



**SANITATION AND STREETS COMMISSION**  
CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

**London N. Breed, Mayor**

***Correspondence Log***

***March 2, 2024 through May 13, 2024***

<b>Date Received</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Subject</b>
5/4/2024	Mike Zimmerman	Bayview San Francisco
5/10/2024	John Higgins	DPW/BUF notification to residents that street trees will be worked on  *Please note that the earlier message in this correspondence was mistakenly not shared with either Chair Post of the Public Works Commission or members of the Sanitation and Streets Commission.

**From:** [Mike Zimmerman](#)  
**To:** [SAS-Commission](#)  
**Subject:** Bayview san francisco  
**Date:** Saturday, May 4, 2024 4:17:34 PM

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My name is Mike Zimmerman I am a third generation San Franciscan our family's own A business in Bay View district for over 65 years Unfortunately the city has left this area as a containment zone For R v's and people dumping throughout district 10 I would appreciate your help on this matter this is totally unacceptable Thank you Also I wanted to tell you I have talked to many people in multiple city Departments Carla short Sean McCormick The mayor's office The police department The fire department Nothing has been done to deal with this issue thank you



**From:** [John](#)  
**To:** [DPW-Public Works Commission](#)  
**Subject:** DPW/BUF notification to residents that street trees will be worked on  
**Date:** Friday, May 10, 2024 1:21:59 PM

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Dear Chair Post,

I would appreciate a response from your office to the items raised in my message of April 12, 2024.

I have not had a response from DPW/BUF.

The primary item in the 4/12/2024 message (below): **DPW/BUF should notify residents that crews will be in the area to cut street trees.**

- **Is it the practice of DPW/BUF to notify residents that crews will be in the area to cut street trees?**
- **If no notification existed in August 2023 when street trees we planted and maintain were whacked, has such a notification plan been adopted?**
- **If no notification plan exists or is being adopted, what is the process for getting the Commission to require DPW/BUF to provide notification?**

Other questions submitted on April 12, 2024 to DPW/BUF have also gotten no response. Details are provided in the message of 4/12/2024.

2. Has BUF and the Public Works Commission reviewed the "opt out" document - and are changes planned?
3. How does BUF contractors identify street trees to target? Are they drawing on data from these online and app resources?
4. Have BUF contractors been trained in how to identify themselves - or wear identifying badges?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

John Higgins

████████████████████ Kirkham Street, SF 94122  
████████████████████

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:** FOLLOW UP: Re: City crew butchers our street trees without notice or permission

**Date:** Fri, 12 Apr 2024 13:53:07 -0700

**From:** John <████████████████████>

**To:** Daniel Hoffinan\_DPW, Urbanforestry (DPW) <[urbanforestry@sfdpw.org](mailto:urbanforestry@sfdpw.org)>, Lauren Post\_DPW-Public Works Commission <[publicworks.commission@sfdpw.org](mailto:publicworks.commission@sfdpw.org)>, EngardioStaff (BOS) <[EngardioStaff@sfgov.org](mailto:EngardioStaff@sfgov.org)>

**CC:** [bob.fuller@sfdpw.org](mailto:bob.fuller@sfdpw.org), Goldberg, Jonathan (BOS) <[jonathan.goldberg@sfgov.org](mailto:jonathan.goldberg@sfgov.org)>, Ben Carlson ██████████, Heredia, Christopher (DPW) <[christopher.heredia@sfdpw.org](mailto:christopher.heredia@sfdpw.org)>, Buck, Chris (DPW) <[Chris.Buck@sfdpw.org](mailto:Chris.Buck@sfdpw.org)>

DPW, (DPW) <[dpw@sfdpw.org](mailto:dpw@sfdpw.org)>, Brian Wiedenmeier <[executivedirector@fuf.net](mailto:executivedirector@fuf.net)>

Lauren Post, Chair, SF DPW-Public Works Commission  
Daniel Hoffman, Urban Forestry Inspector, BUF SF Public Works  
Joel Engardio, District 4 Supervisor

Dear Lauren Post, Daniel Hoffman, Joel Engardio:

I don't have a record of a response to my last correspondence of September 26, 2023, copied below. It followed up on Jonathan Goldberg in Joel Engardio's office, asking on 9/14/2023 BUF about outreach, or how it notified residents on our block about intended work on street trees. My message also noted serious problems with BUF's current "opt out" document and other issues.

