



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item

23-0101

Agenda Date: 2/16/2023

2023 COUNCIL STUDY ISSUE

NUMBER

DPW 22-04

TITLE Street Tree Repopulation with an Equity Lens

BACKGROUND

Lead Department: Department of Public Works

Support Departments: Office of the City Manager
Office of the City Attorney
Environmental Services Department

Sponsor(s): Sustainability Commission

History: 1 year ago: Ranked, Below the Line
2 years ago: N/A

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

What precipitated this Study?

In February 2021, the Department of Public Works, Parks Division presented an update to the Sustainability Commission on the City’s Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP). In this presentation, staff noted that there are more than 5,000 empty street tree spaces. The goal of the UFMP is to increase the urban tree canopy to 20.5%. Currently, canopy coverage is at 18.5% (2007 data); achieving the goal of 20.5% would require adding 29,000 new trees. Thus, filling empty tree spaces will be important to achieving this goal. The cost of planning, planting, watering and lifetime trimming of street trees is significant, but results in environmental benefits (e.g., reduced heat island effect, improved air quality, and carbon sequestration).

The City’s Climate Action Playbook’s Play 4.3 goal is to enhance natural carbon sequestration capacity by implementing various strategies, including Move 4.F (Implement the City’s UFMP and continue to protect and greatly expand tree canopy). Further, prioritizing trees in underserved neighborhoods is aligned with Council’s Policy Priority of Equity, Access, and Inclusion. This Study Issue aims to ensure the available resources are used to add trees in underserved, low-income neighborhoods, or neighborhoods with the least amount of tree cover.

What are the key elements of the Study?

The intent of this Study is to develop a strategy/plan for planting trees in the 5,000 vacant tree locations within five years. This strategy/plan would include the following elements:

1. Identify how to fill all 5,000 vacant street tree locations within five years including how to secure the resources required. This would include a cost analysis for:
 - a. Planting trees and establishing them; and
 - b. Ongoing maintenance and operation costs following tree planting. In the past, the responsibility, cost, and logistics of watering newly planted trees has been a barrier for

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their establishment.

2. Develop a strategy for prioritizing residential areas with lower tree canopy, low-income neighborhoods, multifamily dwellings, and other historically underserved communities.

Estimated years to complete study: 1 year

FISCAL IMPACT

Cost to Conduct Study

(Delete any empty rows in table)

Level of staff effort required (opportunity cost):	Moderate
Funding Required for Non-Budgeted Costs:	\$50,000
Funding Source:	Will seek budget supplement

This Study can be conducted by staff and consultant services.

Cost to Implement Study Results

Staff estimates that the cost to implement this Study is significant. The Study will develop estimates to implement this type of program including the cost of new trees, planting the trees, installing root barriers, and watering the trees during the first three years of establishment. Additional staff and at least one watering truck may be necessary to maintain the new trees.

EXPECTED CITY COUNCIL, BOARD OR COMMISSION PARTICIPATION

Council-Approved Work Plan: No

Council Study Session: No

Reviewed by Boards/Commissions: Sustainability, Parks and Recreation

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Support. This policy issue merits discussion at the 2023 Study Issues Workshop.

The Study would provide valuable information for evaluating the implementation of two key City Plans: the UFMP and the Climate Action Playbook. An analysis of vacant tree locations in underserved neighborhoods could help to accelerate and guide the City's implementation of the UFMP, and ensure that these neighborhoods would be prioritized when resources become available for adding new trees in the future. Based on staff's experience, residents in underserved neighborhoods tend to decline a street tree as they typically do not have resources (e.g., time, income) to care for it. In addition to prioritizing locations in underserved neighborhoods, this Study would examine a longer-term resource plan for maintaining trees where residents may otherwise face hardships or challenges to maintain the trees themselves. Developing such a resource plan would assist staff in budgeting reliably for future UFMP implementation, while addressing equity disparities and achieving climate goals.

Prepared by: Madeline Willett, Environmental Programs Manager

Reviewed by: Jim Stark, Superintendent of Parks and Golf

Reviewed by: Ramana Chinnakotla, Director of Environmental Services

Reviewed by: Chip Taylor, Director of Public Works

Reviewed by: Teri Silva, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Kent Steffens, City Manager