



SF Environment

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A Department of the City and County of San Francisco

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Mayor

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DATE: AUGUST 3, 2016

TO: SAN FRANCISCO COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT
SAN FRANCISCO URBAN FORESTRY COUNCIL

FM: MEI LING HUI, URBAN FOREST COORDINATOR

CC: DEBBIE RAPHAEL, DIRECTOR
ANTHONY VALDEZ, COMMISSION AFFAIRS MANAGER

RE: Memo on Street Tree Financing Proposals
Commission on the Environment August 2, 2016 Policy Committee Meeting

This memorandum was prepared in response to questions from the San Francisco Commission on the Environment and members of the Urban Forestry Council regarding competing proposals before the San Francisco Board of Supervisors on how to transfer responsibility of street trees back to the City from property owners and how to pay for ongoing maintenance.

Background

Public Works has jurisdiction over all of the approximate 105,000 street trees which includes issuing street tree planting and removal permits, direct care responsibility for 40,000 street trees, and oversight of pruning and other maintenance work for all street trees, of which approximately 63,000 trees are the care responsibility of adjacent property owners.

Property owners may not know that they are required to care for street trees adjacent to their property or how to properly maintain trees. Some may not want to or be able to afford to take care of street trees, which results in tree loss due to benign neglect, accidental damage, or purposeful damage and removal.

Public Works has consistently reported that they lack the resources to properly maintain trees under their care, which has led to the current Street Tree Transfer Plan which will transfer an additional 21,000 street trees into the care of adjacent property owners. The Urban Forestry Council's (UFC's) Public Works representative has stated that Public Works would prefer to provide direct management of all street trees, but are unable to do so with their current resources.

The UFC publishes an Annual Urban Forest Report on resources and activities dedicated to tree management across City departments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Surveyed organizations echo Public Works concerns, reporting that their forestry programs lack the necessary funding and staffing to adequately manage the trees within their purview.

The Urban Forest Plan

The Urban Forest Plan (Phase One: Street Trees) sought to address these issues by highlighting the benefits derived from city trees and establishing a set of citywide goals for street tree planting, maintenance, and management. The Plan's primary recommendation was for the City to assume maintenance responsibility for 100% of San Francisco's street trees. In addition, the Plan recommends planting 50,000 new street trees over the next 20 years. As part of the Urban Forest Plan, a Street Tree Financing Study was conducted to identify potential funding and revenue sources to allow for the creation of a municipal street tree maintenance program in San Francisco. The findings highlighted the importance of a long-term dedicated funding source for street tree maintenance.

UFC supported the Urban Forest Plan development, urged the adoption of the Plan including the establishment of dedicated funding for street tree management, and urged development of future phases of the Urban Forest Plan that will focus on other sectors of the urban forest. The Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted the Urban Forest Plan as part of the City's General Plan in 2015.

The Proposals

Three proposals emerged from the Board of Supervisors, each transferring responsibility of tree care and maintenance back to the City but identifying different funding sources to pay for ongoing care.

- Supervisor Scott Weiner's initial proposal was based on the findings of the Urban Forest Plan and Street Tree Financing Study. The proposal would have created a ballot measure that required the City to manage all street trees and establish dedicated street tree management funding, including necessary tree-related sidewalk repairs, through new revenues from both a progressive parcel tax based on linear street footage and a General Fund set-aside.
- Supervisor John Avalos proposed a ballot measure to establish a tax on electricity and natural gas use in San Francisco, that would have created a non-dedicated funding stream for greening work. This proposal would not have created dedicated street tree management funds, but would have generated limited funding that could have been applied to tree management. In addition, Avalos' proposal would result in a decline in revenue over the years as energy sources convert to cleaner supplies.
- Supervisor Norman Yee introduced a proposal which would have required the City to manage all street trees, without establishing dedicated funding resources.

The final proposal (BOS File No 160381) that unanimously passed on first reading at the BOS combines the goals of the three proposals outlined above with a potential new revenue source. This supported measure has been recommended for placement on the November ballot and requires the City to take responsibility for all street trees, including tree-related sidewalk repairs, trip-and-fall liability and provides \$500,000 per year in the San Francisco Unified School District for tree care and maintenance the San Francisco Unified School District properties with secured funding from a General Fund set-aside of \$19 million. Supervisor Jane Kim's unrelated luxury housing transfer tax (BOS File # 160604) on properties that are purchased for more than \$5 million has been identified as a potential revenue source for a portion of the set-aside. However, regardless of the success of the "Luxury Housing Transfer Tax," if the voters pass – by simple majority (50% + 1 vote) – the "City Responsibility for Maintaining Street Trees Charter Amendment" the Department of Public Works will take over all street tree maintenance with a dedicated \$19 million set-aside effective July 1, 2017.

Resources:

Link to the Urban Forest Plan and Street Tree Financing Study: <http://sf-planning.org/urban-forest-plan>

Link to the legislative digest for the BOS supported Street Tree Financing proposal:

<https://sfgov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=4599664&GUID=D246E0FC-A446-452E-845F-531E6874C56B>

Link to the Ultra Luxury Property Transfer Tax proposal:

<https://sfgov.legistar.com/ViewReport.ashx?M=R&N=Master&GID=60&ID=2735947&GUID=DA8650C8-F0E6-4DEC-8FFB-596737FC410F&Title=Legislation+Details>