I would appreciate a response from the DPW Public Works Commission and DPW's BUF to the four questions below.

### *Notification*

At this point, I assume that no such notification was provided - and that BUF/DPW does not notify neighbors that crews (presenting themselves as city workers) would be whacking street trees in our neighborhood - and give options to opt out.

#### **1. Does a notification requirement exist - or has such a notification plan now been adopted?**

In the Outer Sunset, most of the trees were planted by home owners and renters themselves through the wonderful FUF planting program. The trees are considered precious by planters in this sea of concrete. Since my horrible experiences in August 2023, I've talked with a number of neighbors in surrounding blocks and observed trees in the neighborhood. Some people said they just told the crew to leave their tree alone; others were shocked that their "baby" had been targeted or might be pruned without their permission. When I showed them the "opt-out" form provided by BUF, they laughed, for the same reasons I mentioned in my message of 9/26/2023.

The only viable way to prevent your street tree from being mangled by contract crews appears to be one-on-one conversation with the crew at the moment. Or, perhaps, a "hands off" sign on your beloved tree - after you've been notified that cutters will be in the area on specific dates.

### *BUF's Opt-Out Document*

#### **2. Has BUF and the Public Works Commission reviewed the "opt out" document - and are changes planned?**

### *Targeting Street Trees*

Also, it appears that the "maintenance" done is pretty sporadic: one side of a block may have been targeted, while the other side or next block still has trees thankfully without the whack jobs - with similar branch heights. We suspect that people may have made their trees vulnerable by entering them on online sites or the old OpenTree app. If so, it would be helpful for FUF to warn participants in their planting program.

**3. How does BUF contractors identify street trees to target? Are they drawing on data from these online and app resources?**

**4. Have BUF contractors been trained in how to identify themselves - or wear identifying badges?**

In August, they identified themselves as "city workers" when grinding up the tree limbs. Apparently this is not correct.

thank you,  
John Higgins

cc:

Bob Fuller, Commission Affairs Manager, SF DPW-Public Works Commission  
Jonathan Goldberg, Legislative Aide, Office of District 4 Supervisor Joel Engardio  
Christopher Heredia, Public Information Officer, BUF SF Public Works  
Chris Buck, Urban Forester, BUF SF Public Work  
DPW -?

Brian Wiedenmeier, Executive Director, Friends of the Urban Forest

Ben Carlson, Public Relations, Friends of the Urban Forest [REDACTED]

=====  
On 9/26/23 12:36 PM, John wrote:

Hello BUF, DPW, Public Works Commission, Jonathan Goldberg/Joel Engardio's District 4 office,

Following up on last week's correspondence re: the whacking of street trees under our care by crews hired by the city:

**1. BUF, DPW, and the Public Works Commission should review the street maintenance agreement document and revise it.**

I appreciate Daniel Hoffman providing the BUF's "street tree maintenance agreement (prune only)" form for us to opt-out of city-hired crews messing with our street trees. I shared it with our neighbors and we all laughed: **The form is out of date and problematic. Most troubling: it requires us to resubmit the form EVERY YEAR or it expires.** The city assumed maintenance of street trees July 1, 2017 - but we never saw or experienced crews at our trees until 5 years later, on August 3, 2023. **A more reasonable provision would identify 5 years, with a requirement that BUF notify us that the agreement is about to expire. Or state "until cancelled by agreement of both parties" - which is what I'll amend our agreement to read.**

The agreement has other problems; for example, it identifies a city attorney who no longer serves in that position. The agreement spells out responsibilities and "Routine Maintenance" for us - that we followed for 15 years as just good tree care - that the city never followed in 5 years: watering, weed control, fertilizing, bracing, removal of tree-well trash, etc.

**2. Did BUF provide a response to the request for information re: BUF outreach prior to street pruning?** It was made by Jonathan Goldberg in Joel Engardio's District 4 office. Notification would certainly have addressed the issues in this incident. Filing paperwork (street maintenance agreement) with the city is not as effective as actually talking with the crews or posting our own "hands off this tree" signs at the time the work is being done.

On 9/14/23 6:30 PM, Goldberg, Jonathan (BOS) wrote:  
Thank you Daniel for responding to John's email.

Chris/BUF – can you let us know what outreach was done (flyers/door hangers, postcards, letters), prior to pruning? It's my understanding that prior to street tree pruning, BUF informs residents with door hangers or letter notices.

