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Berkeley Environment and Climate Commission

VIA EMAIL

Dear Berkeley Environment and Climate Commission,

Every Coast Redwood will sequester as much carbon as the typical household emits in 33 years. That is the equivalent of 250 “regular” trees.¹

Berkeley has hundreds of Redwoods on private and public land. These are an under-recognized major local mitigation to climate change.

The City has no ordinance to protect Redwoods on private land. In fact, the City can sometimes make it cheaper and faster to chop down precious redwoods in our dwindling urban forests & backyards.

I have been trying to protect a redwood tree in my backyard for nearly two years.

It’s in between two structures and near a deck. The tree roots have made my deck foundation rise and settle unevenly, so I now need to replace the deck.

When I showed the first deck redesign plans my engineer produced for an identically sized deck to a respected local arborist, he said that such a deck would seriously damage the redwood tree and threaten the nearby structures. The engineer proposed minor changes, and the arborist felt each one was still a hazard to the trees.

To save my redwood, I asked the engineer to produce a brand new design that worked within the arborists parameters. It was very expensive—easily above \$10,000 extra. I paid twice for designs, and had to add expensive steel stringers to save this tree. I believe it was worth every cent.

A byproduct of the new design that saved my redwood was that my deck size grew. The larger deck invalidated my original AUP. The City Zoning department requested a new AUP. This new AUP will cost me many more months and dollars hurdles on a project that has already taken 2 years and counting and incurred high expense for doing the right thing by climate.

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/trevornace/2019/07/29/best-way-to-fight-climate-change-clone-3000-year-old-redwoods/?sh=3e8b088f3c33>

I have requested an exception to the AUP. I believe the City Zoning Dept will ultimately grant that exception given the circumstances. But why should it be so difficult to do what is best for climate in an era where we have 9 years left before we cross irreversible climate thresholds?²

If we make it so hard and expensive to do what is right, won't homeowners choose the easy path and simply chop down redwoods in their yard to avoid structural challenges and AUP challenges?

Wouldn't the City's Environmental and Climate Commission consider it a big win to bear upon the City's Building, Planning, and Zoning Depts to make it easy and pain-free to protect redwoods? Title 24 asks for carbon neutral construction, yet cutting down a coast redwood for any construction project is equivalent to 33 years of carbon emissions from a typical American household, or >50 cars on the road.

I hope to encourage you to draft guidance to make it easy for City Departments to grant administrative exceptions when homeowners protect redwoods. Additionally, we should have an AUP and hearing if someone chooses to cut down a redwood tree on their property.

I would welcome the chance to speak at your upcoming meeting and present the need to common sense policies to protect redwoods in Berkeley in this era of accelerating climate change.

Sincerely,

Rahul Brown

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/11/11/cop27-egypt-carbon-budget-gas-projects/>