

DRAFT Urban Forest Plan – Phase 1: Street Trees

Public Comments Summary

Total public comments received: 35

Supportive: 86%

Opposed: 14%

SUPPORT FOR PLAN

- “I support an urban forestry plan that focuses on increasing funding for a municipal program that reduces costs for property owners and improves the health and beauty of our city!”
- “It’s apparent how badly SF needs to improve its Urban Forest, and this plan provides clear guidance in that direction. I particularly appreciate the emphasis on DPW reclaiming responsibility for all street trees.”
- “The urban forest plan is sorely needed. SF should be ashamed to have less canopy coverage than Los Angeles! I think the report has done a nice job identifying problems that have resulted in the poor state of our current urban forest: poor maintenance, under funding, no cohesive planning.”
- “Our Urban Forest is in disrepair and, though there are many initiatives competing for a portion of the City’s budget, the Urban Forest, particularly the street trees, requires an adequate portion.”
- “Our street trees desperately need immediate attention.”
- “This is too important an initiative to be left to unqualified or disinterested property owners or those unable to financially accept responsibility for tree maintenance.”
- “ [street trees] provide the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people”

PLAN FOCUS

- While Phase 1 of Plan focuses on street trees, the urban forest should be planned for in its entirety (streets, parks, private property).
- Plan should be adopted as official City Policy (General Plan).
- Plan is inconsistent in that it purports to be about street trees but often makes recommendations that affect the whole urban forest.
- This is supposed to be a plan about street trees, yet there are strategies, policies, and other sections of the draft that go far beyond the issue of street trees.
- “The draft Urban Forest Plan is a confused and confusing document and needs drastic thinking.”
- “It would simplify matters and bring clarity to specify that this plan applies only to street trees. If you want a vegetation plan for the city, well, that is an ambitious undertaking that needs a broad effort and context.”

STOP RELINQUISHMENT

- Many comments focused on halting the transfer of maintenance and legal liability for street trees to private property owners.
- “The City’s draft proposal is the right thing to do since it was never a reasonable action to transfer the maintenance and legal liabilities of the City-owned trees on to the adjacent property owners.”
- “I remember when the city sent the notices to the property owners (50 years ago) asking permission to plant trees on our street. They said that the city would be responsible for the trees and their up-keep. With that said the property owners agreed.
- Now after all these years the city decides that they can no longer afford the up-keep, and wish to pass this expense on to the property owners. This is not fair. Why should the property owners have to pay for the up-keep of the trees along with the sidewalk repairs that are caused by the trees.”

CANOPY GOAL

- “Why compare San Francisco to other major cities?”
- “There is no reason for SF to compete with other cities with regard to total canopy coverage - a competition that belittles our own very special natural heritage.”
- Planting goals vs canopy goals (ESP for this phase), maybe even note our change in goal statement and why?
- Compete for # of street trees per mile of roadway rather than canopy or quantity?
- Instead of tree canopy coverage goal, set a goal for vegetation cover instead.
- “we need is a land bank of purchased locations that can be turned into green spaces either soon or in the future. Otherwise, we will never have the canopy coverage we would like.”
- Replace citywide canopy goal with goal for street trees. Citywide canopy goal is not most effective strategy. Open spaces and parks have more complicated and competing objectives such as biodiversity that should not be compromised for arbitrary citywide canopy targets.
- Replace canopy expansion goal/comparison with most street trees per roadway.
- “...the ecological context of San Francisco when it comes to trees is quite different from Chicago, Portland, Seattle or New York. Not to mention SF’s incredible density makes it quite different from cities like LA and Atlanta whose canopies will naturally be stronger due to their low density. Comparing us to these other cities is like comparing apples to oranges and should be deemphasized as a justification for urban trees.”

MANAGEMENT

- Consider centralizing City responsibility for trees under only one or two agencies.
- “City owned trees should be cared for by a city. Tree care interest by a city includes care of non-city-owned trees. The care of trees should be a regulated industry. This is in the public interest in two ways. 1) consumer protection - people do not know how to select or adequately judge tree care. 2) Public safety - poorly cared for trees can harm the property and endanger the safety of others.”

