City of Sebastopol

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: December 1, 2026

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To:	Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
From:	Eli Arreola, Associate Planner
Responsible Department:	Planning
Subject:	Appeal of Tree Board Denial: Removal of One American Sweetgum Tree at the Fiesta Shopping Center, 550 Gravenstein Highway North (Applicants: Sandborn Tree Service and Fiesta 116, c/o Don Strouzas). The City Council will hear an appeal of the Sebastopol Tree Board's decision to deny removal of one American sweetgum tree at the Fiesta Shopping Center, 550 Gravenstein Highway North. The tree stands at the southwest corner of the parking lot, behind the EV charging stalls and next to the highway. The Tree Board denied the request, and the applicants have appealed to the City Council.

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RECOMMENDATION:
Staff recommends that the City Council deny the appeal and reaffirm the Design Review Board's determination that the tree does not meet the criterion required for approval of removal.

PROCESS OF AGENDA ITEM:

- Presentation of agenda item
- Council questions and discussion
- Public comment
- Council deliberation and action

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
The item before the City Council is consideration of an appeal of a denied tree removal application of one (1) large American sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) at the southwest corner of the Fiesta Shopping Center parking lot at 550 Gravenstein Hwy North.

BACKGROUND:
In August 2026, a Tree Removal application was submitted by Sandborn Tree Service, on behalf of Don Strouzas. The tree has a 28.5-inch diameter at breast height. Sebastopol Municipal Code (SMC) section 8.12.060 requires review and approval by the Design Review/Tree Board of a tree removal permit for the proposed removal of trees within commercial zones with a trunk of size of 20 inches or more, measured at breast height. The applicant applied for a tree removal permit for the American sweetgum due to a history of branch failure in high-traffic areas of persons, vehicles, and property.

On September 22, 2026, a duly noticed public hearing was held by the Design Review/ Tree Board. After reviewing the Sebastopol Municipal Code (SMC) Chapter 8.12.060, application documents, the City Arborist's report, hearing a presentation from staff, and listening to public comment, the Design Review/ Tree Board denied the Tree Removal Permit.

On September 29, 2026, Sandborn Tree Service, on behalf of Don Strouzas, “appellant”, submitted an appeal of the Design Review/ Tree Board’s decision, citing the risk presented to shopping customers using the charging stations in proximity to the subject tree.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:
Ben Anderson, an ISA Certified Arborist serving as the City Arborist, reviewed the application, conducted a site visit, and prepared an Arborist’s Report dated September 3, 2026 (Exhibit C). In summary, the report stated that the subject tree is located in the Fiesta Shopping Center parking lot, behind the electric-vehicle charging stalls and next to Gravenstein Highway N. The report indicates that the tree is a healthy shade tree with a full canopy. It has a twin-stemmed form with an included-bark union and wounds from two prior branch failures, which the Arborist notes are real structural defects.

In the City Arborist’s report, he describes the tree as tall, with a full, well-foliated canopy that was beginning to show the normal early-autumn coloration typical of the species. During his site visit, the City Arborist did not see any significant dieback, and there was no indication that the tree was in decline. The report also mentions that the tree divides into two codominant stems at roughly 6 feet above grade. The two stems meet at a narrow, acute-angled union with included bark. The trunk is noticeably swollen just below the union.

The City Arborist observed wounds from two large prior limb failures, with tear-out and exposed wood where the limbs pulled away. The remaining large limbs extend over the parking lot, the drive aisle, the electric-vehicle charging stalls, parked vehicles, an adjacent walkway, and Gravenstein Highway N. He also noted that the tree grows near overhead utility lines along the highway frontage, and that line-clearance vegetation management in that space is handled by the electric utility company.

According to the Arborist, branch failure is well documented in American sweetgum. The defects on this tree, the included-bark codominant union and the prior branch failures, are the structural, end-weight type of defect that reduction pruning is designed to address. He notes that shortening the two leaders and the overextended limbs reduces their length and end weight, which reduces the leverage and load on the union and on the branch attachments, and lowers the likelihood of failure. A supplemental support cable installed between the two stems can further reduce the likelihood of union failure. Furthermore, the report states that shortening overextended limbs with selective reduction cuts, cutting back to suitable lateral branches to reduce length and end weight, is standard pruning practice under the ANSI A300 (2023) Tree Care Standards and the ISA pruning best management practices.

The report states that the work needed on this tree can be done with small reduction cuts, up to about three (3) inches in diameter, while retaining the interior and lower foliage and the natural form of the crown. It does not require topping, heading cuts, or removing an excessive amount of live foliage. Maintaining this tree by pruning is therefore consistent with accepted arboricultural standards. Therefore, the City Arborist is not supportive of the removal of this tree, as it does not meet the required findings of SMC § 8.12.060 D.

The City Arborist recommends that the tree be retained and reduced by selective pruning to reduce the likelihood of future branch failure over the parking lot and adjacent targets. The property owner may, as an added measure, install a support cable between the two codominant stems. He also recommends that the ivy be severed at the base and removed from the trunk, both to reduce added load and to allow the trunk and union to be inspected. The reduction pruning should be completed within the coming dormant season, and the tree should be re-inspected periodically, roughly every two to three years, so that limb length and end weight can be managed over time.

<u>Allegations of the Appeal and Findings to Deny the Appeal:</u>

1. **Allegation of the Appeal:**
   The decision to deny the application fails to consider safety concerns stemming from the tree’s history of branch failure.

Staff Response and Finding:

Sebastopol Municipal Code Section 8.12.060(D) establishes the criteria that a tree removal permit application must meet in order to be approved. There are five (5) criteria, and an application must meet at least one criteria in order to be approved. SMC Section 8.12.060(D)(2) establishes the relevant criteria to address the allegation of the appeal, stating: "The tree poses a likely foreseeable threat to life or property which cannot be reasonably mitigated through pruning, root barriers, or other management methods." In his report, the City Arborist states that the foreseeable concern is branch failure over the parking lot, drive aisle, charging stalls, and the adjacent sidewalk and street. The City Arborist also identifies that this concern can be reasonably mitigated through selective reduction pruning and, if desired, through a support cable between the two stems. Because the risk can be reasonably mitigated by pruning, this removal criterion is not satisfied.

