

# Working Collectively to Plant and Care for More Trees And Climate Equity Shifts

Notes from Listening meeting, July 31, 2020, 10:00 am

The Kate Sessions team and Councilmember Ward's office facilitated an informal discussion (via videoconference) of the opportunities to work collectively to plant and care for more trees.

As climate action and community equity become increasingly urgent, the additional \$300,000 for tree planting provide the City of San Diego with opportunities to invest in underserved communities.

Based on the information shared at this meeting, nine actions were identified that could be implemented immediately with current resources and authorities. These could be considered "Climate Equity Shifts."

1. Apply Climate Equity Index to expending FY21 additional tree planting funds. (Sustainability)
2. Outreach to community groups about healthy, heat, and shade, and assist with identifying places to plant trees. (Council staffs)
3. Plant trees in the right-of-way street easement that extends 10 ft from the curb, not just in parkways. (Transportation and Stormwater-TSW)
4. Waive permit fee for removal of concrete to plant trees. (Development Services-DSD)
5. Give priority to trees requested for groups of 6 to 10 trees. (TSW)
6. Allow homeowners to have some choice in tree species planted. (TSW)
7. Identify a Promise Zone jobs project to water boulevard trees weekly. (Economic Development)
8. Restore Urban Corps tree planting purchase orders. (TSW, Purchasing)
9. Add braces to stakes to protect young trees planted from 15-gallon containers. (TSD)
10. Build on Kate Sessions Commitment campaign for communities to plant 100 trees, with education to residents and businesses about planting smaller trees with business and private financing. (Mayor's communications staff)

Twenty-four attended the meeting, for reasons parallel to those outlined in the meeting invitation:

- Climate change is accelerating, cities are warming, health impacts are more evident, and public desire for action is increasing. Trees are affordable, amazing and highly visible ways to cool neighborhoods and implement Goal 5 of the City's Climate Action Plan
- All San Diegans deserve healthy neighborhoods, yet decades of inequitable public investments (locally and nationally) have perpetuated environmental injustice.
- Public trees can be easily ignored (not watering), vandalized, and die within a few years of planting. To counter this, neighborhoods can and should have a hand in deciding where and how the City invests in trees.
- Recent grants are committed to planting trees, but they lack locations in targeted (mostly underserved) communities that have someone accepting tree watering agreements. Finding common interests (trees, places to plant trees) will be facilitated by conversations and collaborations across sectors and communities.

## Participant gave short self-introductions.

Councilmember Ward opened the meeting with a call to focus on climate goals, clean and green neighborhoods, and giving back to our communities.

City Forester Brian Widener outlined the FY21 tree planting funds (from general budget and grants) and the staff's current plans

(<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Np27cpN8pL0cInq4qeFmVgvpJOqBJVX0/view?usp=sharing> .)

Attendees identified the following issues:

### **Watering**

- Tree-planting grants from California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) sometimes lack locations in targeted (mostly underserved) communities for planting trees
- The City of San Diego (and most other cities) require someone to sign a tree watering agreement for any trees planting in public right-of-way

### **Funding tree care and planting**

- Tree planting and care isn't free but it isn't too expensive. More philanthropy can be invited.
- Private donors have contributed funds (such as Business Trades Council) for tree care and planting, and are often brokered by non-profits (such as San Diego Parks Foundation).
- Coordinated multi-partner applications are more likely to be selected for CalFire, Urban Greening, Transformative Climate Communities, and other state grants

### **Equity**

- Climate equity index could drive the City's investments to census tracts that have high pollution and population stresses, and low tree cover.
- Engaging communities of concern is challenging, constructive, and likely to need non-traditional public involvement processes ("outside the box").
- Promise zones may be useful for organizing investments, <https://www.sandiego.gov/economic-development/sdpromisezone>
- Trees and urban nature are essential services, just as health, safety and education.
- Older districts do not have Maintenance Assessment Districts (MADs) funded by property tax collections, so street trees are maintained and planted by general fund (Transportation-streets).
- Many Urban Corps students (ages 18 to 26) live in underserved communities, and could be resources for urban tree planning, planting and care

### **Sidewalk and parkway issues**

- Many older communities were designed with extensive street systems for vehicle access, and a lot of concrete. Some districts lack parkways between streets and sidewalks, and therefore are excluded from many street tree planting efforts.
- Some private funds are available for concrete removal, but City's permit fees are high; City is considering but has not waived the fees
- City's sidewalk investments need to protect and add trees, designing for adequate soil volume and growing space
- Most parkway and sideway sites are not irrigated, and manual watering of trees is expensive, time-consuming, and cumbersome
- More infrastructure can be "green" instead of "grey," particularly stormwater management systems
- Grates may be required, are expensive, and lack City-wide standard designs and availability

### **Losses and damages to trees**

- Vandalism is a major cause of young tree mortality. A city-wide vandalism-prevention program would benefit trees and other City assets.

