

Council File: 19-0600 Communication from Public - NCSA (please post before 5-2-2019 Budget and Finance Committee meeting)

1 message

Joanne D'Antonio <trees@ncsa.la> Wed, May 1, 2019 at 11:37 PM

To: michael.espinosa@lacity.org

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Action Needed Now to Protect Los Angeles

Dear Mayor Garcetti and Los Angeles City Council Members,

We urge you to provide strong leadership now and take accelerated steps to significantly strengthen Los Angeles's Urban Forest and protect us from the effects of climate change.

The Urban Forest plays a vital role in improving the quality of life for 4+ million Angelenos: it is a critical resource in achieving local resiliency and public health in a climate changed world. However, Los Angeles's Urban Forest has limited formal protections and cannot take care of itself; it needs management, care and continued investment.

Over the past decade, this precious resource has been grossly debilitated due to funding cuts, lack of proper staffing, poor pruning, diminished irrigation, heat and climate extremes – all of which have weakened many of our trees in the face of pests, disease and drought.

These impacts, combined with outdated limited data, have hampered proper urban forest management. Which is why it must be a priority to close this gap by documenting the structure and condition of our

trees. A team of third party certified arborists and biologists, not associated with any of the city's departments, should be contracted for a fair and unbiased evaluation and timely completion of an inventory. We don't know how many trees are being removed every month, how many trees we have, what condition they are in, nor where we can plant more trees (and how we can irrigate and maintain them so they get established).

Since the State of the Street Trees report in 2015 and in the past couple of years, a full professional inventory has been suggested, requested and postponed until further study was completed. That study, the Dudek Report: Developing an Urban Forest Management Plan for the City of Los Angeles has now been available for 5 months. Its priority recommendation is a comprehensive professional tree inventory, although this doesn't appear to be included in the proposed budget.

Given the importance of improving the quality of life for city residents, critical societal issues, including climate change and heat reduction, Los Angeles's Urban Forest must be more broadly incorporated into decision making, including city resiliency and climate action plans. But how can we do that when we don't know what we have and don't have a plan to maintain it?

The time to invest in the urban forest is now as we are already many years behind. Key steps include implementing this inventory and updating regulations as follows:

1. Require a complete ground-based Tree Inventory for all public trees citywide by a third party certified arborist/biologist team not associated with the LA City Urban Forestry Division or LA Recreation and Parks for a fair and unbiased condition evaluation and timely completion. Even if UFD receives a Cal Fire grant, the City will have to provide matching funds in order to complete this in one year.

2. Perform a funding study in order to complete the same type of inventory for all private trees, as well as the analysis of existing canopy studies by neighborhood council and CD.
3. Fund the development of an urban forestry management system. The detailed tree inventory should be entered into a public database that informs a care and management plan, which can be viewed by CD and by Neighborhood Council, maximizing areas that are underserved.
4. Prior to the issuance of a Building or Land Use Permit for all development projects, require a tree site inventory performed by an independent qualified arborist, to be delivered to and cleared by UFD. These reports must be made available to council offices and Neighborhood Councils who request them (currently they are not).
5. Implement expert oversight and approval of private property projects designs so that existing trees are being protected before projects begin.
6. Expand the protected tree ordinance to include ALL species with 6" or more diameter at breast height (DBH).
7. Factor in carbon sequestration and other ecosystem benefits for valuation of trees (including replacement/mitigation trees). Factor in loss of ecosystem benefits when evaluating tree removals.
8. Include acknowledgement of specific climate mitigation goals in any new tree related ordinance, management plan and development projects.

We share your vision to make Los Angeles an equitable, healthy, and beautiful green City. We cannot achieve any of those goals while we continue to neglect, remove, pave over, and destroy the green infrastructure we so desperately need to live well in a changing climate.

Over the past 3 years, many of us have spent countless hours attending CFAC meetings, participating on the UFMP Working Group, meeting with all of you and City staff, as well as with many residents and neighborhood councils – all of it UNPAID time. We apologize that we cannot attend the budget hearings

and speak for 1 minute. We respectfully request that you give this letter the weight of the many voices that speak for our trees.

Neighborhood Council Sustainability Alliance Trees Committee

Joanne D'Antonio, Chair

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