Staff Analysis:
Staff finds that the tree removal application does not meet any of the required removal criteria identified in SMC Section 8.12.060(D), specifically, the application does not meet the second criterion because potential safety risks can be reasonably mitigated though selective reduction pruning, as identified in the City Arborist's report.

CITY COUNCIL GOALS/PRIORITIES AND GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY:
This item supports the City Council's goals and priorities, including:

- Goal 4: High-Performance Organization
- Restoring public trust
- Improving public communications and community engagement

The project site has a General Plan Land Use Designation of Commercial Office (CO), and the proposed project is consistent with the following General Plan policies:

- Goal COS 6: Conserve, Protect, and Enhance Trees and Native Vegetation
- Policy COS 6-3: Avoid removal of large, mature trees that provide wildlife habitat or contribute to the visual quality of the environment through appropriate project design and building siting. If full avoidance is not possible, prioritize planting of replacement trees on-site over off-site locations. Replacement trees for high-quality mature trees should generally be of like kind, and provide for comparable habitat functionality, where appropriate site conditions exist.
- Policy COS 6-4: Facilitate the preservation of existing trees, the planting of additional street trees, and the replanting of trees lost through disease, new construction or by other means.
- Action COS 6b: Continue to implement the Tree Protection Ordinance, which protects substantial trees, provides for removals in specified circumstances, and which requires a Tree Protection Plan (TPP) prepared by a certified arborist for projects that may affect protected trees.

PUBLIC COMMENT:
As of the writing of this staff report, the City has not received any public comment. However, if staff receives public comment from interested parties following the publication and distribution of this staff report, such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting. In addition, public comments may be offered during the public comment portion of this item.

PUBLIC NOTICE:
This item was noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled meeting date.

FISCAL IMPACT:
Denial of the appeal and denial of the tree removal permit is not expected to have significant fiscal impact on the City or the 2026/27 General Fund. While appeal fees are subsidized and do not cover the full cost of processing these applications, the fee does cover a majority of the hard costs (postage and noticing), with the remainder being staff time to review materials, manage the project, and prepare materials for the public hearing.

RESTATED RECOMMENDATION:
Staff recommends that the City Council deny the appeal and reaffirm the Design Review Board's determination that the tree does not meet the criterion required for approval of removal.

OPTIONS:
1. Direct staff to make findings to approve the appeal and reverse the Design Review/ Tree Board's decision to deny the tree removal permit.

ATTACHMENTS:
Exhibit A - Draft Resolution No. XX-2026
Exhibit B – Completed Appeal Form
Exhibit C - City Arborist Report dated September 3, 2026
Exhibit D – Tree Removal Application
Exhibit E – Sep 22 2026 Tree Board Minutes

APPROVALS:
Department Head Approval: Approval Date: __11/16/2026__
CEQA Determination (Planning): Approval Date: __11/16/2026__

Environmental Review:
The proposed tree removal is categorically exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Section 15304, Class 4, which includes minor alterations to existing topographical features, such as the removal of a tree. Additionally, if the appeal is denied and the original denial of by the Tree Board upheld, the project is statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15270, Projects which are Disapproved.

Administrative Services/Financial Approval: Approval Date: _____N/A_____
Costs authorized in City Approved Budget: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☑ N/A (Future budget impacts are not known at this time and are dependent on City Council direction)
Account Code (if applicable) _____
City Attorney Approval: Approval Date: _____N/A____
City Manager Approval: Approval Date: __11/23/2026__

RESOLUTION NUMBER: -2026

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEBASTOPOL DENYING THE APPEAL AND UPHOLDING THE DENIAL OF A TREE REMOVAL PERMIT REQUESTING TO REMOVE ONE AMERICAN SWEETGUM AT 550 GRAVENSTEIN HIGHWAY NORTH (FILE 2026-040)

WHEREAS, Sebastopol Municipal Code (SMC) section 8.12.060 requires review and approval by the Design Review/Tree Board of a tree removal permit for the proposed removal of trees within commercial zones with a trunk of size of 20 inches or more, measured at breast height.

WHEREAS, the applicant, Don Strouzas, represented by Sandborn Tree Service, submitted a Tree Removal application on August 20, 2026, requesting to remove an American sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) with a diameter of breast height of 28.5 inches at the Southwest corner of the Fiesta Shopping Center parking lot at 550 Gravenstein Highway North; and

WHEREAS, On September 22, 2026, a duly noticed public hearing was held by the Design Review/ Tree Board. After reviewing the Sebastopol Municipal Code (SMC) Chapter 8.12.060, application documents, the City Arborist's report, hearing a presentation from staff, and listening to public comment, the Design Review/ Tree Board denied the Tree Removal Permit; and

WHEREAS, an appeal was received on September 29, 2026, from Sandborn Tree Service, on behalf of Don Strouzas, appealing the Design Review/Tree Board's decision on the basis that the denial failed to consider safety; and

WHEREAS, the City Council held a duly-noticed public hearing on December 1, 2026, held a public hearing, heard a staff report, heard a presentation from the applicant, and heard public testimony; and

WHEREAS, the project is categorically exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Section 15304, Class 4, which includes minor alterations to existing topographical features, such as the removal of a tree, and statutorily exempt from the requirements of CEQA pursuant to Section 15270, Projects which are Disapproved; and

WHEREAS, the City Council finds that the proposed use is subject to the following provisions of the General Plan:

> *Policy COS 6-3: Avoid removal of large, mature trees that provide wildlife habitat or contribute to the visual quality of the environment through appropriate project design and building siting. If full avoidance is not possible, prioritize planting of replacement trees on-site over off-site locations. Replacement trees for high-quality mature trees should generally be of like kind, and provide for comparable habitat functionality, where appropriate site conditions exist.*
>
> *Policy COS 6-4: Facilitate the preservation of existing trees, the planting of additional street trees, and the replanting of trees lost through disease, new construction or by other means.*

Policy COS 6b: Continue to implement the Tree Protection Ordinance, which protects substantial trees, provides for removals in specified circumstances, and which requires a Tree Protection Plan (TPP) prepared by a certified arborist for projects that may affect protected trees.

