

# Jan C. Scow Consulting Arborists, LLC

Disease and Pest Diagnosis, Hazard Evaluation, Restorative Pruning Advice, Value Assessment

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Date: 10/14/20

To: Emma Dodson

From: Jan Scow

Subject: Evaluation of coral trees at Aubrey Austin Park

Reference:

- 1) "Evaluation of Construction Impacts...", dated 8/11/20, Vincent Amoroso (Davey)
- 2) Letter, dated 9/18/20, Edward Sinnott (ISA Certified Arborist)
- 3) Email, dated 10/6/20 at 10:19 AM, Dodson (online form)

**BACKGROUND:** LA County Department of Beaches and Harbors (LADB&H) retained Davey Resource Group to "conduct assessments" of several coral trees (*Erythrina caffra*) at the subject park in Marina Del Rey. This work was carried out by a Certified Arborist and was related to damage to the trees caused by root pruning associated with sidewalk repairs. The report responding to this request (reference 1) suggested the removal of several coral trees in the park due to concerns about safety.

Concerned neighbors intervened to stop the removals. They provided a second report from a Certified Arborist (reference 2) which suggested that only one tree was at significant risk of failure and needed removal. Ironically, this tree was not discussed in the Davey report.

We were asked to examine the trees and provide a third opinion regarding the safety of the trees and whether they require removal. We visited the site on 10/13/20 and inspected five coral trees.

**OBSERVATIONS:** The table below lists the trees that we examined, our conclusions about each tree, and the recommendations of the previous arborists.

Tree #	Scow	Davey recommendation	Sinnott <sup>1</sup>
VM27	No immediate failure risk noted, see recommendations below	Remove	Save
VM28	No immediate failure risk noted, see recommendations below	Remove	Save
VM29	Remove	Did not inspect	Remove
VM30	Has been removed	Remove	Save
VM33	No immediate failure risk noted, see recommendations below	Prune and monitor <sup>2</sup>	Save

<sup>1</sup> Sinnott did not address each tree individually except for Tree VM29.

<sup>2</sup> Davey recommended to "retain, monitor, and selective prune" Tree VM33, but LADB&H has decided to go against this recommendation and remove the tree.

Tree VM27- This tree's canopy has already been cut back severely. What remains of the canopy appears healthy. There was no evidence of recent root pruning on this tree and it is unclear how Amoroso arrived at the 50% root loss number. This tree is causing damage to the street-adjacent sidewalk. This sidewalk is over 5 feet wide.

Tree VM28- This tree appears healthy. There is minor root pruning on the east side for recent sidewalk repair. There is a driveway on the south side of this tree that has been repaired in the past, probably due to root damage. The trunk is 2-3 feet from the edge of the concrete.

Tree VM29- Although this tree was not noted in the Davey report, it is a high-risk tree for whole tree failure due to excessive lean, severe root cutting, and poor health. This tree should be removed as soon as possible as it is an immediate failure risk.

Tree VM30- This tree has been removed. Based on the extreme amount of root damage done to repair a small sidewalk, it probably had to be removed. It is unclear why this sidewalk was necessary.

Tree VM33- This tree is crowded amongst several other coral trees but appears reasonably healthy. We did not see any recent root cutting however there were small roots cut and left "in place" at some point in the past. None of these root cuts were significant to the tree's stability.

Park conditions- The trees in question (and several other coral trees) are growing in an environment that is not ideal for the species. They are surrounded by lawn which grows right up to the trunks in most cases. The entire area is watered excessively. There are sprinkler heads that spray directly onto tree trunks. Shallow roots have been severely damaged by lawn mowing equipment.

Root cutting- There was evidence of roots being severed adjacent to sidewalks in several areas. Most of this was not recent damage. The comments made in the Davey report regarding the extent of root cutting were curious. Comments like "approximately 50%", "approximately 70%" were hard to verify and could not be confirmed. Indeed, the amount of root cutting that we observed appeared to be significantly lower than these "estimates".

Pruning- Sinnott made a point of discussing the canopies and the lack of proper pruning as being his main concern. We observed that the trees had very dense canopies and were not being pruned adequately or properly. We observed a limb failure on one of the trees adjacent to the street sidewalk (not one of the subject trees), and would concur that limb failure from these trees is a concern in the park.

***DISCUSSION:*** If the goal is to get rid of trees, then the actions recommended by Davey address that goal. However, if the goal is to attempt to save trees, then the conclusions of the report are questionable.

