



City of
Laguna Woods

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Cynthia Conners
Mayor

August 21, 2019

Noel Hatch
Mayor Pro Tem

The Honorable Kirk H. Nakamura
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Shari L. Horne
Councilmember

Carol Moore
Councilmember

Joe Rainey
Councilmember

SUBJECT: City of Laguna Woods' Response to the 2018-2019 Orange County Grand Jury Report, "Orange County's Urban Forest"

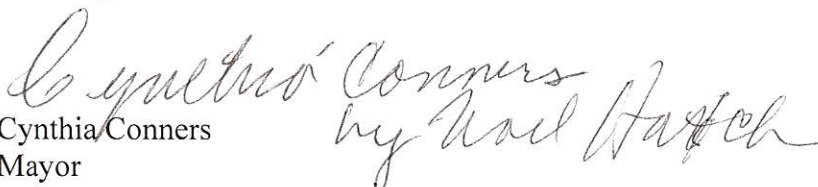
Christopher Macon
City Manager

Dear Judge Nakamura:

Per the Orange County Grand Jury's request, and in accordance with California Penal Code Section 933, please find the City of Laguna Woods' response to the subject report attached. The response was approved by the Laguna Woods City Council on August 21, 2019.

If you have any questions or would like any additional information, please contact David B. Cosgrove at (714) 662-4602 or dcosgrove@rutan.com.

Sincerely,


Cynthia Conners
Mayor

Attachment: A – City of Laguna Woods' Response to the 2018-2019 Orange County Grand Jury Report, "Orange County's Urban Forest"

cc: Orange County Grand Jury
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

ATTACHMENT A

City of Laguna Woods' Response to the 2018-2019 Orange County Grand Jury Report, "Orange County's Urban Forest"

FINDINGS

F1. Cities identified in F10 have dedicated a portion of their general fund budget to an urban forest program; however, the allocated percentage varies widely among cities (See Appendix B).

Response: The City of Laguna Woods disagrees partially with this finding. The City of Laguna Woods has dedicated a portion of its General Fund (and, other funds) budget to its urban forest program. The City of Laguna Woods does not have firsthand knowledge of the budget practices or conditions of the other cities identified in F10.

F2. In order to efficiently manage financial and staff resources, Orange County cities identified in F10 utilize contract services for their tree maintenance and services. Some cities also maintain a small staff to supplement contract services.

Response: The City of Laguna Woods disagrees partially with this finding. The efficient management of financial and staff resources is one reason why the City of Laguna Woods utilizes contract services for tree maintenance and services. The City's decision-making is intended to ensure the efficient, effective, and economical conduct of City business. The City of Laguna Woods does not have firsthand knowledge of the reasons for or the manners in which the other cities identified in F10 provide for tree maintenance and services.

F3. City councils for the cities identified in F10 are supportive of their urban forest programs and budget requests made by their respective city managers and public works departments.

Response: The City of Laguna Woods disagrees partially with this finding. The Laguna Woods City Council is supportive of the City of Laguna Woods' urban forest program, as well as budget requests made by the City Manager and the Engineering & Infrastructure Services Department. The City of Laguna Woods does not have firsthand knowledge of the views or responsiveness of the city councils for the other cities identified in F10.

F4. Cities interviewed for this report reported minimal financial liabilities from tripping hazards, root intrusions, and falling branches and trees.

Response: The City of Laguna Woods disagrees partially with this finding. The City of Laguna Woods was interviewed for the report and did report minimal financial liabilities from tripping hazards, root intrusions, and falling branches and trees. The City of Laguna Woods does not have firsthand knowledge of whether or what the other cities interviewed for the report reported to the Orange County Grand Jury.

F5. Cities identified in F10 have not been successful in ensuring that residents are aware of their city's urban forest program.