WHEREAS, the City Council finds that the proposed tree removal does not meet the required removal criteria identified in Sebastopol Municipal Code Section 8.12.060(D), in that this section requires applications to meet at least one of the five (5) required removal criteria in order to be approved and the subject application does not meet any of the criteria.

WHEREAS, the City Council finds that the proposed tree removal does not meet the requirements of SMC 8.12.060(D),

A. *The tree is diseased or structurally unsound and, as a result, is likely to become a significant hazard to life or property within the next two years*.
The applicant states that the required scope of work to maintain this tree by pruning would be inconsistent with established ISA standards. As part of Ben Anderson's City Arborist review, the report states that the tree is healthy, with a full canopy, and there are no signs of decline. It has structural defects, but it is not diseased, and in his opinion, it is not likely to become a significant hazard within the next two years, particularly because the likelihood of branch failure can be reduced through routine reduction pruning. Therefore, this criterion has not been met.

B. *The tree poses a likely foreseeable threat to life or property which cannot be reasonably mitigated through pruning, root barriers, or other management methods.*
The City Arborist's report states that the foreseeable concern is branch failure over the parking lot, the drive aisle, the charging stalls, and the adjacent walkway and street. That threat can be reasonably mitigated through selective reduction pruning and, if desired, through a support cable between the two stems. Because the risk can be reasonably mitigated by pruning, this finding is not satisfied. Therefore, this criterion has not been met.

C. *The property owner can demonstrate that there are unreasonably onerous recurring maintenance issues, which are deemed necessary for safety or protection of property. The property owner is responsible for providing documentation to support such a claim.*
The City Arborist's report states that the application does not provide documentation demonstrating that the recurring maintenance needed to retain this tree would be unreasonably onerous. Based on his inspection, the City Arborist states that the anticipated maintenance consists primarily of periodic reduction pruning to manage limb length and end weight. Therefore, this criterion has not been met.

D. *A situation exists or is proposed in which structures or improvements, including, but not limited to, building additions, second units, swimming pools, and solar energy systems, such as solar panels, cannot be reasonably designed or altered to avoid the need for tree removal.*
This criterion is not applicable.

E. *The tree has matured to such an extent that it is determined to be out of scale with adjacent structures and utilities, or with other landscape features.*

The City Arborist's report states that the tree is a mature shade tree of a size appropriate to the edge of a commercial parking lot, and it is not out of scale with the site. It grows near overhead utility lines, but vegetation in that space is managed by the utility's line-clearance program, and the tree has been maintained in place rather than removed. Therefore, the removal of the tree does not meet this criterion.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City of Sebastopol City Council hereby denies the Appeal and Upholds the Denial of the tree removal permit application (Planning File 2026-040), subject to the Findings in this Resolution.

The above and foregoing Resolution was duly passed, approved and adopted at a meeting by the City Council on the 1st day of December 2026, by the following vote:

VOTE:
Ayes:
Noes:
Abstain:
Absent:

APPROVED: _____
Mayor

ATTEST: _____
Mary Gourley, City Manager

APPROVED AS TO FORM: _____
Alex Mog, City Attorney

City of Sebastopol

APPEAL FORM

Date: 9/29/26
* Filing Fee Paid: _____
File #: _____

To: (check one):

[ ] PLANNING COMMISSION (limited to the appeal of staff determination not involving design matters or Planning Director Use Permit decision)
[ ] DESIGN REVIEW BOARD (limited to the appeal of staff determination on design matters)
[ ] TREE BOARD (limited to the appeal of staff determination on tree removals)
[X] CITY COUNCIL (all other appeals)

FROM: Sandborn Tree Service, Inc. on behalf of Don Strouzas
(Please print your name)

SUBJECT:
I wish to appeal the action of: (check one):

[ ] CITY STAFF (please give name or title) _____
[ ] PLANNING DIRECTOR PUBLIC HEARING
[X] TREE BOARD
[ ] DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
[ ] PLANNING COMMISSION

Taken or made on 9/22/26 (Date of action or decision) with regards to Tree removal application 2026-040. (Name of use, applicant, project or other description of item you are appealing) APN 004430038

I ask that the decision or determination made above be reversed and/or modified, and that the original application be:
(Check one): [X] granted [ ] denied [ ] modified

The reason(s) that my appeal should be granted by the Board, Commission, or Council named above [ ] are set forth below: or, [ ] are attached.

Please see the attached document from the property owner requesting that this decision be reconsidered due to the risk presented to clients using charging stations in proximity to the subject tree.

I understand that there is a filing fee for appeal, whether the appeal is from a Staff Determination, Design Review Board Decision, or Planning Commission Decision, and that the fee must be paid on the date that the appeal is submitted. Appeals must be submitted within 7 calendar days from the day of the original staff determination, or of the Board/Commission action. (The date of the decision is not included in the calculation of 7 days.)*

You will be notified by mail of the date of the Board, Commission or City Council hearing on review of your appeal. All interested persons will be entitled to attend the meeting and be heard.

M. Sandborn Mariah Sandborn
Your Signature Print Name

119 Morris Street Sebastopol, Ca 95472
Your Mailing Address

(707) 823-9144 service@sandborntree.com
Your Phone Number Your Email Address

* If a staff determination was mailed to you, and a public meeting has not been held, the appeal must be submitted within seven (7) days of the mailing of the letter.

9/28/2026

TO: City of Sebastopol Planning Department

RE: Tree Removal Application (2026-040)

550 Gravenstein Hwy N. (APN 004-430-038)

I am shocked and very disappointed that the City of Sebastopol Planning Department denied our tree removal application, especially given the following statement in the Denial Letter: According to the City Arborist, branch failure is well documented in American sweetgum.

