pines Park Complex. This area does not have a single tree that stands out, so to make much impact

all of the trees/bushes in the area would be lit.

Who to Perform Necessary Work?

Staff received estimates from two companies:

TAG Associates is headquartered in Los Gatos, and does holiday lights and decorations for many communities and commercial clients in the Bay Area, including San Carlos, Redwood City and Palo Alto. They provided the following cost estimates:

- A. Large Ralston Entrance Tree. Estimated cost of \$15,000 for all installation, testing, and connection of the lights. Ongoing maintenance costs of approximately \$3,000 per year.
- B. Tree in Parking Area. Estimated cost of \$6,000 for all installation, testing, and connection of the lights. Ongoing maintenance costs estimated to be \$900 per year.
- C. Trees/Bushes. Estimated costs of \$100 per tree/bush, using mini-lights. Trees can be decorated using ladders rather than lifts. Probable maintenance costs of \$40 per tree.

Davey Tree Experts is a company that the City often contracts with for trimming, removal, and upkeep. They have installed holiday trees for many customers throughout the Bay Area, and provided estimates for the first two options:

- A. Large Ralston Entrance Tree. Estimated Cost of \$1,000 to string the lights. Purchasing, testing, hooking the lights up to power, and ongoing maintenance would be the responsibility of the City.
- B. Tree in Parking Area. Estimated Cost of \$480 to string the lights. Purchasing, testing, hooking the lights up to power, and ongoing maintenance would be the responsibility of the City.

In addition to these costs, the City would need to purchase lights for the tree, at an estimated additional cost of \$600 - \$1,500 plus tax and shipping costs.

Community Event Option - Belmont Sings:

The Civic Center Holiday Tree Lighting event could include a culmination of neighborhood caroling. The eight neighborhood associations and seven condo/townhouse associations would be asked to lead their communities in caroling from their neighborhood to the Twin Pines Civic Center for the lighting of the City's Holiday Tree. A variety of activities would be available including holiday arts and crafts, cookie decorating and free hot chocolate and hot apple cider. The event would be highlighted by performance from local choirs from the various churches, high schools, NDNU, and other community choirs for all to enjoy the sounds of the season as "Belmont Sings" and celebrate the spirit of the holidays.

The event "Belmont Sings" is in line with the Departments philosophy of building community through small neighborhood building events. Sponsorship opportunities would support the cost of the event and possibly provide funding to offset a percentage of the holiday lighting at City

Hall and Twin Pines Park.

General Plan/Vision Statement

The appropriateness of the Holiday Tree Lighting project should be evaluated in light of the following 2003 Vision Statement objectives:

Vision Statement – Distinctive Community Character

“Belmont prides itself on being unique.”

Vision Statement – Distinctive Community Character

“Our strong sense of community and enjoyment of the town’s assets and activities deepen as we become better informed and connected.”

Fiscal Impact

Actual costs will depend on final contract reached after receiving Council direction to staff on which tree option to pursue, and on final negotiation of a contract with the vendor. If the City Council directs staff to decorate the large tree at the Ralston Avenue entrance, the initial cost would be approximately \$15,000, with annual maintenance costs of approximately \$3,000 per year.

There is no identified funding for this proposal in the Parks or Redevelopment budget. Therefore, funding for this action is recommended the City Manager’s Office budget, which has available funds sufficient to cover this cost. Alternatively, the source of funding can come from the City Council’s \$50,000 Contingency for unanticipated expenditures.

In addition, if the City Council directs staff to move forward with the “Belmont Sings” event as part of the tree lighting ceremony, the cost associated with this event would be no more than \$5,000.

If approved, this action will direct staff to bring back a supplemental appropriation for adoption at the Mid Year Budget Review.

Public Contact

This matter was placed on the agenda and posted as required by the California Government Code.

Recommendation

Provide direction to staff on the City Council’s preferred Holiday Tree option. If the Council prefers the *Large Tree at the Ralston Avenue entrance* option, then authorize staff to negotiate a contract with Davey Tree or TAG Associates, whichever is less, not to exceed \$15,000. The vendor will be required to install lights for this tree in line with the contract obligations.

Alternatives

1. Contract with TAG Associates or Davey Tree Experts to provide and install lights on the smaller tree between the Manor House and City Hall.
2. Contract with TAG Associates to provide and install mini-lights on the small redwoods and bushes immediately outside of City Hall.
3. Provide direction to staff on the City Council's preferred Holiday Tree option and direct staff to continue with the planning and coordination efforts for the "Belmont Sings" holiday event.
4. Direct staff to return to City Council with additional information as directed.
5. Do not install any lights at this time, foregoing a Holiday Tree and/or a City Sponsored holiday event for this year.

Attachments

None.

Respectfully submitted,

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