In our examination, we did not see any evidence of high risk regarding whole tree failure for the subject trees, with the exception of Tree VM29. Yet, safety is the apparent justification for removing these trees. We acknowledge there is some root damage, but in no case is the damage as severe as Amoroso stated, nor do we think the amount of root damage puts the trees at high risk of failure. There are safety issues regarding the

lack of adequate maintenance and proper pruning of the trees that could lead to additional large limb failures, but this issue is easily managed with changes in landscape management and corrective pruning, rather than tree removal.

The conditions in the park are inappropriate for coral trees, which thrive in a drier soil environment. Excessive watering of coral trees leads to rapid growth that requires more frequent pruning as well as creates an environment favorable to the development of diseases in the trees. Wounding to roots from lawn mowing is also problematic, especially when those roots are frequently wetted.

Finally, the subject park is quite small, yet it contains an excessive amount of paving, much of which is not ADA-compliant. It was clear on the site that this paving has been repaired several times over the years. Now, trees are being recommended for removal apparently as a result of these repairs. Considering that the purpose of a park is to provide the community with green space, it seems counterintuitive to continue repairing excessive, non-compliant walkways at the expense of the health and safety of trees on the site.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** There are several steps that could be taken to make these trees safer and improve their growing environment, as well as reduce their rapid growth rate.

Remove some of the excessive sidewalks- Rather than removing trees to accommodate sidewalks, remove the sidewalks to accommodate the trees wherever possible. In addition, some of the sidewalks could be made narrower to give the trees a bit more room. For example, when the sidewalk between the street and Tree VM27 is repaired, it could be reduced to 4 feet wide instead of the current 5 feet. This would allow less root damage to the sidewalk and less damage to the tree, while still maintaining ADA compliance.

Install root barriers- In locations where sidewalks cannot be removed, installation of root barriers should be considered. If the roots can be safely cut, a root barrier will protect the sidewalks from further damage for several years.

Reduce canopies- Pruning the trees with crown reduction cuts will reduce their wind sail, reduce the likelihood of whole tree failure, and reduce the impacts if a tree does fail. All of the coral trees in the park, not just the subject trees, should be pruned appropriately to address structural concerns contributing to limb failure, such as corrective pruning where old topping cuts have led to excessive regrowth. Ideally these trees would be pruned twice a year.

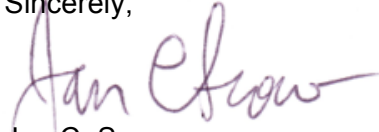
Change surrounding environment- Most important, if the entire park could be converted to a drier environment, it would solve several of the issues described above. Turning off the irrigation and allowing the lawn to die and be replaced with an appropriate mulch (such as decomposed granite) would be better for the health of the trees, require less frequent pruning, ultimately make for safer trees, and probably result in more blooming as an added bonus.

**CONCLUSIONS:** We did not observe any immediate threat of whole tree failure on the trees that were marked for removal by Davey or LADB&H. We are recommending the removal of Tree VM29 though, as it does represent an elevated risk of whole tree failure.

If the justification for removing the subject coral trees is based on the evaluation done by Davey, we strongly disagree with their conclusions and it is our opinion that there are not sufficient safety concerns to justify removing the trees. If LADB&H chooses to maintain these trees rather than remove them, they can certainly be made safer and conditions around the tree can easily be improved in their favor.

Please let us know if we can be of any further assistance or if you have any additional questions. Our goal is to satisfy our clients and help them to better care for their trees in the most effective way possible. We look forward to working with you toward that goal!

Sincerely,



Jan C. Scow  
ASCA Registered Consulting Arborist #382  
Board Certified Master Arborist # WE-1972B



### **ARBORIST DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

Arborists are tree specialists who use their education, knowledge, training and experience to examine trees, recommend measures to enhance the beauty and health of trees, and attempt to reduce the risk of living near trees. Clients may choose to accept or disregard the recommendations of the arborist or seek additional advice

Arborists cannot detect every condition that could possibly lead to the structural failure of a tree. Trees are living organisms that fail in ways we do not fully understand. Conditions are often hidden within trees and below ground. Arborists cannot guarantee that a tree will be healthy or safe under all circumstances, or for a specified period of time. Likewise, remedial treatments, like any medicine, cannot be guaranteed.

Treatment, pruning, and removal of trees may involve considerations beyond the scope of the arborist's services such as property boundaries, property ownership, site lines, disputes between neighbors, landlord-tenant matters, etc. Arborists cannot take such issues into account unless complete and accurate information is given to the arborist. The person hiring the arborist accepts full responsibility for authorizing the recommended treatment or remedial measures.

Trees can be managed, but they cannot be controlled. To live near a tree is to accept some degree of risk. The only way to eliminate all risks is to eliminate all trees.