

September 1, 2026

Porsche Nauls, Section Manager
Planning and Environment Section
Planning Division
County of Los Angeles
Department of Beaches and Harbors
13837 Fiji Way
Marina del Rey, CA 90292

SUBJECT: Level 2 Tree Risk Assessment Report for Tree VM-32 Located in Marina del Rey, Los Angeles County, California.

Dear Ms. Nauls:

Pursuant to Task 3: As-Needed Advanced Inspections and Additional Services of the 2026 Marina del Rey Tree Risk Assessment Scope of Work, Amigo Environmental, LLC (Amigo) ISA Certified Arborist (WE-3192A) and ASCA Registered Consulting Arborist (No. 907) Joshua Zinn conducted a post-incident Level 2 Tree Risk Assessment of County of Los Angeles Department of Beaches and Harbors (DBH) Tree VM-32 at Aubrey Austin Park. DBH notified Amigo on August 28, 2026 that a large tree part had failed. Amigo inspected the tree on August 31, 2026 and prepared this memorandum to document the observed condition, risk rating, management options, and basis for the recommendation.

The assessment consisted of a 360-degree, ground-based visual inspection of the accessible root crown, trunk, failed attachment, remaining stems, scaffold limbs, crown, and surrounding targets. The inspection included photographic documentation and review of the 2026 Level 1 inventory record and available incident information. The visibly open rupture and loss of a major apical co-dominant stem established the primary structural condition; sounding or probing was not needed to confirm that failure. The assessment follows the Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ) framework described by Dunster et al. (2025) and applies a 12-month assessment period unless the tree is removed sooner or its condition changes.

Results and Management Recommendations

The results of the Level 2 assessments, including observed structural conditions, ISA TRAQ risk ratings, and corresponding management recommendations for DBH Tree VM-32 are summarized in Table 1 below. Detailed Level 2 assessment findings, representative photo documentation, and additional discussion for DBH Tree VM-32 is provided in the detailed Level 2 Tree Risk Assessment Results Matrix (Table 2) and subsequent discussion sections of this memorandum.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT RECOMENDATIONS

Tree ID	Species	ISA TRAQ Overall Risk Rating	Management Recommendation
VM-32	Coastal Coral Tree	High	Prompt proactive whole-tree removal and suitable replacement. Maintain the exclusion zone until removal. Corrective pruning alone is not considered a sustainable retention strategy because the tree has lost a major co-dominant stem and now has extensive longitudinal rupture, severe crown asymmetry, altered loading, and poor long-term preservation suitability.

TABLE 2: LEVEL 2 TREE RISK ASSESSMENT RESULTS MATRIX

Basic Tree Data and Metrics							Basic Tree Health			Tree Risk Assessment											
Tree ID	Species (Scientific)	Species (Common)	Location	DSH (in)	Height (ft)	Crown Radius (ft)	General Health ^a	General Vigor ^a	Observable Pests and/or Pathogens	Limb and Branch Structure ^a	Root Crowna	Primary Defect Observed	Secondary Defect(s) Observed	Sounding Mallet Result	Probing Result	Condition(s) of Concern	Targets	ISA TRAQ Likelihood of Failure and Impacting Target(s)	ISA TRAQ Overall Risk Rating	Mitigation (Management) Options	ISA TRAQ Residual Risk Rating (Post Mitigation [Management])
VM-32	<i>Erythrina caffra</i>	Coastal Coral Tree	Aubrey Austin Park 33.967164, -118.452769	24/18	50	15	2.5	2.5	None observed	1.5	No visible soil mounding, heaving, or root-plate displacement was observed in the accessible area.	Recent failure of a large co-dominant stem, with substantial crown loss and an extensive longitudinal rupture through the remaining attachment and stem.	Senescent condition; mature multi-stem architecture; jagged fractured remnant; extensive exposed wood; asymmetric remaining crown; altered load distribution and wind exposure; limited viable crown for corrective restructuring.	Not performed. The open post-failure rupture and structural loss were directly visible, and sounding was not needed to establish the primary defect.	Not performed. The open post-failure rupture and structural loss were directly visible, and probing was not needed to establish the primary defect.	The failure removed a major structural and photosynthetic component of the crown and left a long, open rupture extending down the retained stem. The remaining crown is strongly asymmetric, and the retained stems must now carry wind and gravity loads without the former crown distribution and mutual sheltering. Corrective removal of the fractured remnant would address loose or damaged material but would not restore the lost architecture. It would also leave a large wound on a mature, senescent Coral Tree with limited capacity to close the injury. The tree may produce sprouts, but such growth would not recreate a comparably attached structural leader within a reasonable management period. Continued retention would require repeated pruning and close surveillance while preserving a tree with reduced structural redundancy, poor form, and declining long-term value.	1. High-frequency pedestrian walkway; 2. Park users within the tree-failure zone; 3. Waterfront recreational area; 4. Adjacent residential and park improvements	Likely	High	Prompt whole-tree removal and suitable replacement. Maintain the existing exclusion zone until removal. A qualified tree-care contractor should remove unstable fractured material only as necessary to complete the removal safely.	Low (with replacement)

^aGeneral Health, General Vigor, Limb and Branch Structure, and Root Crown scores were assigned during the August 31, 2026 Level 2 assessment using the 1-to-5 condition-rating framework established in the 2025 and 2026 Annual Level 2 Tree Risk Assessment reports. Higher scores indicate better observed condition.

