



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item-No Attachments (PDF)

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REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBJECT

Approval of the Urban Forest Management Plan

BACKGROUND

On March 4, 2008 Council authorized staff to apply for an Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) Grant from the California State Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL-FIRE). The grant was approved by the CAL-FIRE on August 3, 2008, but state funding of the plan was significantly delayed due to the economic recession. After Council approved the Urban Forest Management Plan grant with CAL-FIRE, Phytosphere Research was contracted to draft an urban forestry management plan for Sunnyvale. The UFMP draft was completed in 2011 and final review was delayed due to City departmental restructuring. A final condition of the CAL-FIRE UFMP grant is adoption by Council.

The need for a plan emerged from many years of public inquiries about a variety of topics related to street trees, their management and City policy starting with a study issue in 2007 (DPW 07-16) on the sustainability of large street trees. The overall goal of the UFMP is to help sustain, protect, and enhance the urban forest in the City of Sunnyvale in order to maximize the many benefits that it provides to city residents. This plan addresses all major segments of Sunnyvale's urban forest, but is largely focused on the City's Street Tree Program, which manages the majority of Sunnyvale's municipal trees. The UFMP reviews the benefits of having an urban forest, outlines a strategic plan for guiding the overall management of the urban forest, describes the current condition of the urban forest, and discusses the current management of the urban forest and the value of trees to the community.

The Parks and Recreation Commission considered this item on August 13, 2014 and by the Sustainability Commission on August 18, 2014.

EXISTING POLICY

Municipal Code 13.16 - City Trees.

Private property trees that are outside of the public right-of-way currently have municipal oversight as outlined in:

- **Municipal Code 19.38.70d** - Landscaping, Irrigation and Useable Open Space - *Minimum parking lot landscaping requirement.*
- **Municipal Code 19.94** - Tree Preservation

General Plan:

- City-wide Vision Goals
 - Attractive Community: To maintain and enhance the appearance of Sunnyvale, and to distinguish it from surrounding communities, through the promotion of high quality

architecture, the preservation of historic districts and structures, the maintenance of a healthy urban forest, and the provision of abundant and attractive open space.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This action is not a project for purposes of CEQA because it is an administrative or organizational activity that will not result in a direct or indirect physical change in the environment (Guideline 15378 (b)(5)).

DISCUSSION

Street Trees

The urban forest is comprised of three main groups of trees: trees located on City-owned property including parks; trees located on private property in the public right-of-way; and trees located on private property outside of the public right-of-way. On a typical street (although there may be exceptions in particular neighborhoods), the private property extends to the center line of the street. The right-of-way (ROW) is an easement that extends 31 feet back from the center line of the street. Common improvements within the ROW include street surfacing, lighting, sewer laterals, curbs, sidewalks and street trees. Although trees planted on private property within the ROW are the property of the property owner, the City regulates their maintenance, removal and planting and provides limited maintenance services for public benefit per Sunnyvale Municipal Code (SMC) 13.16. The UFMP is primarily focused on those trees located within the right-of-way and commonly referred to as “street trees”.

Goals

The UFMP’s major goals as stated on page 6, Section 2 of the plan include:

- Increase tree canopy cover to maximize ecosystem benefits provided by the urban forest.
- Choose and locate new trees in all vacant planting spaces to maximize tree-related benefits and minimize maintenance costs.
- Develop an urban forest canopy that is stable over the long term.
- Maintain street trees appropriately to maximize benefits and minimize hazard, nuisance, hardscape damage, and maintenance costs.
- Facilitate collaboration among City departments related to issues and projects involving trees.
- Foster community support for maintaining and improving Sunnyvale's urban forest.
- Encourage proper tree management on private property.

Next Steps

Should Council approve the UFMP, staff would develop an operational implementation and monitoring plan to ensure that the goals are achieved. A major focus will be to create a formal relationship with a community based non-profit group that is dedicated to helping achieve the goals of the UFMP including public education about the benefits of trees and new tree planting and care through volunteer efforts. The City should also consider revisions to its existing ordinances and policies that address trees in Sunnyvale, including SMC chapters 13.16-City Trees, 19.94-Tree Preservation, and 19.38.70d-Landscaping, Irrigation and Useable Open Space, to ensure they are current and reflective of City policies, practices and the rest of the Municipal Code. Related items requiring Council approval including possible Municipal Code revisions or additional funding will be brought forward as separate issues for consideration and possible action at a later date.

Board and Commission Review

The Parks and Recreation Commission considered this item on August 13, 2014 (RTC 14-0372). Commissioners voted 3-0 (one commission member absent) to recommend Alternative 1: Approve adoption of the Urban Forest Management Plan. They expressed support for the plan because it is timely, comprehensive, supports an expanded city tree canopy, and will serve as an important focus for future planning.

The Sustainability Commission considered this item on August 18, 2014 (RTC 14-0372). Commissioners voted 6-0 to recommend Alternative 1: Approve adoption of the Urban Forest Management Plan. They also unanimously approved a motion to recommend Council consider issues of concern as follows:

1. Clarification on the methods of how shading is achieved in parking lots.
2. Include in the Urban Forest Management Plan specific mechanisms for dealing with the effect of high density development on the urban canopy.
3. Include ways for collaboration between organizations, volunteers, non-profit organizations, Commissions, and staff to create and implement policies to address concerns of pedestrians, bicyclists, and other city interests.
4. Modify the public right-of-way to allow trees to be planted to expand species variability and numbers, including places where planting strips have been paved over.

FISCAL IMPACT

Adoption of the UFMP will have no initial fiscal impact as the goals of the UFMP can be completed over time given that current funding and service levels in the approved operating budget are maintained. Recent increases in funding for the Street Tree Services Program will allow the City to maintain a seven year trimming cycle for all street trees and increase tree planting.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Senior Center, Community Center and Department of Public Safety; and by making the agenda and report available at the Sunnyvale Public Library, the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's website.

The Parks and Recreation Commission considered this item on August 13, 2014 and the Sustainability Commission considered this item on August 18, 2014.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve adoption of the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP).
2. Provide other direction to staff as Council deems appropriate.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Alternative 1: Approve adoption of the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP).

Adoption of the UFMP is a requirement of the grant funding used to create the plan. The UFMP will serve staff and the community as a general framework for managing all trees in Sunnyvale to ensure the sustainability and attractiveness of the urban forest. Any future change in policies or the Municipal Code or service levels requiring additional funding beyond the currently approved operating budget will be brought to Council for consideration as a separate issue at a later date.

BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Sustainability Commission as well as the Parks and Recreation Commission voted unanimously to recommend Alternative 1. The Sustainability Commission also recommended Council consider additional issues as noted under the Board and Commission Review section above.

Staff feels the issues as noted by the Sustainability Commission are not within the scope of the Urban Forest Management Plan. Should Council choose to pursue the issues, staff recommends the study be done independent of the UFMP and as part of the 2014 study issue process.

Prepared by: Leonard Dunn, Urban Landscape Manager; Scott Morton, Superintendent of Parks & Golf

Reviewed by: Kent Steffens, Director, Public Works

Reviewed by: Robert A. Walker, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Deanna J. Santana, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

1. Urban Forest Management Plan
2. Excerpt of the August 13, 2014 draft meeting minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission
3. Excerpt of the August 18, 2014 draft meeting minutes of the Sustainability Commission