Sincerely,  
Jonathan

Thank you,  
John Higgins

On 9/18/23 12:48 PM, John wrote:

Hello Daniel,

Thanks for your quick and detailed response.

I appreciate your empathetic tone; I got the feeling you appreciate how dear these trees are to us and the neighbors who helped plant them. As we all know, the Outer Sunset is a particular desert of urban canopy - one reason I helped organize our blocks in a FUF tree-planting back in 2008; we planted 5 trees then, paying to replace 2 in 2016 after a reckless driver knocked down 2 of the trees. Neighbors planted 2 more trees in a 2016 FUF-planting. We planted the birch trees in 2014.

Yes, we're talking about the street trees along the curb, not the birch trees. The photo shows 2 arbutus/strawberry trees, there is another arbutus in front of neighbors' at 3331 Kirkham and another on our corner at Kirkham and 38th Ave. The 2 dracena palm trees in front of [REDACTED] Kirkham and on 38th Ave are not at issue.

We are sad with the work on the arbutus/strawberry trees (planted 2016) in your photo - they formed a sidewalk archway with the birch trees. But most distressing was the cuts on the lower limbs of the

westernmost strawberry tree on Kirkham at 38th Ave. (planted 2008).

I'll send photos after I also locate photos of the trees before they were cut, since the context is key to understanding our distress. I'd appreciate meeting with DPW's arborists who might be inspecting the work done on our trees. Either email or text/voice:

[REDACTED]; [REDACTED].

To clarify, the trees were not injured. "Buttering" refers to my interpretation of how the workers removed all lower limbs, seemingly willy-nilly, destroying elements of the trees' character that I've lovingly cultivated and pruned over the years, with the assistance of arborists I've paid to help, most recently in 2018. I noted during our fierce winter storms that I needed to hire arborists again to thin out the canopy of the wind-swept tree at the corner of Kirkham & 38th Ave to avoid losing large limbs next winter. The cuts made by the city-hired crews did nothing to address this issue.

I'm glad to hear there is opt-out paperwork, but would have preferred to have this before the pruning - as well as a notice of the impending tree work. I would have put a sign on the trees to make sure crews did not touch them. Maybe most people don't care - but I'm guessing that people who have personally planted their trees with FUF might be more concerned? Perhaps FUF and DPW could share email lists to provide notices about the pending tree work and opt-out possibilities.

I recommend to FUF to consider notifying FUF planting participants that an opt-out process with DPW exists.

I'm glad to hear DPW is providing oversight of the WCA work crews. It might be helpful for WCA to train the crews how to identify themselves - they are not city workers. And provide them with personnel tools to refer unhappy residents to DPW or other department.

As I said, I'll send photos when I also locate previous pictures, and would appreciate meeting with a DPW arborist who might be inspecting the work done on our trees. Either email or text/voice:

[REDACTED]; [REDACTED].

Thank you,  
John Higgins  
[REDACTED] Kirkham Street  
San Francisco

On 9/14/23 2:54 PM, DPW, Urbanforestry (DPW) wrote:

Hi John,



Thanks for bringing this to our attention. I am sorry you had a bad experience with one of our tree work contractors.

I just want to confirm which trees we are talking about. Are you referring to these Birch trees, or the young street trees.

West Coast Arborists are contractors that the city has selected to complete pruning throughout San Francisco. They are not city employees. They are qualified tree work vendors who have proven to be effective and safe.

WCA arborist trains their tree work technicians and has a certified arborist oversee each crew. Each pruning contract is audited during work and post-inspected by an Urban Forestry inspector, if the inspecting arborist notices poor pruning practices then they will contact the WCA rep and give them feedback about their work. If they missed trees we also send them back to complete that work.

Can you describe the work in more detail or provide some photographs of the trees? (we will also have an inspector take a look in person ASAP)

Injuring/damaging a tree usually occurs when the person doing the work completes poor pruning cuts or ignores pruning best practices. To my knowledge we haven't had issues with WCA's quality of work lately.

Again I apologize for any stress this has caused you. We care about our urban forest and it is our mission and goal to grow and preserve the urban forest. We will be following up with WCA as well as completing an inspection of these trees.

I am attaching the opt-out paperwork here as well for your reference. Please let me know if you have any questions.

