

Community Forest Advisory Board

City of San Diego



January 14, 2018

Mayor Kevin Faulconer

Council President Gomez and Councilmembers Bry, Campbell, Ward,
Montgomery, Kersey, Sherman, Cate, and Moreno

SUBJECT: *Resources and Staffing for Urban Forestry Program, FY 2020 Budget*

Trees are invaluable City assets that contribute to public health and safety, air and water quality, shade and cooling, climate action, walkable communities and “quality of life” for all San Diegans. This letter offers recommendations from the Community Forest Advisory Board (CFAB) on staffing, contracts, and priorities in the FY 2020 budget for these trees.

As the seriousness of global and local climate impacts accelerates, so does the value of trees for cooling cities. Summers are getting hotter, heat-related risks increase, and trees are recognized as cost-effective ways to shade and cool neighborhoods. Trees need to be maintained in healthy conditions to continue providing shade and climate resilience, and more trees need to be planted now so that neighborhoods will be cooler and more livable in 20 years. Even with projected FY 2020 budget reductions, there are compelling reasons to invest in trees as cost-effective and amazing providers of climate mitigation and adaptation.

Request two additional FTE to manage the City’s tree assets.

We urge you to consider the following staffing increases.

1. \$100,000 for one FTE for a Code Enforcement Officer, in Development Services. Over the years, development permits have required trees to be planted and maintained in perpetuity, and many of these trees have been incorrectly topped, underwatered, or removed. These thousands of trees could be contributing to cooler neighborhoods and stormwater retention, if the City inspected, issued compliance notices and fines, and required trees to be replaced and maintained. Fines can partially or totally offset salary of a Code Enforcement Officer.
2. \$100,000 for one additional arborist/horticulturalist, in the Streets Division. Current staff have insufficient capacity to respond to tree complaints, tree requests, infrastructure conflicts, public safety, code compliance, contract oversight, interdepartmental coordination, and more. Inattention to these will (and does) cause more tree losses and increases City exposure to liabilities and lawsuits. Staffing needs are listed in the Five-year Urban Forest Management Plan (adopted by City Council on January 24, 2017) and were calculated for the FY 2019 budget (available by request) as 15 FTE. Cities with more than 200,000 population have an average urban forestry staff of 20 FTE, and San Diego has only three professionals and five tree care workers for street trees, in addition to park arborists and tree care workers.

Fund additional contract work for tree planting maintenance.

It is imperative that investments be made in tree maintenance and planting contract work.

3. \$300,000 for planting 1,500 additional street trees. The Mayor added \$300,000 in FY 2018 for “one-time non-personnel expenditures associated with tree planting services to support the City’s Climate Action Plan, and this needs to be reinstated. The City has enjoyed national

recognition for a great plan, and now needs commitment and resources to implement the climate mitigation and adaptation services that trees provide. These funds need to be coupled with adequate City staff to coordinate and encourage tree requests from property owners and businesses, ensure site suitability, oversee and track proper tree planting by contractors, and monitor health of the newly planted trees.

4. \$500,000 increase in contracts for inspection and scheduled tree care. The highest priority should be to “take care of what we have” and provide for public safety, tree health, and community benefits. Budgets since 2016 have included \$2,400,000 level funding for tree care and planting contracts (proposed to be eliminated but not actually reduced in FY 2018 and 2019). It’s time to raise this, as drought has diminished tree health and increased the need for tree pruning, palm trimming, risk assessments, and tree removal in emergencies. The City needs to follow the seven- or ten-year maintenance cycles that most municipalities follow, as longer cycles result in more tree failures, branches breaking off, shorter tree life, conflicts with infrastructure, and payments to settle public safety lawsuits.

Focus tree-related activities in other departments on quality planning, installation and care.

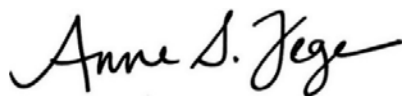
Other departments are accountable for and contribute to tree management, public safety, and community services. Those individual departments can enhance their effectiveness and cooperation. This is a long list because urban forest management is complex, reaches across a dozen departments, contributes many environmental services, and is strongly integrated with urban livability.