DESIGN

- “As a lifelong San Francisco resident, my biggest pet peeve about the urban forest is its visual inconsistency when I walk down the street.”
- The Plan should prioritize the visual aesthetics of urban trees.
- Consider adding policies discussing Urban Design along street corridors.
- Succession and reforestation strategies needed for key streets.
- Uniform and consistent design needed certain streets (e.g. Hyde Street corridor)
- “many other streets have mismatched species of trees that fail to provide a cohesive visual experience of an urban forest of an appropriate scale. contrast this to residential streets in new york or chicago where robust trees of similar size and species grow to form true canopies along beautiful streets.”

BIODIVERSITY & HABITAT

- Consider using word “conserve” instead of “restore” since restoring implies returning to some arbitrary point in the past.
- San Francisco is NOT a biodiversity hotspot, but is located within the CA Floristic Province which has been identified as a hotspot. This should be clarified.
- Acknowledge the harmful effect that tree planting has had on some local native ecosystems.
- “planting trees WILL increase biodiversity”
- Efforts to increase the size of the non-street tree canopy could be counterproductive to our biodiversity objectives.
- Good wild-life supporting native trees and shrubs should be promoted on streets.
- Target large planting areas (schools, hills, medians) for exclusive native planting since many natives are not good street trees.

INCENTIVES & HOMEOWNERS

- Create tax incentives to residents who remove concrete and plant or put greenery on sidewalks.
- Consider a program to help homeowners with costs of sidewalk repair caused by tree roots for privately maintained trees.
- Create a process where neighbors can pool resources and contract tree care services cheaper by bulk pruning/trimming. Discount to homeowners for contractor efficiency.

SOCIAL JUSTICE & HEALTH

- “we also feel strongly that greening is a social justice issue and that the City should be working proactively to plant trees in areas with increased air and noise pollution due to freeways.”
- Greening is social justice. Trees mitigate noise and pollution from freeways (although the noise mitigation is really not achieved without stands of trees, according to science, it is certainly still perceived by neighbors of freeways).
- Street trees can be a source of pollen and impact air quality and trigger asthma especially male trees.

DEFINITION

- Are the naturally occurring trees and other vegetation included in the definition?
- “If the "urban forest" includes all vegetation, then the name of the plan should reflect all vegetation, as in ‘The Green Plan’.”
- Difficulty in use of term "urban forest"
- “Trees are plants; trees are vegetation; trees are part of the landscape. Yet the document keeps using "and" (trees and plants, trees and vegetation, trees and landscaping, trees and greenery) as if trees are something separate from the rest of the plant kingdom. This odd taxonomy belies the "think holistically" justification for the term UF, and facilitates the belief held by many that trees are superior to other forms of vegetation.”

TREE PLANTING

- Consider creating a limited list of approved contractors who have permission to plant trees that are required to be planted per the Planning Code requirement (new construction and renovations). Right now there is too much staff time spent at DPW Urban Forestry on trying to fix problems. If we could limit who plants these trees and require that those who are planting them have a contract with the City or some mechanism for annual review
- If Citywide Program initiates new street tree planting, homeowners should be given option to opt out (homebound, disabled, seniors, financially restricted).
- It is critical that only urban-appropriate trees be planted to minimize impacts and nuisance of trees with excessive droppings are roots that damage sidewalks.

- “Think bigger: Think bigger: 50,000 trees over the next 20 years only gets us to canopy parity with present-day NYC and Seattle. This goal seems underwhelming and unduly distant. SF deserves better. Why not imagine this 50,000 trees in 10 years?”
- Until an actual funding mechanism is in place, I am against planting new trees unless that sponsoring entity can prove or has shown that it will, in fact, maintain the tree in healthy condition. The first order of business should be pruning and maintaining the trees we have.”
- Recognize that some homeowners may not want trees in front of their homes due to shading or nuisance concerns.
- “San Francisco needs trees!! When I moved here from another party of the country 30 years ago I was shocked at how hostile the city seemed to trees.”
- Who would financially benefit from a Street Tree Nursery?
- Consider overhead utilities and the right trees/size to plant in those instances.
- “Tracking (of tree planting goal) should occur every 2 years. Please also add an accountability phrase such as: If the Controller’s office determines the goal is not met within the two year period, a revised plan will be drafted by DPW within one month’s time completely funded with supplies and manpower, in order to make up the loss on the planting schedule before the end of the fiscal year. Losses in tree planting will not be allowed to "carry over".”
- “Property owners should have the option to not plant trees, to easily have trees removed and, instead, plant shrubs like toyon or other vegetation.”