TABLE 2: LEVEL 2 TREE RISK ASSESSMENT RESULTS MATRIX CONTINUED

Notes		
Suitability for Preservation	Management Recommendations	Special Considerations
No	Remove and replace promptly. Corrective pruning alone is not recommended as a long-term retention strategy. Continue restricting access to the potential failure zone until the tree is removed.	The 2026 Level 1 record classified VM-32 as senescent and recommended monitoring. That screening determination described the condition observed before the incident. The subsequent failure of a major co-dominant stem is a material change that warrants a new Level 2 risk determination. The tree was identified in the field by reconciling its position with VM-31, VM-33, and VM-34 and the inventory map; the map reported approximately 5.9 m GPS accuracy. A Level 3 assessment could further characterize internal wood condition, but it would not restore the lost architecture or materially improve preservation suitability and is not required to support the removal recommendation.

Discussion

Tree VM-32 (Coastal Coral Tree [*Erythrina caffra*])

DBH Tree VM-32 is a mature, multi-stem Coastal Coral Tree located in Aubrey Austin Jr. Park near a waterfront pedestrian route and other occupied park areas. The 2026 Level 1 inventory recorded two principal stems measuring approximately 24 and 18 inches diameter at standard height, an overall height of approximately 50 feet, and an approximately 30-foot crown spread. The Level 1 record described the tree as “Senescent. Monitor.” That was a screening observation, not a prediction that a specific attachment would fail or a finding that every mature Coral Tree required removal.

On August 28, 2026, DBH notified Amigo that a large tree part had failed at Aubrey Austin Jr. Park. During the August 31 post-incident inspection, Amigo identified the damaged tree as VM-32 by comparing the tree’s field position and remaining architecture with the mapped locations of VM-31, VM-33, and VM-34. The inventory map reports GPS accuracy of approximately 5.9 meters, so the identification relies on field triangulation as well as the mapped point. The photographs and field relationship support VM-32 as the affected tree.

The observed event was not limited to the loss of a small lateral limb. A large co-dominant stem failed, removing a substantial portion of the crown and producing a long, open longitudinal rupture through the retained attachment and stem. The jagged remnant, exposed wood, and loss of crown mass are directly visible. The event therefore provides realized evidence of failure at the tree’s mature multi-stem architecture and materially changes the condition documented during the Level 1 screening.

Risk and Target Analysis

The principal targets are people using the adjacent pedestrian route and park, together with waterfront and residential improvements within reach of the tree. Occupancy is frequent enough that a subsequent failure has a meaningful opportunity to affect a target. Considering the compromised remaining structure, the size of the remaining stems and crown parts, and the occupied target environment, Amigo rated the combined likelihood of failure and impact as Likely and the overall risk as High for the 12-month assessment period.

The local history of Coral Tree failures provides relevant site context, but it is not the basis for assigning VM-32 its rating. The rating rests on this tree’s realized co-dominant stem failure, extensive remaining rupture, altered crown geometry, retained loading, and target exposure. Species and population history help explain why these observations require careful management; they do not replace the individual-tree assessment.

Why Corrective Pruning Does Not Provide a Sustainable Retention Option

Removing the fractured remnant and reducing the remaining crown could lessen immediate loading, but that work would not reconstruct the lost co-dominant architecture. The remaining crown is already strongly asymmetric. Additional reduction sufficient to materially decrease load would remove more live crown from a mature tree that was previously classified as senescent, further reducing photosynthetic area and leaving a highly altered remnant with limited capacity to rebuild durable structure.

The tree may produce epicormic or adventitious sprouts after pruning, but sprout production is not equivalent to recovery of the lost structural leader. New shoots arising around a large injury would require years of repeated selection and reduction and would not develop a comparably attached, mature replacement stem within a reasonable management horizon. Retention would therefore shift the tree into a cycle of repeated pruning and surveillance without resolving the basic loss of structural continuity and crown balance.

