



Memorandum

TO: TRANSPORTATION AND
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: John Ristow

SUBJECT: Community Forest
Management Update
and Urban Forestry
Annual Report

DATE: May 12, 2025

Approved

Date:

5/20/2025

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the annual report on the Community Forest Management Plan and Urban Forestry and the impact on advancing urban forestry goals and increasing the tree canopy.

BACKGROUND

San José's community forest is a vital City asset with a complex maintenance and management structure. For several generations, property owners in San José have been responsible for street tree and sidewalk maintenance adjacent to their properties per the City's municipal code. As a result, the City's street tree program has been primarily regulatory and enforcement-based, where permits are required and issued for tree-related activities.

The adoption of the Community Forest Management Plan (CFMP) in February of 2022 changed the strategic direction of the City's forestry program, resulting in more staff across the Department of Transportation (DOT) and Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS), funding to prune and maintain all street trees on a 12-year cycle, and funding to plant 1,000 trees per year. DOT and its partners plant an additional 1,000 trees per year with various collaborations and funding streams (for a total of 2000 trees a year).

The City Auditor was also directed to determine how and whether the City is collecting tree-related mitigation fees from developers, how and whether the City is enforcing tree-planting conditions on development, how the City is spending tree mitigation funds, and how the City can cost-effectively plant more trees. The audit was completed, and results were presented to City Council, on January 10, 2023. One open audit item remains requiring DOT to develop a list of tree species which residents and businesses could choose from when planting trees. The list will be posted by the end of this fiscal year

ANALYSIS

The adoption of the CFMP and heightened community interest provided an opportunity for the City to expand its forestry capacity. The plan provides direction for how the community forest could be improved and shepherded into the future. The plan has key themes for the building of a robust urban forestry program that include:

- Streamlining governance;
- Ensuring the sustainability of the urban forest;
- Support for diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging;
- Efficient and effective tree management; and
- Standardization of planning and development practices.

Streamlining Governance

The DOT Forestry works closely with the Planning, Building and Code Enforcement Department to ensure Chapter 13 of the municipal code, as well as the landscaping and stormwater management component of the Citywide Design Standards is applied to all new developments. Since tracking started in 2023, staff have reviewed 236 development plans. Since 2023, staff have confirmed 292 trees were planted at 60 completed developments. Additionally, arborists are available to provide expertise for living tree removal applications on private property.

The Forestry team is also working with PRNS staff to increase the population of trees in city parks, complete a park tree inventory, and execute shared tree service contracts. To date, the Forestry team has been working with PRNS staff to identify spaces around parks in the public right-of-way where trees can be planted, collaborating on project budgets for new parks to ensure funding is available for tree planting, and conducting training to ensure trees are planted with the infrastructure needed to ensure successful establishment. The two departments are developing specifications for tree work to ensure a consistent approach.

Ensuring the Sustainability of the Urban Forest

To ensure there is a healthy urban forest in the future, work is happening in two key areas. First, new trees are being planted where tree vacancies exist and where trees have been removed. The goal is to plant 2,000 trees a year. By the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-2024, 2,517 trees had been planted in DOT and PRNS maintained areas including medians, spaces between sound walls and streets, and vacant parcels. To date in FY 2024-2025, 1,692 trees have been planted by the City and partner organizations. The second area of work is maintenance of trees in public medians and areas that back up to sound walls. This work includes dead tree removals and pruning. The proactive pruning of 3,100 trees has helped prevent storm damage to the trees and adjacent property.

Looking ahead to FY 2025-2026, the Forestry team anticipates working with PRNS, non-profit partners, and contractors to plant at least 1,500 new trees. These will be placed in vacancies in the public right of way and other public spaces. Funding allows for tree pruning on a 12-year cycle. To efficiently conduct this maintenance, work is completed in geographic areas across the city considering an equitable distribution of work citywide.

Urban Forestry Grant Status

In 2023, the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program awarded the City \$5.6 million to maintain and plant trees in certain census tracts within the City. The awarded project included pruning 5,000 street trees, planting 2,800 resilient new trees, and removing dead and invasive trees over a four-year period through volunteer opportunities as well as on-the-job training for local youth facilitated through the City's Resilience Corps program operated the San José Conservation Corps and Charter School. PRNS was also awarded \$1 million to make Alum Rock Park and Overfelt Gardens Park safer and more resilient through vegetation management and community engagement to decrease the risk of wildfires.

Though the grant agreement was executed, the change in federal administration has resulted in a pause being placed on this grant funding. To date, DOT issued bids for tree service contractors and interviewed candidates to staff the grant funded project though no offers were made due to the pause. PRNS was notified that their project funding had been completely canceled.

