

Hazardous trees not going down easily

The removal of high-risk trees in Stern Grove could take years to complete, a city employee said.

Mike Aldax, The Examiner

2008-07-04

As hundreds of trees in Stern Grove are aging and falling apart, city officials have learned it will take years to remove many of them.

Three months ago, 50-year-old Kathleen Bolton of San Francisco was killed when the branch of a redwood tree crashed down on her in a Stern Grove parking lot.

That redwood tree was found to have had significant structural defects and should have been taken care of well before the tragedy, according to an arborist's report four years ago.

About 550 of Stern Grove's 2,600 trees are deemed hazardous, the report from Pleasanton-based HortScience said.

At a City Hall hearing Thursday, an official with the Recreation and Park Department told city officials that with three tree crews on its citywide staff, it will take years — not months — to remove many of the high-risk trees.

The official's warning comes in the midst of the Stern Grove summer concert series.

"There have been a number of folks that have called in saying it is a danger," said Supervisor Carmen Chu, whose district includes Stern Grove. "Right now, given that we only have three crews and a budget deficit, it's difficult to find the resources."

Chu said The City needs to prioritize how it maintains its trees. Many of them were planted around the same time and "as they start to age, you will start to see more tree failures across The City," she said.

Rec and Park, which oversees around 100,000 trees citywide, recently was allocated \$4 million in voter-approved funds for tree maintenance, some of which will go toward felling dead or dying trees.

"It comes at a really timely time," Chu said. "Now the question now is how to use those resources." Public safety has always been the Rec and Park top priority, department spokeswoman Rose Dennis said.

"It's always our goal to gain as much field staff as we can," she said. "But we work with the resources that we have."

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