As the landlord I am very concerned about the safety for our customers that frequent the Fiesta Shopping Center particularly since limbs from this tree have fallen in the past. With more people now parking in this area to use the new EV Charging stations, which are located directly below and next to the problem Liquid Amber tree, I am even more concerned that a customer will get severely injured when a future tree limb falls in this area. It is my desire to be pro-active and mitigate future liabilities, which was the reason we submitted the application to remove this one tree.

I ask that you re-evaluate your decision, taking into account the desire to provide a safer environment for our customers, and please approve our tree removal application.

I would also be willing to plant a new smaller tree to replace the liquid amber tree once it is removed.

Thank you,

Don Strouzas

Urban Forestry Associates
550 Gravenstein Hwy Liquidambar

September 3, 2026

Client: City of Sebastopol
Project Location: 550 Gravenstein Hwy N, Sebastopol, CA
Inspection Date: September 2, 2026
Arborist: Ben Anderson

URBAN FORESTRY ASSOCIATES, INC.

Summary

The subject tree is a large American sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) at the southwest corner of the Fiesta Shopping Center parking lot, behind the electric-vehicle charging stalls and next to Gravenstein Highway N. The tree is a healthy shade tree with a full canopy. It has a twin-stemmed form with an included-bark union and wounds from two prior branch failures, which are real structural defects. In my opinion the likelihood of future branch failure can be reasonably reduced through selective reduction pruning, and, if the property owner wants to go further, through a support cable between the two stems. Because that risk can be reasonably mitigated without removing the tree, the application does not meet the required findings of Sebastopol Municipal Code § 8.12.060 D, and I do not recommend approval.



Figure 1. The subject American sweetgum viewed from the parking lot, behind the electric-vehicle charging stalls. Overhead utility lines and a pole-mounted transformer cross the frontage at left. The canopy is full and the tree is in good health.

Assignment

Tori Henkel of the City of Sebastopol Planning Department asked me, as City Arborist, to review a tree removal permit application for the subject tree and advise the Tree Board whether the requested removal meets the criteria of Sebastopol Municipal Code Chapter 8.12, "Tree Protection." I was provided the application materials, including the applicant's written statement, photographs, and a location map. I inspected the tree from the ground on September 2, 2026. No one met me on site.

This was a ground-based visual inspection. I did not climb the tree, excavate roots, or perform internal decay detection. English ivy (*Hedera helix*) covering the lower trunk limited my inspection of the trunk and the base of the union.

Observations

The subject tree is an American sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*). I measured the trunk at 28.5 inches in diameter at standard height, 4.5 feet above grade and below the union. The tree is tall, with a full, well-foliated canopy that was beginning to show the normal early-autumn coloration typical of the species. I saw no significant dieback and no indication that the tree is in decline (Figure 1).

The tree divides into two codominant stems at roughly 6 feet above grade. The two stems meet at a narrow, acute-angled union with included bark. The trunk is noticeably swollen just below the union. Ivy obscured part of this area, so I could not fully inspect the union or the wood immediately below it.

The tree has a history of branch failure. I observed wounds from two large prior limb failures, with tear-out and exposed wood where the limbs pulled away. The remaining large limbs extend over the parking lot, the drive aisle, the electric-vehicle charging stalls, parked vehicles, an adjacent walkway, and Gravenstein Highway N.

Urban Forestry Associates
550 Gravenstein Hwy Liquidambar

September 3, 2026

These are the targets of concern.

The tree grows near overhead utility lines along the highway frontage (Figure 1). Line-clearance vegetation management in that space is handled by the electric utility.

Discussion

Branch failure is well documented in American sweetgum. The University of California's Western Tree Failure Database includes a detailed summary of 137 reported failures in this species, 96 of which were branch failures. Of those branch failures, 68 percent occurred at the point of attachment and another 24 percent within 6 feet of it, and the mean branch diameter at the point of failure was 7 inches. Decay was not reported in 66 percent of the branch failures, showing that substantial branch failures frequently occurred without decay. In the subset of reports where end weight was recorded, 30 of 38 branches were reported to have substantial end weight. The conditions most often associated with failure were dense crowns and codominance, and the trees are heavily laden with seed. The species is also subject to summer branch drop. In that dataset, 67 percent of the trees that failed had received no pruning.

The defects on this tree, the included-bark codominant union and the prior branch failures, are the structural, end-weight type of defect that reduction pruning is designed to address. Included bark can interfere with the development of a strong wood connection between codominant stems, making the union more susceptible to separation under load. Shortening the two leaders and the overextended limbs reduces their length and end weight, which reduces the leverage and load on the union and on the branch attachments, and lowers the likelihood of failure. A supplemental support cable installed between the two stems can further reduce the likelihood of union failure.

Shortening overextended limbs with selective reduction cuts, cutting back to suitable lateral branches to reduce length and end weight, is standard pruning practice under the ANSI A300 (2023) Tree Care Standards and the ISA pruning best management practices. The work needed on this tree can be done with small reduction cuts, up to about 3 inches in diameter, while retaining the interior and lower foliage and the natural form of the crown. It does not require topping, heading cuts, or removing an excessive amount of live foliage. Maintaining this tree by pruning is therefore consistent with accepted arboricultural standards.

A tree removal permit is required for this tree. The property is in commercial use, and the tree has a single trunk well over 20 inches in diameter at standard height, so its removal requires a permit under SMC § 8.12.060 A.2. The tree is not an escaped exotic and does not qualify for any of the exemptions in § 8.12.060 B.

Because the removal does not meet an exemption, at least one of the findings in SMC § 8.12.060 D must be established and verified by the City Arborist before the Tree Board may approve the permit. My response to each finding follows in italics.

1. The tree is diseased or structurally unsound and, as a result, is likely to become a significant hazard to life or property within the next two years.

