



Memorandum

TO: RULES AND OPEN
GOVERNMENT
COMMITTEE

FROM: Councilmember Dev Davis

SUBJECT: URBAN GREENING
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

DATE: January 20, 2021

Approved:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dev Davis", written over a horizontal line.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Building on the Green Stormwater Infrastructure Plan, identify equity-focused urban greening projects to promote the rapid incorporation of green streets, and other nature-based strategies (extensive urban tree canopy, California native plantings, re-wilding, rain gardens, etc.) throughout the city.
2. Direct staff to work across departments to prioritize these multi-benefit climate adaptation strategies into major street rehabilitation and redesign projects as well as major development projects.
3. Direct staff to align implementation strategies with other priorities such as Better Bike Plan 2025, Vision Zero, and the urban village plans.
4. Direct staff to advocate for a greater alignment of regional, state, and federal funding to support the construction of these projects and pursue said funding sources.
5. Direct the City Manager to take a coordinated approach – including with the City Manager’s Office, Intergovernmental Relations Team, Department of Transportation, Public Works, and Environmental Services Division – to advocate for flexibility in grant requirements and timelines when used for projects with multiple objectives (e.g., repaving combined with urban greening).
6. Consistent with the current 2021-22 Annual Legislative Priorities, advocate for new and more flexible infrastructure funding at the federal level to support urban greening elements.

BACKGROUND

Urban greening is the utilization of green space, tree canopy, rain gardens, and swales to improve water quality, reduce flooding, and promote biodiversity and climate resilience. The US EPA currently predicts that the number of days subject to extreme heat events is likely to triple in coming years.ⁱ We are already experiencing the impact of additional heat in San Jose, and that is felt most acutely in parts of the city lacking adequate green space. The EPA notes that streets designed to include significant tree coverage and other vegetation can experience cooler air temperature of up to 10 degrees.ⁱⁱ

Public streets, especially major streets, and other city-owned properties should be utilized to promote climate resilience and biodiversity by incorporating urban greening and native planting strategies that help mitigate heat, manage stormwater, and improve air quality, while providing significant additional community benefits. Through Climate Smart San Jose, the city has taken significant steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve resource efficiencies to lower the city's contribution to climate change. Building on that bold leadership, we must now focus on incorporating climate adaptation measures to deal with the impacts that are already occurring and likely to persist. For example, the Park Avenue Green Streets Project (a joint project between the State Water Board and the City of San José) leveraged \$859,128 of Proposition 84 Stormwater Grant Program funds to allow replacement of asphalt along Park Avenue (between University Avenue and Sunol Street) with roughly 6,500 square feet of curbside rain gardens and 2,800 square feet of permeable pavers to filter stormwater from the roadways. This project showcases a cost-effective stormwater management retrofit that benefits the community and the watershed.

Through the City's Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) Plan, staff have identified a variety of potential GSI improvements, including large regional stormwater catchment projects (regional projects), low-impact development, and green streets. To date, the City has only made significant progress on implementing the construction of regional projects (River Oaks Pump Station, for example), which are needed for the city to meet its obligations of improving water quality in the San Francisco Bay. However, to realize the additional climate resilience, biodiversity and community benefits noted, San Jose must begin to prioritize, design, and fund the construction of green streets and other urban greening and native planting elements. By redesigning streets to include urban greening, this policy also supports multiple existing San Jose city priorities, including enhanced bicycle and pedestrian safety and comfort, carbon sequestration, expanding native wildlife habitat, improved flood protection, increased transit usage, and Al Fresco dining. Furthermore, the restrictions on travel and recreational opportunities necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened local awareness for the need for urban nature and for green, walkable neighborhoods.

ANALYSIS

By adopting the recommendations above, San Jose will develop green complete streets throughout the city to improve local ecology and climate resilience through an equity lens. Special emphasis should be given to areas likely to experience greater impacts from climate change (additional heat, compromised air quality, and flooding episodes) and communities of concern.ⁱⁱⁱ

The City is currently undertaking a review of potential stormwater projects due to the Baykeeper settlement and has some local funding available through remaining Measure T funds. The City is also undertaking a massive repaving initiative, with the support of Measure T, Measure B (VTA), and Senate Bill 1 (State) funds. Strategically incorporating green infrastructure alongside repaving

requires significant advance planning and additional funding sources, but ultimately should prove more cost-effective, bring greater co-benefits, and further leverage Measure T and other funds. New development projects also frequently bring opportunities to incorporate urban greening, particularly when utilities and other elements along surrounding streets are already being reconstructed.

In addition to including green streets as a priority for remaining Measure B funds and with new development, city staff should identify opportunities to secure outside funding to offset local costs. Today, additional funding sources for urban greening can be challenging to align with street paving and complete street project funding, based on diverse project delivery requirements (i.e., timing constraints) and criteria (i.e., cost-benefit thresholds that can discourage the inclusion of urban greening elements). The City should advocate at the regional level, in Sacramento, and in Washington, D.C., for greater coordination among these programs and funding sources.

In tandem, San Jose needs to position itself to be competitive for these funds. Funding for the EPA's San Francisco Bay Water Quality Improvement Project was recently increased 50%, and additional funding for climate resilient infrastructure may become available under the incoming federal administration or through the State of California.

Potential funding sources for these types of infrastructure projects include:

One Bay Area Grant Program (VTA/MTC)

Active Transportation Program (CTC)

Prop 1 Stormwater Grant Program (State Water Resources Control Board)

Urban Greening Grants (Cal Natural Resources Agency)

San Francisco Bay Water Quality Improvement Grants (US EPA)

Clean Water State Revolving Fund (State Water Resources Control Board)

TIGER/BUILD Grants (US DOT)

Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program (Valley Water)

CONCLUSION

Implementing equity-focused, city-wide urban greening improvements will promote climate resilience and sustain biodiversity in San Jose. By incorporating strategies that help mitigate heat, manage stormwater, and improve air quality, the city will provide significant additional ecological and community benefits for all.

ⁱ <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-10/documents/extreme-heat-guidebook.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.epa.gov/heatislands/using-trees-and-vegetation-reduce-heat-islands>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://mtc.ca.gov/tools-resources/mtc-abag-library/glossary-transportation-planning-acronyms-and-terms#Communities%20of%20Concern>