TREE PROTECTION

Improved tree protection measures needed on large-scale utility work in the roadway.

- Regarding the protection of street trees, I think we should try to point out that while the construction impacts placed on trees is an important issue to tackle another huge impact to trees are the larger, capital projects such as:
 - Paving of streets (DPW or SFMTA?)
 - Sewer line upgrades (SFPUC)
 - Water line upgrades (SFPUC)
 - Utility upgrades (PG&E)
 - Corner curb ramp installations (DPW)
- There needs to be better visual evidence to the public that these trees are being protected on street where major utility work or road repairs are taking place. Construction activity should not commence until all tree protection measures are in place. The City of Palo Alto seems to do this very well and may be the best example - although it is a much smaller municipality (Palo Alto Tree Technical Manual).
- Explain tree/utility conflicts and where there aren't really conflicts
- More tree protection - note for phase 3 more protection of trees on private property during development.
- No net loss is a good objective for street trees, but not for natural areas or for the cited tree plantations, which need thinning and variety.

FUNDING

- “I support a dedicated funding program using any one of the options mentioned. I would add the words "dedicated and non-transferrable" to insure the funding program is not used for any other City purpose except as specified.”
- “This Plan cannot be supported until a General Fund commitment is made to eliminate the sidewalk repair backlog and current relinquished street tree maintenance backlog is eliminated.”
- Disagree with proposal that taxes property owners to fund street tree maintenance.
- The Plan seems very dependent on securing funding – not many new policies if funding is not secured.

OPEN SPACE

- Explore more opportunities for trees in new and existing open spaces (Phase 2 Plan)
- Cement used for sidewalk repairs can contribute additional CO2 to atmosphere by its production.

ENGAGEMENT

- Although plan recommends City program, there would still be major role of neighborhoods and communities - how to clarify/emphasize that. (idea for neighborhood caregiver, who gets some stipend?)
- Effort to preserve significant trees in neighborhood- expand on landmark program? Woojoo's idea of best street tree award?
- Community tree plans for major streets - develop further
- “Be proactive vs. reactive. Host community workshops on tree care to instruct residents on proper pruning techniques and tools. Be an advocate, not a disciplinarian. Our local garden collectives, e.g., Garden for the Environment, are wonderful examples. Measure your success and effectiveness by how many citizens you positively interact with.”
- Engagement can be costly so any funding proposal should include funds for education and outreach.
- “I really like the idea of creating an urban forestry awards program. One additional comment to that section would be to have a SFDPW annual award where citizens of SF can nominate the best existing street tree. Staff can choose the best among a list of criteria, and we advertise through our website.”
- Plan and related information should be translated into Chinese and Spanish.
- “Just a thought. A neighborhood could have a tree caregiver that takes care of the block and gets a stipend or voucher.
- That would likely be so much more cost effective than city maintenance. A neighbor knows what is going on and can deal with things in a timely manner.”
- “Clearly, the draft plan is centered on trees. Yet, the public needs to be educated about all options for planting. Therefore, education should not be limited to or laser-focused on trees.”

CODES & ENFORCEMENT

Planning Code Requirements:

- Track how and where greening requirements are waived and what other requirements may be instituted - off-site greening instead of in lieu fees, etc.
- Include greening issues in Pre-Application meeting requirement (Planning Code Sec 311/312).
- Require detailed greening details (i.e. # of trees and species) on plans submitted for building permits.
- Should we address sunlight/view considerations as important in SF?