1. Educate local residents and businesses about watering trees. Periodic and seasonal public information messages need to be scheduled by the Water and Communications departments on the benefits of trees and proper tree maintenance. In the last drought, all water messages focused on saving gallons and resulted in tree mortality, loss of shade and other benefits, public safety risks, and high costs of removing dead trees. The City needs to be prepared for the next (inevitable) drought cycles and watering to sustain young and mature trees.
2. Ensure that sidewalk improvements (\$5 million in FY 2019) preserve trees. Many innovative and cost-effective sidewalk design and construction methods can be applied to increase public safety and maintain healthy street trees. And for each tree removed in sidewalk projects, two trees should be planted.
3. Develop Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach for emerging tree pests. IPM focuses on monitoring and identifying pests (such as the shot hole borer that attacks more than 20 tree species and the gold-spotted oak borer that kills large oaks), measures to prevent pest infestations, and controls once pests are detected. An IPM specialist was recently hired for parks. Any delay in addressing these pests will risk the loss of thousands of trees in the City.
4. Invest in trees to meet stormwater permit requirements. Green streets and infrastructure are a key element of the recently-approved Midway-Pacific Highway community plan update, and the City recently revised the “low-impact design manual” that includes green street designs to retain stormwater.
5. Explore increasing property-based fees. Older neighborhoods were not developed with Maintenance Assessment Districts, now there is a stark difference between public landscaping funded by property fees in northern communities and limited public landscaping by (lack of) general funding in the older southern communities. Fiscal impacts and options were outlined in a 2013 report by the Independent Budget Analysis and a 2016 report on the storm drain fees. Measure W just passed (by over 60%) for Los Angeles County to collect fees for \$300 million annually in stormwater projects, and this could be considered locally.

6. Fill vacant funded Landscape Architect position in Public Works. The department's landscape architect retired several years ago and his position is unfilled, so projects lack professional inspection of landscape designs and tree installation. Oversight is now provided by a civil engineer and occasional consultations with the over-scheduled urban forestry staff.
7. Complete tree canopy analysis. This assessment was funded by CalFire, delivered two years ago by the University of Vermont, but not completed. Unanswered questions include:
 - What differences are there in tree canopy and land cover types, relative to land use (schools, residential, commercial, schools, parking lots, and more), districts, and community planning areas?
 - How is tree canopy cover (by census tract) correlated with population and pollution data (poverty, housing burden, asthma, traffic, ozone and more)?
 - What are realistic tree canopy objectives for the Climate Action Plan? Where should trees be planted? How can equity in neighborhood trees and access to green spaces be achieved?
8. Approach contacting with "Best Value" approaches. Contracts have been awarded to low bidders, and there are some problems with the quality of tree planting, maintenance and inventory work. Partnering with "Best Value" contractors allows for better use of City funds through software, work quality, expertise and contract management.
9. Accelerate applications of Enterprise Asset Management systems. Technology and information innovations are transforming urban forestry, and their application locally will increase effectiveness of the few urban forestry staff to track tree inventories and conditions, trees planted, gaps in tree maintenance, complaints and inspections, and contract work.

The Board was established twenty years ago and continues to advise and advocate for "establishing, advocating and stewarding, in perpetuity, a healthy urban forest and thereby a healthy, attractive and prosperous city" (from Board mission). Thank you!!! for the support by City staff and Council for urban forest management over the years, to provide essential public health, safety, and environmental services to residents, businesses, and visitors. Please feel free to contact me with questions and further information.

Sincerely,



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cc: Council staff, City staff, CFAB Board

cc: Assistant Chief Operating Officer Stacey LoMedico, Transportation and Stormwater Director Kris McFadden, Park and Recreation Director Herman Parker, Planning Director Mike Hansen, Development Services Director Elise Lowe, Information Technology Director Jonathan Behnke, Public Works Director James Nagelvoort, and Mayor's Office staff Almys Udrys and Lee Friedman