Not met. The tree is healthy, with a full canopy and no sign of decline. It has structural defects, but it is not diseased, and in my opinion it is not likely to become a significant hazard within the next two years, particularly because the likelihood of branch failure can be reduced through routine reduction pruning.

2. The tree poses a likely foreseeable threat to life or property which cannot be reasonably mitigated through pruning, root barriers, or other management methods.

Not met. The foreseeable concern is branch failure over the parking lot, the drive aisle, the charging stalls, and the adjacent walkway and street. That threat can be reasonably mitigated through selective reduction pruning, and, if desired, through a support cable between the two stems. Because the risk can be reasonably mitigated by pruning, this finding is not satisfied.

3. The property owner can demonstrate that there are unreasonably onerous recurring maintenance issues, which are deemed necessary for safety or protection of property. The property owner is responsible for providing documentation to support such a claim.

Not met. The application does not provide documentation demonstrating that the recurring maintenance needed to retain this tree would be unreasonably onerous. Based on my inspection, the anticipated maintenance consists primarily of periodic reduction pruning to manage limb length and end weight.

4. A situation exists or is proposed in which structures or improvements cannot be reasonably designed or altered to avoid the need for tree removal.

Not applicable.

5. The tree has matured to such an extent that it is determined to be out of scale with adjacent structures and utilities, or with other landscape features.

Not met. The tree is a mature shade tree of a size appropriate to the edge of a commercial parking lot, and it is not out of scale with the site. It grows near overhead utility lines, but vegetation in that space is managed by the utility's line-clearance program, and the tree has been maintained in place rather than removed.

Conclusions

The requested removal does not meet any of the findings required by Sebastopol Municipal Code § 8.12.060 D. The tree is a healthy, structurally defective but manageable shade tree whose principal risk, branch failure, can be reasonably reduced through pruning. I do not recommend approval of the tree removal permit.

I recommend that the tree be retained and reduced by selective pruning to reduce the likelihood of future branch failure over the parking lot and adjacent targets. The property owner may, as an added measure, install a support cable between the two codominant stems. I also recommend that the ivy be severed at the base and removed from the trunk, both to reduce added load and to allow the trunk and union to be inspected. The reduction pruning should be completed within the coming dormant season, and the tree should be re-inspected periodically, roughly every two to three years, so that limb length and end weight can be managed over time.

Pruning Specifications

Reduce the length and end weight of the two codominant leaders and the longer overextended limbs, concentrating on branches over the parking lot, charging stalls, walkway, and other occupied areas. Use selective reduction cuts no larger than approximately three inches in diameter. Retain interior and lower foliage and the natural form of the crown. Do not generally thin the canopy, lion-tail branches, top the tree, or make indiscriminate heading cuts. Remove the minimum amount of live foliage necessary to reduce limb length and leverage.

Works Cited

American National Standards Institute. 2023. *ANSI A300 Tree Care Standards*. Tree Care Industry Association, Londonderry, New Hampshire.

Lilly, Sharon J., Edward F. Gilman, and E. Thomas Smiley. 2019. *Best Management Practices—Pruning*. Third edition. International Society of Arboriculture.

Regents of the University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. *California Tree Failure Report Program (Western Tree Failure Database): Liquidambar styraciflua branch failures*. https://ucanr.edu/sites/treefail/Species_Profiles/Liquidambar_styraciflua_branch_failures

Smiley, E. Thomas, and Sharon Lilly. 2014. *Best Management Practices—Tree Support Systems*. Third edition. International Society of Arboriculture.

Urban Forestry Associates
550 Gravenstein Hwy Liquidambar

September 3, 2026

Scope of Work and Limitations

Urban Forestry Associates has no personal or monetary interest in the outcome of this investigation. All observations regarding trees in this report were made by UFA, independently, based on our education and experience. All determinations of health condition, structural condition, or hazard potential of a tree or trees at issue are based on our best professional judgment. The health and hazard assessments in this report are limited by the visual nature of the assessment. Arborists cannot detect every condition that could possibly lead to the structural failure of a tree. Since trees are living organisms, conditions are often hidden within the tree and below ground. Arborists cannot guarantee that a tree will be healthy or safe under all circumstances, or for a specific period of time. Likewise, remedial treatments cannot be guaranteed. Trees can be managed but they cannot be controlled. To live near trees is to accept some degree of risk and the only way to eliminate all risk associated with trees is to eliminate all trees.



Benjamin Anderson, Urban Forester
ISA Board Certified Master Arborist & TRAQ
RCA #686, WE #10160B
(415) 454-4212

City of Sebastopol
Planning Department
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472
(707) 823-6167

MASTER PLANNING APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATION TYPE

☐ Administrative Permit Review	☐ Lot Line Adjustment/Merger	☐ Temporary Use Permit
☐ Alcohol Use Permit/ABC Transfer	☐ Preapplication Conference	☑ Tree Removal Permit
☐ Conditional Use Permit	☐ Preliminary Review	☐ Variance
☐ Design Review	☐ Sign Permit	☐ Other_____

This application includes the checklist(s) or supplement form(s) for the type of permit requested: ☑ Yes ☐ No

REVIEW/HEARING BODIES

☐ Staff/Admin ☐ Design Review/Tree Board ☐ Planning Commission ☐ City Council ☑ Other Arborist

APPLICATION FOR

Street Address: 550 Gravenstein Hwy N Sebastopol
Assessor's Parcel No(s): 004430038

Present Use of Property: Commercial
Zoning/General Plan Designation:

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Property Owner Name: Fiesta 116, a CA LP c/o Don Strouzas
Mailing Address: [redacted]
Phone: [redacted]
City/State/ZIP: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]
Signature: Don Strouzas for Fiesta 116
Date: Aug 19, 2026

Authorized Agent/Applicant Name: Sandborn Tree Service, Inc.
Mailing Address: 119 Morris Street
Phone: 707-823-9144
City/State/ZIP: Sebastopol, Ca 95472
Email: SERVICE@SANDBORNTREE.COM
Signature: M.J. Sandborn
Date: 8/20/26

Contact Name *(if different from above)*: Kevin Paul
Phone/Email: 707-483-2312

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND PERMITS REQUESTED (ATTACH ADDITIONAL PAGES IF NECESSARY)

36" dbh Liquid Amber located at the s/w corner of parking lot behind the vehicle charging station. This tree has an included bark twin trunk form and a history of major branch failures. These branch failures have left significantly tear out wounds that further weaken the remaining limbs overhanging and threatening high traffic areas (persons, vehicles and property). The required scope of work to maintain this tree by pruning would be inconsistent with established ISA standards. Removal is advised.