- Clean and Safe (Downtown Partnership), <https://downtownsandiego.org/clean-and-safe/>) is planting 36-inch box trees (more expensive) that seem to be vandalized less than smaller trees
- Stake braces or re-usable protective “cages” can be installed to protect young trees, and allow for smaller trees to be planted
- Dogs make it hard to be an urban tree, as many dog owners do not think of the impact of repeated urine and droppings through strong chemicals and physical impacts to trees. More dog exercise areas are needed in areas with apartments and limited yards.
- Trees are being cut down and illegally pruned, immediately reducing tree canopy and benefits. Code enforcement is very limited, and few citations and fines are actually levied.

**Other issues and opportunities** (which of these should be separate sections?)

- Private residential property offers the greatest promise to increase urban tree canopy, through education and incentives.
- Some older trees were planted in places with far too little growing space, and current tree planting needs to match trees with large growth forms with parkways and places that have plenty of space—and not create similar problems in 50 years.
- Many schoolyards have limited shade, and additional trees could be planted around and within schoolyards
- Urban nature is valuable habitat for birds and other wildlife. San Diego Canyonlands is investing in transition areas at developments on the edge of canyons.

**Attendees:**

- Councilmember Chris Ward, District 3, City of San Diego
- Brian Elliott and Kathleen Ferrier, District 3 staff, City of San Diego
- Roberto Torres and Katie-Intern, Sustainability Department, City of San Diego
- Brian Widener, City Forester, City of San Diego
- Muriel King, District 4 representative to Community Forest Advisory Board, City of San Diego
- Puja Batra, District 8 representative to Community Forest Advisory Board, City of San Diego
  
- Richard Miller, Sierra Club San Diego
- Lauren Welch, Urban Corps San Diego
- Mike Palat and Liz Velarde, West Coast Arborists, contractor to City of San Diego for street tree work
- Stacia Roesler, Paradise Hills Foundation
- Jennifer Elliott and Judy Schroeder, University Heights
- Kasi Munoz, Landscape designer, City Heights
- Beryl Forman, El Cajon Boulevard Business Improvement District
- Lynn Langley and Robin Rivet, Master Gardeners
- Lydia Van Note, The San Diego Foundation
- Elektra Fike-Data, Tree San Diego
- Alonso Vivas and Ernesto-operations team, Clean and Safe project of Downtown Partnership
- Anne Fege, Organizing team, Kate Sessions Commitment; SD Regional Urban Forests Council (SDR UFC); and Chair, Community Forest Advisory Board, City of San Diego

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Organized by Anne Fege, [afege@sdrufc.com](mailto:afege@sdrufc.com) and Brian Elliott, [bellriott@sandiego.gov](mailto:bellriott@sandiego.gov) .

### **Additional information:**

Notes taken and comments entered into the chat, during the July 31 meeting, at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ar4-rAc4m0Bi6R4FxD0cxo32MMWCv3cRuodFALG2GII/edit?usp=sharing>

City of San Diego, Climate Equity, <https://www.sandiego.gov/climateEquity>  
Climate Equity Index Report, 48 p., 2019,  
[https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/2019\\_climate\\_equity\\_index\\_report.pdf](https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/2019_climate_equity_index_report.pdf)

“After analyzing the results of the CEI assessment, including feedback from the Equity Stakeholder Working Group, City staff recommends the following actions:

1. Seek grant funding opportunities to support community engagement and invest in areas with very low to moderate access to opportunity.
2. Conduct public engagement efforts, in partnership with community-based organizations, in census tracts with very low access to opportunity.
3. Explore the feasibility of establishing a sustainability ambassador program in areas with a very low to moderate access to opportunity to improve participation in City planning.
4. Determine mechanisms to incorporate climate equity into City programs and projects.
5. Refresh data within San Diego’s Climate Equity Index every five years.”