**Daniel Hoffman**  
**Urban Forestry Inspector**  
**ISA Certified Arborist/Utility Arborist WE-12568AU**

**ISA Tree Risk Assessment Qualified**

Bureau of Urban Forestry

| San Francisco Public Works | City and County of San Francisco

| Desk: (628) 271-2811 | Mobile(text): (628) 219-4529

| [sfpublicworks.org](http://sfpublicworks.org) |

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**From:** John <[REDACTED]>

**Sent:** Thursday, September 14, 2023 2:28 PM

**To:** DPW, Urbanforestry (DPW) <[urbanforestry@sfdpw.org](mailto:urbanforestry@sfdpw.org)>; DPW, (DPW) <[dpw@sfdpw.org](mailto:dpw@sfdpw.org)>; EngardioStaff (BOS) <[EngardioStaff@sfgov.org](mailto:EngardioStaff@sfgov.org)>; [executivedirector@fuf.net](mailto:executivedirector@fuf.net)

**Cc:** DPW-Public Works Commission <[publicworks.commission@sfdpw.org](mailto:publicworks.commission@sfdpw.org)>

**Subject:** Re: City crew butchers our street trees without notice or permission

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Dear

Director, DPW - no name listed on web site; no response to email or phone messages.

DPW Urban Forestry - no name listed on web site; no response to email or phone messages.

Joel Engardio (District 4)

Brian Wiedenmeier (FUF)

I'd appreciate a response to my message from 6 weeks ago (below):

1. Why weren't we notified that trees on our property were going to be whacked - and provided with options to avoid it? Like when the city told us our sidewalk had cracks that we needed to take care of - or the city would do the repair.
2. Do WCA workers work for SF Public Works? Are these city employees, as they claimed? What training and instructions have the workers been given?
3. Why has the city contracted WCA, a

company that does such unprofessional work?  
4. Who in the city is overseeing the work of this company?  
5. Are FUF and the District 4 supervisor warning participants in street tree-plantings that the city may butcher their beloved trees unless they are pro-active - and opt out of city "maintenance" ?  
6. We've already learned not to participate in tree-plantings on Sunset Blvd any more: no one waters the trees and we watch them die. Is the city out to kill more trees?

**7. How can we opt out of having this horrible experience in the future? Your workers whacked our trees - we are still in shock and grief-stricken at what they did to trees we planted with neighbors through FUF and have nurtured for 15 years, with the help of "real" arborists we've hired.**

**Requesting opt-out: [REDACTED] Kirkham Street and [REDACTED] Kirkham Street.**

Thank you,  
John Higgins  
cc: Lauren Post, Chair Public Works Commission

On 8/3/23 2:12 PM, John wrote:

Hello SF Public Works,

We want to opt out of the city's street tree maintenance program. Our neighbors are requesting this, too.

[REDACTED] Kirkham Street

[REDACTED] Kirkham Street

We were devastated today when we found the street trees we planted and care for absolutely butchered by crews claiming to work for SF Public Works. The name on the trucks: WCA."Tree Care Professionals." These were the least professional tree people I've ever witnessed. Their work was an amateurish hack job; crews had no identification, and they were rather abusive when challenged. They had no paperwork to show they legitimately could butcher our trees with city permission or as city

employees.

We received no notice from the city that you intended to whack our trees. We should have gotten notice, so we could opt-out and take care of any problems ourselves - and avoid a hack job like the one we have in front of us by so called "tree professionals."

We planted 6 street trees in 2008 with Friends of the Urban Forest; our neighbors planted more a few years later. We have all lovingly watered, nurtured, trimmed, cared for, and had arborists attend to the trees. The trees were regularly trimmed and maintained. As recently as 2 weeks ago, we checked with the driver of the street sweeper that the trees provided enough headroom for the sweeper to operate. In the 15 years since they were planted, no one from the city ever helped with the trees. And now, your department has butchered them.

We are deeply saddened and angered by this situation. It's like losing a family member. And now we'll have to hire real professionals to take care of the mess your department/subcontractors left behind.

This will serve as a notice to exclude our trees from "maintenance" the city's street tree program. Unless, if you want to water our trees, that's fine. We've helped plant along Sunset Boulevard the past few years in programs with DPW - and then watched the trees die from lack of water. Seems that the city is better at killing trees than maintaining them.

I left voice messages at 628-271-3160 and 628-652-8733. Please respond by email or voice.

John Higgins  
[REDACTED] Kirkham Street  
San Francisco