CITY USE ONLY

Fill out upon receipt:		Action:		Action Date:
Application Date:		Staff/Admin:		Date:
Planning File #:		Planning Director:		Date:
Received By:		Design Review/Tree Board:		Date:
Fee(s):	$	Planning Commission:		Date:
Completeness Date:		City Council:		Date:

SITE DATA TABLE

If an item is not applicable to your project, please indicate "Not Applicable" or "N/A" in the appropriate box; do not leave cells blank.

N/A

SITE DATA TABLE	REQUIRED / ZONING STANDARD	EXISTING	PROPOSED
Zoning	N/A		
Use	N/A		
Lot Size			
Square Feet of Building/Structures *(if multiple structures include all separately)*			
Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R)	/. FAR	. FAR	. FAR
Lot Coverage	% of lot sq. ft.	% of lot sq. ft.	% of lot sq. ft.
Parking			
Building Height			
Number of Stories			
Building Setbacks – Primary			
Front			
Secondary Front Yard (corner lots)			
Side – Interior			
Rear			
Building Setbacks – Accessory			
Front			
Secondary Front Yard (corner lots)			
Side – Interior			
Rear			
Special Setbacks *(if applicable)*			
Other (_____)			
Number of Residential Units	Dwelling Unit(s)	Dwelling Unit(s)	Dwelling Unit(s)
Residential Density	1 unit per sq. ft.	1 unit per sq. ft.	1 unit per sq. ft.
Useable Open Space	sq. ft.	sq. ft.	sq. ft.
Grading	Grading should be minimized to the extent feasible to reflect existing topography and protect significant site features, including trees.	N/A	Total: cu. yds Cut: cu. yds. Fill: cu. yds. Off-Haul: cu. yds
Impervious Surface Area	N/A	% of lot sq. ft.	% of lot sq. ft.
Pervious Surface Area	N/A	% of lot sq. ft.	% of lot sq. ft.

CONDITIONS OF APPLICATION

1. All Materials submitted in conjunction with this form shall be considered a part of this application.
2. This application will not be considered filed and processing may not be initiated until the Planning Department determines that the submittal is complete with all necessary information and is "accepted as complete." The City will notify the applicant of all application deficiencies no later than 30 days following application submittal.
3. The property owner authorizes the listed authorized agent(s)/contact(s) to appear before the City Council, Planning Commission, Design Review/Tree Board and Planning Director and to file applications, plans, and other information on the owner's behalf.
4. The Owner shall inform the Planning Department in writing of any changes.
5. **INDEMNIFICATION AGREEMENT:** As part of this application, applicant agrees to defend, indemnify, release and hold harmless the City, its agents, officers, attorneys, employees, boards, committees and commissions from any claim, action or proceeding brought against any of the foregoing individuals or entities, the purpose of which is to attack, set aside, void or annul the approval of this application or the adoption of the environmental document which accompanies it or otherwise arises out of or in connection with the City's action on this application. This indemnification shall include, but not be limited to, damages, costs, expenses, attorney fees or expert witness fees that may be asserted by any person or entity, including the applicant, arising out of or in connection with the City's action on this application, whether or not there is concurrent passive or active negligence on the part of the City.

   If, for any reason, any portion of this indemnification agreement is held to be void or unenforceable by a court of competent jurisdiction, the remainder of the agreement shall remain in full force and effect.

   NOTE: The purpose of the indemnification agreement is to allow the City to be held harmless in terms of potential legal costs and liabilities in conjunction with permit processing and approval.
6. **REPRODUCTION AND CIRCULATION OF PLANS:** I hereby authorize the Planning Department to reproduce plans and exhibits as necessary for the processing of this application. I understand that this may include circulating copies of the reduced plans for public inspection. Multiple signatures are required when plans are prepared by multiple professionals.
7. **NOTICE OF MAILING:** Email addresses will be used for sending out staff reports and agendas to applicants, their representatives, property owners, and others to be notified.
8. **DEPOSIT ACCOUNT INFORMATION:** Rather than flat fees, some applications require a 'Deposit'. The initial deposit amount is based on typical processing costs. However, each application is different and will experience different costs. The City staff and City consultant time, in addition to other permit processing costs, (i.e., legal advertisements and copying costs are charged against the application deposit). If charges exceed the initial deposit, the applicant will receive billing from the City's Finance department. If at the end of the application process, charges are less than the deposit, the City Finance department will refund the remaining monies. Deposit accounts will be held open for up to 90 days after action or withdrawal for the City to complete any miscellaneous clean up items and to account for all project related costs.
9. **NOTICE OF ORDINANCE/PLAN MODIFICATIONS:** Pursuant to Government Code Section 65945(a), please indicate, by checking the boxes below, if you would like to receive a notice from the City of any proposal to adopt or amend any of the following plans or ordinances if the City determines that the proposal is reasonably related to your request for a development permit:

   ☐ A general plan ☐ A specific plan

   ☐ An ordinance affecting building permits or grading permits ☐ A zoning ordinance

Certification

I, the undersigned owner of the subject property, have read this application for a development permit and agree with all of the above and certify that the information, drawings and specifications herewith submitted are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and are submitted under penalty of perjury. I hereby grant members of the Planning Commission, Design Review Board and City Staff admittance to the subject property as necessary for processing of the project application.