The City received word at the end of April that the federal government would be implementing reductions of AmeriCorps programs. This will have impacts in two areas. It is possible that funding will no longer be available for the San José Conservation Corps youth job training and other partners like Our City Forest whose staff is made up largely of AmeriCorps participants.

Efficient and effective tree management

A key component of public tree management is maintaining a tree inventory. All trees in parks and majority of trees maintained by DOT have been inventoried. An updated street tree inventory in the 78 identified disadvantaged census tracts was to be completed as part of the grant work. Given the uncertainty about grant fund availability, this work has been paused. An analysis and extrapolation of the data collected would also have been performed to determine the feasibility for DOT to assume responsibility of street tree care that is currently the responsibility of adjacent property owners.

Standardization of planning and development practices

Before August 2023, plan and permit application review by the Forestry team was inconsistently performed. The result was that inappropriate tree species were often chosen and insufficient infrastructure was provided to support trees to successfully thrive. The Forestry team has now been integrated into the PBCE project review and tree selection processes. An arborist is available to PBCE to assist with applications to remove living trees on private property. Additionally, development plans are being reviewed by the City Forester for compliance with City codes and Citywide Design Standards. This includes reviewing plant palettes for appropriateness for the specific site and taking into consideration needs based on anticipated climate changes. Mitigation fees are being tracked and enforced. In FY 2025-2026, the mitigation fee will be raised from \$775 to \$1,000 to cover the full cost of tree planting and establishment watering more realistically. In FY 2024-2025 there are development projects impacting trees which, if permitted and removed for implementation of the project, may lead to \$600,000 for the tree mitigation fund.

Invasive Pest Mitigation Efforts

The invasive shot hole borer, a small beetle that burrows into trees and allows a fungus called *Fusarium* to harm and sometimes kill trees, was confirmed in the City of San José in 2024 and has resulted in substantial shifts of staff effort to ensure existing trees are protected. DOT is working with the Santa Clara Agriculture Commission, the California Invasive Pest Council, the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Agency, University of California Cooperative Extension, and Cal Fire on best practices and a strategy to contain the invasive shot hole borer. In a worst-case scenario, this pest has the potential to impact an estimated 69,000 San José street trees, potentially causing property owners more than \$19.7 million in tree removal costs.

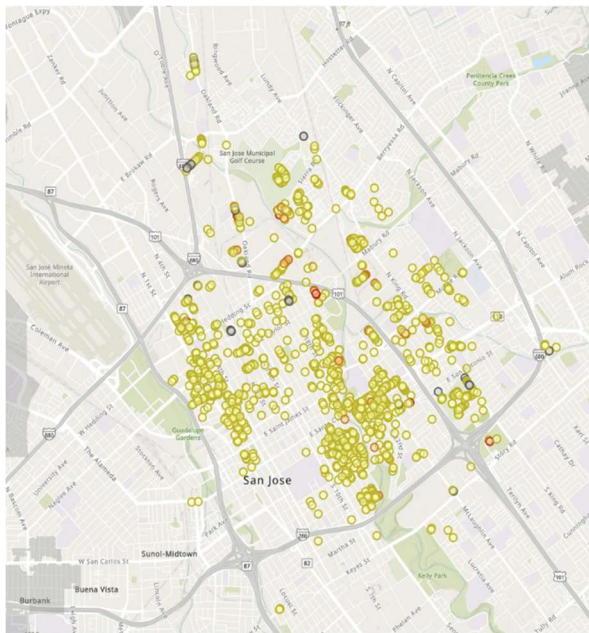


Figure 1 Map of ISHB Infestation

DOT has been canvassing street trees to determine the extent of the insect infestation. Initially, it was thought that the pest was only affecting trees in riparian corridors. Inspections have shown that is not the case. Figure 1, shows a much larger area of

infestation outside of riparian corridors. An interactive map can be found on the DOT webpage¹ along with other resource materials.

The trees in red on the map are heavily infested and will be treated with a pesticide and fungicide to slow the spread of the infestation; the other trees on the map, have lower levels of infestation. To combat the issue, \$250,000 in funding was shifted from the tree planting budget to cover mitigation costs. To notify property owners who may have street tree species that could be affected, 24,000 postcards were mailed to property owners within one mile of confirmed infested trees. Community outreach presentations are available upon request.

COORDINATION

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Manager's Budget Office, the City Attorney's Office, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services, and the Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement Department.

/s/

JOHN RISTOW

Director, Department of Transportation

For questions, please contact Jennifer Seguin, Deputy Director, Infrastructure Maintenance, Department of Transportation, at jennifer.seguin@sanjoseca.gov or (408) 794-6453.

¹ <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/departments-offices/transportation/landscaping/trees/invasive-shot-hole-borers>