

DATE ISSUED: February 20, 2002

REPORT NO. 02-040

ATTENTION: Committee on Rules, Finance and Intergovernmental Relations
Agenda of February 27, 2002

SUBJECT: San Diego's Urban Forest

REFERENCES: Manager's Report No. 02-022

THIS IS AN INFORMATION ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF
THE COMMITTEE OR THE CITY COUNCIL

BACKGROUND

On October 5, 2001, a Ten-Step Action Plan developed by the City's Tree Advisory Board to enhance the City's urban forest was submitted to the Committee on Rules, Finance and Intergovernmental Relations following a report on a related energy issue. Additionally, Ms. Holly Duncan, a resident of the Clairemont Mesa Community Planning Area, discussed the benefits of trees in the urban environment and submitted a letter with recommendations to improve the City's management of its urban forest. The Committee directed staff to review the recommendations and provide information on the City's urban forest management program.

An interdepartmental committee with representatives from Development Services, Park and Recreation, Transportation and Environmental Services departments met and developed City Manager Report No. 02-022 providing information on the City's existing urban forestry efforts and responding to recommendations in the Ten-Step Action Plan. Ms. Duncan's letter and recommendations were referred to the Tree Advisory Board for evaluation and recommendations.

As part of Mayor Murphy's January 8, 2002 State of the City Address regarding Goal #9, Pursue Energy Independence, the issue of the City's urban forest was addressed and a new program was proposed as follows: "Finally, I will be asking the City Council to adopt a more aggressive urban forestry program. More trees not only reduce temperatures thereby cutting summer energy use, but also improve air quality, mitigate urban runoff, and add beauty to our neighborhoods. I call on the City Manager and the City's Tree Advisory Board to develop an urban forestry program that will plant 5,000 new trees per year in our city. My vision is to have planted 100,000 new trees by the year 2020."

This report complements the report developed for the Committee's January 23, 2002 meeting and addresses the Mayor's tree planting proposal contained in the 2002 State of the City Address. However, while this report does not propose an urban forestry program, it contains a preliminary discussion of many of the issues and projects that will be considered in the development of a plan for an aggressive urban forestry program.

DISCUSSION

As detailed in CMR No. 02-022, three City departments, Development Services, Park and Recreation and Transportation, are responsible for citywide tree planting and maintenance programs. The individual department's responsibilities are fully integrated with its primary mission and do not result in an overlap or duplication of efforts. Development Services Department administers the City's landscape ordinance as it is applied to new development, Park and Recreation Department is responsible for planting, inventorying and maintaining trees in the City's 337 parks and Street Division of the Transportation Department is responsible for planting and maintaining trees in the City's rights-of-way. The departments are assisted by the Tree Advisory Board in the areas of policy development and program development and implementation.

In general, the City is gradually increasing its inventory of trees, primarily through trees required to be planted in new commercial and residential developments by the City's landscape regulations (Municipal Code Sections 101.0700 through 101.0714). Development Services Department estimates that new developments subject to the landscaping ordinance conservatively resulted in the planting of approximately 400,000 trees last year. Transportation Department and Park and Recreation Department also reported planting more trees than were removed from street parkways and City parks (despite the onset of the red gum lerp psyllid infestation that has recently killed a number of park trees) over the past few years.

While the City's landscape ordinance results in the planting of a significant number of trees in the newer developing areas; many older portions of the City, developed prior to its enactment, have a deficiency in street trees and large unforested areas that are prone to heat island effects. The planting of additional trees in these established neighborhoods would be an important step in reducing heat islands and enhancing neighborhood aesthetics. The Mayor's proposal to provide an additional 5,000 new trees each year should be focused in these areas to provide the greatest benefit to the City as a whole. High priority areas for planting additional trees should include residential neighborhoods with treeless streets, commercial and industrial parks without street or parking lot trees, City parks with fewer trees than the current standard of 22 trees per acre and older City facilities with fewer trees than are provided under the current canopy standard. Among the barriers to adding additional trees in existing developed areas are access to water or the cost of water truck services, and other limiting factors such as the potential for root intrusion into sewer lines, etc. Recommendations from City departments, community groups, and the Tree Advisory Board would all be important input for prioritizing tree planting projects.

For such a program to be successful on a sustained basis, funds must be identified to purchase and plant as well as maintain the new trees. Street Division estimates the cost of purchasing and planting a shade tree to be between \$120 to \$180 per tree. Maintenance costs are estimated to be \$8 per year, based on a 5-year trimming frequency at an average cost of \$40 per tree. However some of these costs could be reduced through private sector involvement, volunteer efforts, and grant funds. Based on these estimates, a program to plant 100,000 new trees, at the rate of 5,000 trees per year through 2020, could cost \$19,600,000 if fully funded.

In developing an aggressive urban forestry program proposal for Council consideration, staff and the Tree Advisory Board will investigate strategies and opportunities to achieve urban forestry goals at a lesser direct cost to the City than is shown above. Proposals to reduce direct City costs

could include seeking grant funding from a variety of sources, voluntary tree planting or changes to the Municipal Code to add tree planting requirements for single family residential construction permits over a certain value or for modifications to existing commercial and industrial developments, such as major tenant improvements or remodels, which are currently exempt from the landscaping requirements imposed on new subdivisions and developments.

As part of the development of a urban forestry program, current Council policies, 200-05, Planting of Trees on City Streets, adopted in 1993, and 200-09, Street Tree Plan - Central Business District, adopted in 1966, should be reviewed and up-dated to be consistent with the new urban forestry program. The Tree Advisory Board has already proposed changes to Council Policy 200-05 and a new Tree Protection Ordinance to provide enhanced protection for landmark and historic trees and parkway resources trees. The Tree Advisory Board's recommended changes to Council Policy 200-05 and proposed Tree Protection Ordinance are currently being reviewed by staff before being brought forward for Council consideration.

Historically, San Diego residents have responded positively to calls for voluntary efforts, such as recycling and energy and water conservation, to improve San Diego's environment and quality of life. Staff believes that providing information on the benefits of trees to permit applicants, not required to plant trees as part of the current permit process, could encourage additional voluntary tree planting in existing residential and industrial and commercial sites. In addition to promoting such voluntary efforts, staff will also bring forward proposals, some of which would make certain tree planting efforts mandatory, as part of an urban forestry program proposal to achieve Mayor Murphy's vision of planting 100,000 additional trees by 2020.

Respectfully Submitted,

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