City of San Diego, Climate Action Plan, 2015, 74 p.,  
[https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/final\\_july\\_2016\\_cap.pdf](https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/final_july_2016_cap.pdf)

City of San Diego, Urban Forestry Program Five-year Plan, January 2017, 32 p.,  
[https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/final\\_adopted\\_urban\\_forestry\\_program\\_five\\_year\\_plan.pdf](https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/final_adopted_urban_forestry_program_five_year_plan.pdf)

City of San Diego, district- and community-level maps of Urban Tree Canopy Assessment, at <https://sandiego.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=22676b84005b4365aa44af1b217d4201> Census-tract level tree canopy percents at [http://sdrufc.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CalEnviroScreen3.0\\_Results\\_SanDiegoCo\\_2018.xlsx](http://sdrufc.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CalEnviroScreen3.0_Results_SanDiegoCo_2018.xlsx)

Paradise Hills Foundation, <https://www.facebook.com/Paradise-Hills-Foundation-480281269401408>

SD U-T article about Paradise Hills Foundation, planting trees along Reo Drive, issue about permit fees to cut concrete <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/communities/san-diego/story/2020-01-24/group-looks-to-beautify-paradise-hills-commercial-center-with-trees>

“Social Equity Considerations for Cities’ Decision Making Related to Inner, Nearby, and Faraway Forests,” 2020, 47 p., <https://cities4forests.com/lq-se-social-equity/> (pages 1-25 are about urban forests)

Articles about Los Angeles and Phoenix addressing ways to reduce urban heat  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/climate-solutions/phoenix-climate-change-heat/>  
<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/aug/21/cooling-goo-sidewalks-and-other-strange-new-weapons-in-the-war-on-urban-heat>

### **Email messages from Council staff that could not attend the meeting:**

#### **District 4:**

From: Henson, Eric <[HensonE@sandiego.gov](mailto:HensonE@sandiego.gov)>  
To: Anne Fege <[afege@aol.com](mailto:afege@aol.com)>

Sent: Fri, Jul 31, 2020 9:52 am

Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] TODAY 10 am, Healthy Trees-Kate Sessions listening meeting

Hi Anne,

I will not be able to attend this meeting and really wanted to be there. However, I am staffing Council member Montgomery at an event occurring at the same time. Since I cannot be in attendance, I want to share a comment in solidarity with our District 4 Community Forestry Representative, Muriel King:

It is imperative that we expand the urban tree canopy in District 4. Some of our Census Tracts are in the 70 percentile of environmental impacts such as greenhouse gas emissions, hazardous waste and even indoor air quality due to the age of housing. Our office also supports walkability and complete streets.

Muriel King, Nancy Janssen, Kim Laru and Cody Livingston through the Bay Terraces Community Association and Paradise Gardeners were taking proactive action with place-making projects in our neighborhoods before place-making became a popular topic in the realm of City Planning, even though they know this term as beautification. Woodman Drive has transformed into a catalyst for change when it comes to grass-roots beautification which deserves more funding and assistance.

We also want to acknowledge Stacia from the Paradise Hills foundation who is taking initiative to plant street trees on Reo Drive that was documented in a 1987, as implementation of community plans are difficult but we have faith through the community and our office we can make implementation possible and more relevant to the community than ever.

## **District 9:**

From: Loando, Sanna <SLoando@sandiego.gov>

To: Cardenas, Gloria <GCardenas@sandiego.gov>

Cc: Gates, Lara <LGates@sandiego.gov>; Anne Fege <afege@aol.com>

Sent: Fri, Jul 31, 2020 3:37 pm

Subject: Fw: FRI 11:30 talk? Tree planting \$300K added for FY21, seeking community engagement!

Hi Gloria..... [In a phone call with Anne Fege on July 31,] we discussed next steps on the \$300,000 that has been allocated for tree planting in the FY21 Budget, and while the objective is to address the current backlog of requests, the low percentage of requests from CD4, CD8, and CD9 do not reflect the existing need to increase tree canopy coverage in these Districts.

I encouraged Anne to work with CM Campbell's office on bringing forward an item related to this at the Environment Committee, but she has not heard back from their staff. At this time, Anne would like to stay in touch and see what can be done to advocate for an equitable implementation of the tree planting program.

Anne mentioned that CM Ward expressed his support for this vision at the meeting earlier today, so this could be an opportunity for the Council offices to catalyze interest for this program in our underserved areas, and also work with our CBOs to help promote the program. Another thing that Anne mentioned was that in the past Urban Corps has been part of tree planting efforts, and this is something that should be sustained to reflect the communities we serve.

Thank you in advance for your assistance on this.

Sanna Loando

Policy Advisor & Council Representative

Office of Council President Georgette Gómez

City of San Diego, Ninth District