

March 15, 2024

TO: City of Santa Barbara Parks & Recreation Department  
City Parks Commission

FROM: Mary Jane Headlee and Ralph Clevenger

RE: Removal of Mexican Fan Palm – 138 Santa Rosa Place, SB

We recently submitted an application to the SB Parks & Recreation Department for removal of a Mexican Fan Palm in our front yard. After a committee meeting on 3/7/24, this request was denied. Although we do understand that it is a healthy tree, we would like to further detail why we believe it is appropriate to remove this tree.

1) This tree started as a volunteer in our yard about 30 years ago. For many years, it was the appropriate size for our yard. However, it is now too tall and out of scale with our house and yard size. Since Mexican Fan Palms can grow up to 100 feet tall, it will eventually tower over our house.

2) It has become a hazard. When the tree was of moderate height and had a skirt of palm fronds around it, it did not shed a lot of fronds. However, as it has continued to grow, it has reached a certain point where the fronds are self-shedding and with its current height, it has become dangerous.

a. In 2021, a large portion of the skirt spontaneously fell. The fronds covered our entire front patio and one-half of our driveway. Ralph was just walking through that area shortly before it happened and could have been seriously injured. (Images enclosed) We hired a tree company to remove another portion of the skirt to lighten the load. This is an expensive endeavor to keep the tree trimmed as any tree company needs to bring a crane truck with a bucket to reach those heights.

b. In late 2023, the upper half of the tree skirt spontaneously fell. The lower half of the skirt was left exposed. Since this occurred during a storm, the fronds not only fell in our yard, but flew into the neighbors' yard too.

c. In early 2024, during another storm, the remainder of the skirt fell, once again during a storm and covering our yard, our neighbor's yard and some flew into the street.

d. With each of these events, it becomes our responsibility to collect, bundle and dispose of these fronds, which is at our expense. During the last storm, some of the fronds were blown into the street, but the City of SB Parks truck that came by to deal with a downed tree would not take them since they were from "our" tree.

As you are aware, when these fronds fall from such a height, they can injure any pedestrian and well as cause property damage. What if a falling palm frond hits a person? And we are also concerned about damage to our house and to all the surrounding area. Cars are routinely parked in front of our house and if a palm frond falls on one causing damage, we, as the homeowners, would be responsible for any claims. The same goes for our neighbors' houses. What if a solar panel was broken? We think this liability issue is reason enough to grant our request.

3) Climate considerations: Palm trees do not provide much shade or sequester carbon well. For example, Miami Beach, Long Beach and Los Angeles are reducing the percentage of palms in their urban forests.

Our house faces almost due west. In the afternoons we get direct sunlight into the front of our house. The Mexican Fan Palm does not provide any shade for our house as its canopy width is only 10-18 feet and with its current height, any shade is a small circle on our roof.

We planted a Gold Medallion Tree about 2 years ago in our front yard. This was in anticipation that it would replace, or offset, the removal of the Mexican Fan Palm. The Gold Medallion tree reaches a height of only 25 feet, more in keeping with the scale of the house and their canopy spreads out to 30 feet, thus providing a lot more shade to the front of our house.

We believe this replacement tree is better suited for our house and small front yard. It would also provide us with more shade, thus reducing the use of energy to cool the inside of our house,

As per the notice that was attached to our tree, we believe we fulfill many of the requires to grant a tree removal permit:

- a. Outgrown planting site: The base of the palm tree base is covering part of our flagstone patio, and the height of the tree is out of scale with our home.
- b. Aesthetically unattractive: All we see of the tree now is the trunk of the tree. Looking out from our front room, we do not get any pleasing view of greenery, flowers or branches. You need to tilt your head way back to see the top of the tree.
- c. Tree creates hazard or debris: This is detailed above.
- d. Replacement tree: We have replaced it with a tree that is more appropriate in scale and will provide shade for the front of our house.

We have attached two letters that our neighbors just gave to us after seeing the notice the SB Parks & Rec committee placed on the tree. One of the attached photos (138 Santa Rosa Place 4.jpg) shows the proximity of the tree to our neighbors at 142 Santa Rosa Place.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mary Jane Headlee & Ralph Clevenger