Response: The City of Laguna Woods disagrees wholly with this finding. It is unclear how the Orange County Grand Jury reached such a finding. The City of Laguna Woods does not believe its residents are unaware of its urban forest program. The City of Laguna Woods does not have firsthand knowledge of whether other cities have been successful in ensuring that their residents are aware of their respective urban forest programs.

F6. Environmental and economic benefits provided by urban forests have not been fully realized in Orange County cities identified in F10 and the unincorporated areas of Orange County.

Response: The City of Laguna Woods disagrees wholly with this finding. It is unclear how the Orange County Grand Jury reached such a finding. The City of Laguna Woods' urban forest provides substantial environmental and economic benefits, many of which are generally summarized in the "Background and Facts" section of the report.

F7. Cities identified in F10 do not coordinate their urban forest programs with each other.

Response: The City of Laguna Woods disagrees partially with this finding. In general, the City of Laguna Woods does not coordinate its urban forest program with other cities, nor do other cities coordinate their urban forest programs with the City. The City of Laguna Woods does not have firsthand knowledge of the extent to which urban forest programs may be coordinated (if at all) amongst the other cities identified in F10.

F10. The following cities have significantly fewer public street trees per resident than other Orange County cities (Appendix B). • La Palma • Laguna Beach • Laguna Niguel • Laguna Woods • Santa Ana • Stanton • Westminster • Yorba Linda

Response: The City of Laguna Woods disagrees partially with this finding. The Orange County Grand Jury's decision to exclude public land area from its comparison of public street trees by city has resulted in a flawed assessment of local efforts. The City of Laguna Woods' public streets and right-of-way areas (the only areas in which public street trees would be found) are generally limited to areas containing or adjacent to El Toro Road, Moulton Parkway, Ridge Route Drive, and Santa Maria Avenue. All other streets in Laguna Woods, including all residential streets, are located on private property and are, therefore, landscaped and maintained by private property owners. That is a markedly different arrangement than exists in other cities due to the size and scope of private development located within Laguna Woods. The City of Laguna Woods is proud of its public street trees and notes that the presence of trees throughout Laguna Woods is plentiful. The City of Laguna Woods does not have firsthand knowledge of the number of public street trees located in the cities identified in F10.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. By September 30, 2019, each city listed in F10 and the City of Mission Viejo should commit to continue regularly scheduled tree inspection and maintenance cycles to enhance public safety and to minimize future liabilities due to tree-related claims (F4).

Response: The City of Laguna Woods has implemented this recommendation prior to the report. The City of Laguna Woods has a longstanding commitment to regularly scheduled tree inspection and maintenance cycles for reasons including enhancing public safety and minimizing future liabilities due to tree-related claims. The City of Laguna Woods' commitment predates the report and remains unchanged as a result. The City conducts citywide tree inspections and citywide tree maintenance on an annual and as-needed basis.

R2. By September 30, 2019, Orange County cities listed in F10 should implement a program to coordinate with non-profit and volunteer organizations to improve residents' awareness of the city's urban forest benefits and promote active involvement with ongoing programs (F5).

Response: The City of Laguna Woods will not implement this recommendation because it is not warranted. As stated in the response to F5, the City of Laguna Woods does not believe its residents are unaware of its urban forest program. The City of Laguna Woods' encourages the active involvement of residents in reporting tree maintenance needs, which continues to occur without specific external programmatic coordination.

R3. By September 30, 2019, Orange County cities listed in F10 should develop and implement policies and practices that will benefit their urban forests and explore ways to improve their street tree count (F1, F6, F10).

Response: The City of Laguna Woods will not implement this recommendation because it is not warranted. The City of Laguna Woods' urban forest is well-maintained as a result of existing policies and practices, which are reviewed at least annually and amended on an as-needed basis. The Orange County Grand Jury's perception that the City of Laguna Woods' public street tree count requires improvement is based on a flawed methodology as previously discussed in the response to F10. The City of Laguna Woods does not believe that there is a deficiency in its present public street tree count and remains committed to appropriately caring for and, when practicable, expanding its urban forest.