Property Owner's Signature: Don Strouzas for Fiesta 116 **Date:** Aug 19, 2026

I, the undersigned applicant, have read this application for a development permit and agree with all of the above and certify that the information, drawings and specifications herewith submitted are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and are submitted under penalty of perjury.

Applicant's Signature: M. Sandle **Date:** 8/20/26

NOTE: It is the responsibility of the applicant and their representatives to be aware of and abide by City laws and policies. City staff, Boards, Commissions, and the City Council will review applications as required by law; however, the applicant has responsibility for determining and following applicable regulations.

Neighbor Notification

In the interest of being a good neighbor, it is highly recommended that you contact those homes or businesses directly adjacent to, or within the area of your project. Please inform them of the proposed project, including construction activity and possible impacts such as noise, traffic interruptions, dust, larger structures, tree removals, etc.

Many projects in Sebastopol are remodel projects which when initiated bring concern to neighboring property owners, residents, and businesses. Construction activities can be disruptive, and additions or new buildings can affect privacy, sunlight, or landscaping. Some of these concerns can be alleviated by neighbor-to-neighbor contacts early in the design and construction process.

It is a "good neighbor policy" to inform your neighbors so that they understand your project. This will enable you to begin your construction with the understanding of your neighbors and will help promote good neighborhood relationships.

Many times, development projects can have an adverse effect on the tranquility of neighborhoods and tarnish relationships along the way. If you should have questions about who to contact or need property owner information in your immediate vicinity, please contact the Building and Safety Department for information at (707) 823-8597, or the Planning Department at (707) 823-6167.

I have informed site neighbors of my proposed project: ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, or if you will inform neighbors in the future, please describe outreach efforts:

As needed.

Website Required for Major Projects

Applicants for major development projects (which involves proposed development of **10,000 square feet of new floor area or greater, or 15 or more dwelling units/lots),** are required to create a project website in conjunction with submittal of an application for Planning approval (including but not limited to Subdivisions, Use Permits, Rezoning, and Design Review). Required information may be provided on an existing applicant web site.

The website address shall be provided as part of the application. The website shall be maintained and updated, as needed until final discretionary approvals are obtained for the project.

Such website shall include, at a minimum, the following information:

- √ Project description
- √ Contact information for the applicant, including address, phone number, and email address
- √ Map showing project location
- √ Photographs of project site
- √ Project plans and drawings

SANDBORN
Tree Service Inc.
Since 1975

Written Statement

8/18/2026

36” dbh Liquid Amber located at 550 Gravenstein Hwy N Sebastopol, Ca at the s/w corner of parking lot behind the vehicle charging station. This tree has an included bark twin trunk form and a history of major branch failures. These branch failures have left significantly tear out wounds that further weaken the remaining limbs overhanging and threatening high traffic areas (persons, vehicles and property). The required scope of work to maintain this tree by pruning would be inconsistent with established ISA standards. Removal is recommended.

Assumptions and Limiting Conditions

•Care has been taken to obtain all information from reliable sources. All data has been verified insofar as possible; however the consultant/appraiser/arborist can neither guarantee nor be responsible for the accuracy of information provided by others.

•The consultant/appraiser/arborist shall not be required to give testimony or to attend court by reason of this report unless subsequent contractual arrangements are made, including payment of an additional fee for such services.

•This report and any values expressed herein represent the opinion of the consultant/appraiser/arborist, and the consultant/appraiser, and the consultant/appraiser/arborist fee for this report is in no way contingent upon the reporting of a specified value, a stipulated result, nor upon any finding to be reported.

•Unless expressed otherwise: 1) the information in this report/consultation covers only the items that were examined and reflects the condition of those items at the time of inspection; and 2) the inspection is limited to visual examination of accessible items without dissection, excavation, probing, or coring. There is no warranty or guarantee expressed or implied that problems or deficiencies of the plants or property in question may not arise in the future.

•Trees are inherently large, growing, and constantly changing organisms subject to a multitude of factors that can be critical to their physical and structural well being. The

science of identifying their flaws is new and inexact, complicated by the fact that many defects are hidden completely from the Arborist's possible detection. All trees will fail eventually. Most tree failure is sudden and unexpected. Therefore, those who live, or cause, or allow others to live in proximity to trees do so at some degree of risk to persons or property despite all efforts to eliminate that risk.

•Loss or alteration of any part of this report invalidates the entire report/consultation.

Kevin Paul
Certified Arborist ISA WE-6265a
TRAQ Qualified

SANDBORN
Tree Service Inc.
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550 Gravenstein Hwy N.
Sebastopol

