

To: Transportation and Environment Committee, City of San Jose
Councilmembers Cohen (Chair), Davis, (Vice Chair), Foley, Ortiz, Candelas
CC: Kip Harkness, City Manager's Office; Colleen Winchester, City Attorney's Office; Faye Garcia, Mayor's Office; Yasmin Johnson, City Clerk's Office

Subject: Community Forest Plan and Urban Forestry Annual Report; Item CC 23-122

The CFMP work plan strategies and objectives and the audit report recommendations are good next steps for the future of a vibrant urban canopy.

A major lack in the plan and the City's underlying policies remain. Making this plan part of a unified climate action plan by the City has yet to happen.

Recognizing this linkage is an opportunity for City and community leaders.

A base line would include monitoring seasonal ambient air temperature in the various neighborhoods and correlating these with the local urban canopy. Disadvantaged communities are deeply affected by climate change, rising temperature and poor air quality. These measurements would provide important information.

The City's own climate plans have yet to recognize the deep impacts of inadequate tree canopies on disadvantaged communities. The new addition of the protection of the natural environment to the City's climate plan provides the needed groundwork for this further unification. The linkage between tree canopy and climate change mitigation should be made abundantly clear with possible actions to update City policies.

I encourage City Council to direct staff to factor in inequities of the impacts of climate change to be part of the guidance system for the next steps in this important program.

Sincerely,

Rita Norton
Retired City Employee, (Energy Office, OEM, ESD)



P.O. Box 5374
San Jose, CA 95150
www.lwvsjsc.org
June 4, 2023

To: Transportation and Environment Committee, City of San Jose:
Councilmembers Cohen (Chair), Davis, (Vice Chair), Foley, Ortiz, Candelas
cc: Kip Harkness, City Manager's Office;
Colleen Winchester, City Attorney's Office;
Faye Garcia, Mayor's Office;
Yasmin Johnson, City Clerk's Office

Subject: **Community Forest Plan and Urban Forestry Annual Report; Item CC 23-122**

The League of Women Voters of San Jose/Santa Clara commends the progress made toward goals set forth in the Community Forest Management Plan (CFMP) and toward the recommendations made by the City Auditor. Notably, the Committee Forest Advisory Committee has had its first meeting and has set priorities, six new staff members have been hired, and 2000 trees have been planted. However, **we are concerned to read that the tree canopy continues to decrease (from 13.5% in 2018 to 13.2% in 2020), bringing us substantially short of the realistic baseline canopy of 20%** that was discussed in the Community Forest Management Plan Update.

We are impressed with the CFMP work plan strategies and objectives and the audit report recommendations. While some funding has increased, we're concerned to see that the funding is still woefully short for achieving "net zero canopy loss" and to replace lost canopy. Because the CFMP is a living document, **we would like to see more specific timelines for achieving the objectives in the plan** realizing that achievable timelines may be dependent on adequate funding. **We would like to see metrics for working with and funding partnerships with community groups as a measure for reaching goals, as planting by City departments alone is insufficient to recover canopy losses.**

1. We are pleased to see a goal of completing an inventory of all public space street and park trees as well as the goal of using this data to calculate an updated cost estimate for the City to take on full maintenance responsibility and liability for all trees in the public sphere. **We are concerned that there is only partial funding for an updated tree inventory, and we would like to see more specifics in the work plan about what a "regular cycle" of inventory updates and tree canopy analyses would look like.** Since the majority of San Jose's trees are planted and maintained by external groups and private landowners, we are pleased to see the Funding 1D goal of evaluating an incentive program to help property owners with tree maintenance responsibilities.
2. As the League is committed to advancing equity in all of our work, we are very concerned about the marked inequities in the tree canopy in some San Jose neighborhoods. We are pleased to see that a short-term goal of the Advisory Committee is to work with staff on community outreach. **We support the goal to prioritize increasing the tree canopy in disadvantaged communities, and we would like to see a more specific timeline for the planned objectives.**

3. As an organization devoted to good government practices, we are pleased to see the proposed strategies for streamlining the CFMP governance structure. **Consolidating tree responsibilities in one division or creating a new division would help focus attention on increasing our city's tree canopy.**
4. We are encouraged to see that the City is developing and refining policies to prevent or mitigate the removal of trees, to collect and distribute off-site tree replacement fees, and to spend in-lieu replacement fee revenues. We look forward to more specifics about these policies in 2023-2024. **We encourage policies of compensation that better reflect the value of diameter of lost trees and fees for on-going maintenance of new saplings.**

We are pleased to see that CFMP strategies include exploring various funding sources and working more closely with organizations like Our City Forest. We encourage the City Council to work with the CFMP to achieve adequate funding so that San Jose's community forest can thrive.

The community forest is an integral part of San Jose's climate resilience strategy, and increased funding for management of our community forest will lead to a healthier San Jose for us all.

Sincerely,

Diane McNutt

Diane McNutt, President, League of Women Voters of San Jose/Santa Clara
president@lwvsjsc.org - lwvsjsc.org