The existing rupture already exposes a large area of wood. Additional pruning needed to remove the damaged remnant would not create the original defect, but it could enlarge the final wound surface. The University of Florida/IFAS species account for *E. caffra* reports that the species does not compartmentalize decay well and may develop extensive decay after trunk injuries or large pruning cuts. The exposed surface should therefore be



described as a potential entry pathway for wood-decay organisms, not as proof that decay is already present throughout the stem.

Loss of the co-dominant stem also changed how wind and gravity loads are distributed through the remaining crown. The retained stems no longer have the same crown balance or mutual sheltering that existed before failure. The resulting exposure is an edge-type condition that may increase bending and torsional demand from directions that were previously buffered. This effect was not instrumentally quantified at VM-32 and is treated as a contributing consideration rather than an independent prediction of failure. Research on tree biomechanics supports the narrower point that changes in crown structure and exposure can change mass distribution, displacement, and mechanical response.

Co-dominant attachment research also supports concern at the failed architecture. Smiley (2003) found that co-dominant unions with included bark were significantly weaker than comparable unions without included bark. Included bark was not independently confirmed at VM-32 and is not assumed here. The relevance of the study is that mature co-dominant junctions are recognized structural load paths and that an actual failure at such a junction is consequential evidence when evaluating the remaining tree.

Senescence and Preservation Suitability

In this report, senescence describes a mature tree exhibiting age- and stress-related decline in vigor, resilience, or capacity to respond to injury. It does not mean that old age alone causes failure or that every mature Coral Tree should be removed. Tree aging is not governed by a single programmed endpoint, and survival reflects interactions among size, site conditions, stress, injury, decay organisms, and management history. For VM-32, senescence is one factor considered together with an observed major structural failure and the limited biological and structural value of further crown reduction.

The preservation question is separate from whether short-term pruning could temporarily reduce a particular hazard. A heavily reduced remnant might remain standing, but continued existence alone does not make retention a practical long-term management outcome. VM-32 has lost a major structural and canopy component, retains an extensive rupture, and would require substantial additional intervention while offering reduced canopy function and poor prospects for restoration of durable form. Its suitability for preservation is therefore rated No.

Whole-tree removal is therefore the only identified management option that reduces residual risk to Low without retaining a severely altered tree requiring repeated intervention and surveillance.

Management Recommendation

Amigo recommends prompt whole-tree removal and suitable replacement. DBH should maintain the exclusion zone around the potential failure area until removal is complete. Work should be performed by a qualified tree-care contractor using methods appropriate for the waterfront park setting and nearby occupied improvements. If unstable fractured material must be addressed before whole-tree removal, that work should be limited to what is necessary to maintain site safety and facilitate removal.

A Level 3 assessment could provide additional information about internal wood condition, but the management decision does not depend on proving concealed decay. Advanced testing would not restore the failed co-dominant stem, close the longitudinal rupture, rebalance the crown, or improve the tree's long-term preservation suitability. The visible post-failure condition, target exposure, and limited sustainable mitigation are sufficient to support removal.

Replacement should be documented as part of DBH's long-term Coral Tree transition program, including the replacement location, species, planting date, establishment requirements, and survival status. Removing VM-32 is an individual-tree decision based on its condition. It should not be interpreted as a recommendation for blanket removal of the remaining Coral Tree population.



Assessment Limitations

This Level 2 assessment was ground based and limited to visible and accessible conditions on August 31, 2026. Trees are living organisms, concealed defects may be present, and failure cannot be predicted with certainty. Weather, loading, site use, additional cracking, or other changes may alter risk before removal. The recommendation reduces foreseeable exposure but does not constitute a guarantee of safety.

Sincerely,

Amigo Environmental, LLC



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Representative Photographs



Photo 1. VM-32 Coastal Coral Tree (*Erythrina caffra*)

Incident overview showing the failed large co-dominant stem and the occupied park and pedestrian setting. The failed crown extended into the public-use area. **Note:** lower right is previous location of Tree VM-31 (a Coral Tree that also experienced large limb failure)

Photo taken August 31, 2026



Photo 2. VM-32 Coastal Coral Tree

Jagged fracture surface and lost attachment. Corrective removal of damaged material cannot restore the former co-dominant architecture.

Photo taken August 31, 2026



Photo 3. VM-32 Coastal Coral Tree

Close-up of post-management of failed limb. Note additional cambial wound from management activities (chainsaw) contributing to additional tree stress. These ancillary injuries cannot typically be avoided when abating hazard conditions.

Photo taken August 31, 2026



Photo 4. VM-32 Coastal Coral Tree

Wider target and canopy context showing the retained asymmetric architecture, caution controls, adjacent walkway, landscaping, and nearby residential improvements.

Photo taken August 31, 2026



Photo 5. VM-32 Coastal Coral Tree (*Erythrina caffra*)

Close view of the extensive longitudinal rupture and exposed wood extending down the retained stem.

Photo taken August 31, 2026