



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Omar Torres

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: January 9, 2023

Approved

Date: 01/09/23

SUBJECT: Collection and Use of Tree-Related In-Lieu Fees, Enforcement of Tree Planting Conditions on Development, and the Cost of Tree Planting Audit Report

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept Staff's report with the following additional direction to City Staff:

1. Explore incentives programs for residents in form of financial support, grants and/or reimbursement for tree planting and damage to sidewalks.
2. Explore a program that will remove paved areas, adding further opportunities for tree planting in neighborhoods, prioritizing those that have the least amount of urban canopy.
3. Pursue additional funding sources to grow our urban canopy, prioritizing areas that have been identified having the least amount of canopy.
4. All educational materials should be multilingual and multicultural.
5. Report back to the Transportation & Environment Committee (T&E) by June 2023 with updates regarding staff and council recommendations.

Background

Thank you to the office of the City Auditor for the comprehensive audit. Gaps in the administration have been identified and the time is now to move forward with the recommendations to grow our urban canopy and meet the city's goal to reduce Green House Gas Emissions. As global warming and climate change continue to push us all into finding ways to mitigate and turn back the clock, the urban canopy is yet another tool in our tool belt.

In underserved communities such as Guadalupe-Washington, Mayfair, Santee our residents are burdened with post-COVID recovery, a recession, and inflation. These are the same residents that are burdened with the ill-effects of a heat island caused by a concrete jungle and lack of canopy. Throughout the City of San José, the lack of canopy is evident.

The City has an opportunity to reduce or remove barriers that keep our residents from participating. Although many desire to be part of the solution, the financial burden and liability often serve as deterrents. An incentive program through city grants or reimbursement could lessen this burden, addressing damaged sidewalks and cost of watering.

San José should follow in the footsteps of cities like Portland, Oregon who have a program called Cut Back the Pavement where they have removed pavement to make room for trees. It has allowed for thousands of trees to be planted where no trees have been. According to a 2013 study done by U.S Forest Service, UC Davis, CalFire and the University of Vermont that used lasers (LIDAR technology) to map trees from air, 58 percent of San Jose's urbanized area is covered with buildings, asphalt, or concrete.

Urban Canopy offers a plethora of benefits; good public health, energy conservation especially during heatwaves, beautifies neighborhoods, increases public safety, safer streets, and increases foot traffic for business districts. Further a canopy that shelters the walker, the jogger, the playground, and the student offers yet additional benefits of natural and organic placemaking.

Canopy loss is an environmental threat to all San Joseans, but especially to those who live in canopy deficient districts. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency "the lack of canopy creates heat islands where the temperature can be 1.8-5.4 degrees warmer than its surroundings." Canopy deficient areas are also prone to flooding. Trees can reduce the amount of stormwater runoff and pollutants that reach local waters by slowing and storing runoff, capturing, and storing rainfall, creating conditions that promote infiltration of rainwater and absorbing and converting pollutants into less harmful substances (EPA 2013). Canopy deficient districts that have been identified should be prioritized when choosing the location of where to plant trees.

The goal of preserving and growing our canopy with 2,000 trees for FY22-23 is a lofty goal that requires massive multilingual and multicultural communication with our residents. It requires a commitment by each and every one of us to address GHG and its harmful effects in our city.