Location Map



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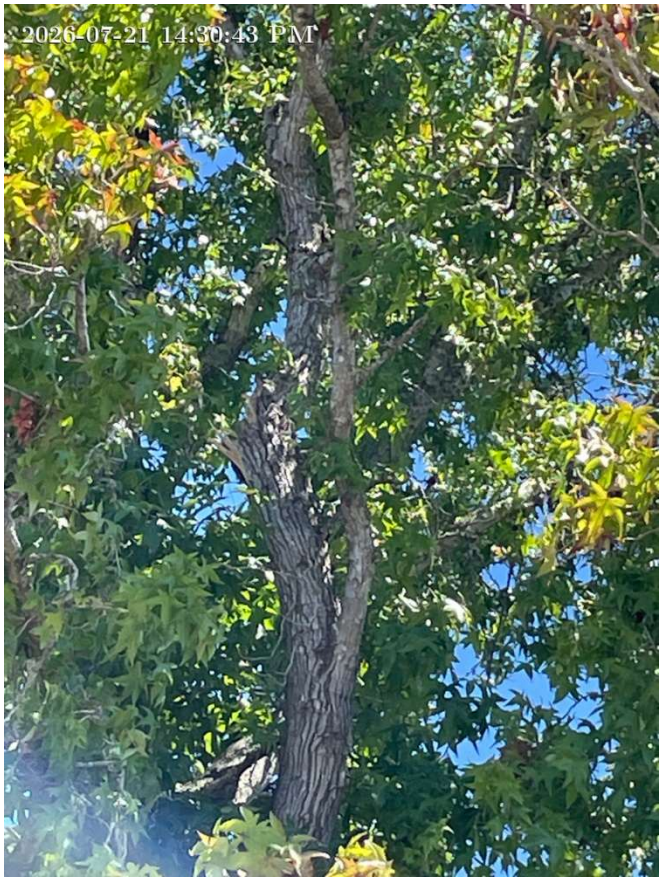
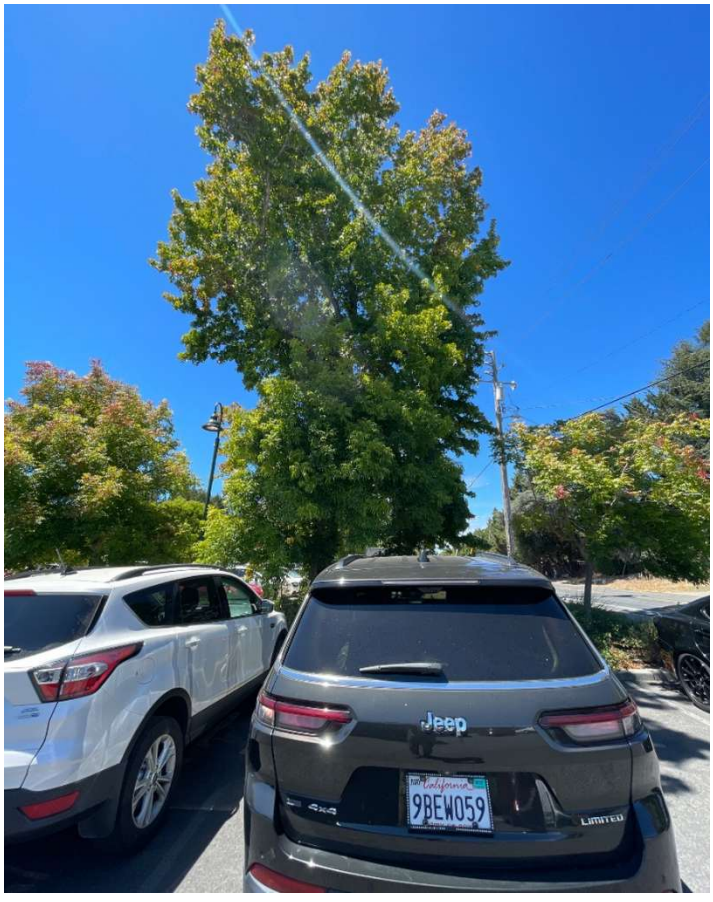
550 Gravenstein Hwy N.
Sebastopol









SANDBORN
Tree Service Inc.
Since 1975

550 Gravenstein Hwy N.
Sebastopol





City of Sebastopol
Incorporated 1902
Planning Department
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472
707-823-6167
707-823-1135 (Fax)
www.ci.sebastopol.ca.us

APPROVED ACTION MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW & TREE BOARD
CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 22, 2026

DESIGN REVIEW & TREE BOARD:

The notice of the meeting was posted on September 17, 2026.

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Chair Langberg called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

2. **ROLL CALL:**

Present: Chair Lars Langberg,
Vice-Chair Melissa Hanley,
Board Member Lynn Deedler,
Board Member Marshall Balfe
Absent: Board Member Christian Macke,
Board Member Blake McDowall
Staff: Eli Arreola, Associate Planner
Tori Henkel, Permit Technician

3. **COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC REGARDING ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA:** None.

4. **STATEMENTS OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** None.

5. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** June 23, 2026, and July 28, 2026

Board Member Deedler made a motion to approve the minutes of June 23, 2026, as submitted.

Board Member Balfe seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0-0-2
Ayes: Board Members Balfe, Deedler, Vice-Chair Hanley, Chair Langeberg
Noes: None
Abstain: None
Absent: Board Members Macke, McDowall

Vice-Chair Hanley made a motion to approve the minutes of July 28, 2026, as submitted.

Board Member Balfe seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0-0-2
Ayes: Board Members Balfe, Deedler, Vice-Chair Hanley, Chair Langeberg
Noes: None
Abstain: None
Absent: Board Members Macke, McDowall

6. PUBLIC HEARINGS:

A. 550 Gravenstein Hwy N (Tree Removal) - A public hearing for an application from Sandborn Tree Service on behalf of Fiesta 116 et al., c/o Don Strouzas. The applicant is requesting the removal of one (1) liquid amber tree with a 36-inch dbh, located at 550 Gravenstein Hwy N. The tree is at the southwest corner of the parking lot, behind the vehicle charging station. This tree has an included bark twin trunk form and a history of major branch failures, leaving significant wounds that further weaken the remaining limbs overhanging high-traffic areas.

Vice-Chair Hanley made a motion to deny the tree removal permit request.

Board Member Balfe seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0-0-2
Ayes: Board Members Balfe, Deedler, Vice-Chair Hanley, Chair Langeberg
Noes: None
Abstain: None
Absent: Board Members Macke, McDowall

7. REGULAR AGENDA:

A. Boards, Commissions, and Committees Draft Handbook Discussion and Action was discussed.

B. Design Review/ Tree Board Representative to Attend the October 6, 2026, City Council Meeting Discussion and Action

Chair Lars made a motion to appoint Vice-Chair Hanley to be the DRB representative at the October 6, 2026, City Council meeting.

Board Member Blafe seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0-0-2
Ayes: Board Members Balfe, Deedler, Vice-Chair Hanley, Chair Langeberg
Noes: None
Abstain: None
Absent: Board Members Macke, McDowall

C. Sign Ordinance Subcommittee Update was discussed.

8. SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

9. **PLANNING DEPARTMENT REPORT was given by staff.**

10. **ADJOURNMENT:** Chair Langberg adjourned the meeting of the Sebastopol Design Review & Tree Board at 4:31 p.m. The next regular Design Review & Tree Board meeting will be held on October 22, 2026, at 3:30 p.m.