



SF Environment

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A Department of the City and County of San Francisco

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SAN FRANCISCO URBAN FORESTRY COUNCIL

Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023

Introduction

This document presents an overview of recent history and the current context in which the Urban Forestry Council is pursuing its mission of guiding the stewardship of San Francisco's trees for the benefit of all San Franciscans.

The strategic plan articulates six strategic priorities of the Council for the next three years. These priorities are understood to require additional work to develop the specific strategies and tactics creative engagement by all members of the Council and staff.

The plan is the culmination of a six-month series of meetings led by the Planning and Funding Committee, and two meetings of the full Urban Forestry Council and work by staff and individual Council members. Detailed action plans will be developed and periodically updated by committees of the Council. Strategic planning consultant Mike Allison of Michael Allison Consulting facilitated the process.

Recent History and Accomplishments

The Urban Forestry Council was created in 2003, replacing an earlier community group called the San Francisco Tree Advisory Committee. Chapter 12 of the Environment Code created the Urban Forestry Council, with the goal of improving forestry management and oversight, to enhance the size and health of San Francisco's urban forest. Though the Council is an advisory body, the Urban Forestry Council is charged with a broad mission: to guide the stewardship of San Francisco's trees by promoting a healthy and sustainable urban forest that benefits all San Franciscans while ensuring public health and safety. This mission covers all trees, and understory, within San Francisco.

One of its early accomplishments was developing and winning passage of the Landmark Tree Ordinance to amend the Department of Public Works Code in 2006. The ordinance was championed by the UFC as a way to protect trees on private property. The UFC is the first level review for Landmark Tree Applications, charged with making recommendations to the Board of

Superiors on whether the tree should be given Landmark Status, which provides the highest level of protection to trees in San Francisco.

In 2008, the Council gained greater influence as its membership was amended by ordinance identifying multiple key City Departments and other entities that would be represented with the goal of increasing the UFC's effectiveness.

Since the Council passed its last strategic plan in 2013, it has worked diligently to gain greater influence and relevance in serving as a force for change and preservation.

Ongoing projects and responsibilities that the Council currently manages include:

- Reviewing Landmark tree nominations
- Reviewing and updating the List of Recommended Street Trees
- Producing the Annual State of the Urban Forest Report, and
- Reviewing transit and other public development projects and providing recommendations

In 2015 The San Francisco Urban Forest Plan was adopted with significant input and involvement from the Council. The plan was structured with three phases:

Phase 1. Street Trees

Phase 2. Parks and Open Spaces

Phase 3. Greening Buildings and Private Property

In 2015, The Urban Forestry Council held three contentious public hearings and ultimately was able to support the passage of The Significant Natural Areas Management Plan (dealing with hot spots like Mount Sutro and Mount Davidson). In navigating intense public disagreement and debate the Council provided significant added value.

In 2016 one of the most dramatic accomplishment in decades, the San Francisco Trees and Sidewalks Amendment Proposition E, known as "StreetTreesSF" was placed on the ballot by a unanimous vote of the Board of Supervisors and passed by the electorate with an incredible 79% approval. For the first time in decades the public supported the creation of a permanent funding source, to the tune of \$19 million annually, for tree care and maintenance, and the repair of sidewalks created by street trees, by amending the City Charter to transfer the care of the City's 125,000 trees to Public Works. The Council and its individual members were leaders in the creation of this proposition, building support with Supervisors and in ensuring a successful campaign.

In 2017, the Council was able to do something it had struggled to do in the past bringing all the players on the Council into agreement to coordinate grant applications and not get in each

other's way. In this way the Council is able to make the most of its resources and influence with various City agencies as well as elected officials.

Note: additional comments on achievement of the goals of the Council's 2013 strategic plan are included at the end of this document.

Where we stand

More than creating a funding source, and transferring responsibility for street trees, the passage of Proposition E demonstrated an extraordinarily high level of support for trees in general across the city.

There is much broader awareness at the public policy level and among the public at large regarding the importance and true value of trees, including now in the context of climate change.

With this success the Council has more credibility and political clout. The Council has been able to attract additional funding for its operations and will want to seek further support.

However, we have also learned that there is significant distrust of the City and this distrust is showing up in resistance to having new trees planted. Navigating the changing dynamics will be critical for the Council over the coming years.

Strategic Priorities

Now the Urban Forestry Council must find ways to nurture this public support and leverage the support to enact further changes to plant more trees, and to protect and grow the whole urban forest.

The Urban Forestry Council identified the following six priorities for the coming three years. The actions identified are first steps to assess the topic and support strategy formation.

1. Develop Policy Recommendations related to management of the urban forest with respect to Biodiversity, Tree Species Palette and Availability and Climate Change

1. Acquire data on trees being planted from all stakeholders, Rec and Park, etc. including data on the carbon intensity of trees being planted
2. Consider how to create mechanisms to obtain good tree stock of rare and under-planted trees.

3. Make formal request to all stakeholders for reports on what they are planting and why- incorporate this request into the Annual Report process
4. Update our recommended tree planting list for street trees and parks/open space based on information from prior steps– this will be the heart of the policy recommendation and will be coordinated by the street tree list process.

2. Expand Focus of the Council to Consider all Trees in San Francisco

1. Obtain data on tree canopy, through LIDAR, and how canopy is changing over time
2. Prioritize the Urban Forest Master Plan Phase 2, Parks and Open Space
3. Prepare for Phase 3
 - a. Learn from what other cities are doing with backyard trees – currently in process
 - b. Work with Planning Department on developing policy for backyard trees

3. Steps to Strengthen the Urban Forestry Council

1. Develop membership of UFC
 - a. Expand our recruitment of new members by growing a crop of people who would be good candidates; getting people to come to committee meetings;
 - b. Articulate criteria for what we need from agencies who are sending representatives (including demographics)
 - c. Committee structure that allows for non-Council members to participate
 - d. Increase existing membership participation by reviewing meeting times
2. Plan ahead to manage leadership transition in position of the Chair
3. Seek additional funding and in-kind resources
 - a. Additional staff support
 - b. Ask existing contributors for more money
 - c. Explore grant opportunities

4. Develop Communications Plan

1. Create a packet about UFC that tells the story and outlines our role and activities
2. Look for pro bono assistance in giving us a communications and outreach strategy
3. Engage other groups to carry our news
 - a. Take advantage of existing department newsletters to put in feature articles
 - b. Reach out to neighborhood groups to carry features about our work in their neighborhood newsletters and meetings
 - c. Figure out who can write these articles
4. Reach out to Board of Supervisors; involve more of the Council members in relationship building and communicating our priorities

5. Articulate Canopy Goals to Inform Policy

Our overall goal is maximizing tree canopy

Next three years Focus on replanting; tree-stocking goals

(Goals either: *quantity*, e.g. 2 for 1 replacement for trees removed; or identify *percentage* of space in a given area) by use type

1. Street trees
2. Park Trees
 - a. Recreation areas (e.g. can't plant on soccer field, but perhaps around the fields)
 - b. Natural areas – seek to protect, replace and where possible add trees
3. School trees
4. Other Public Lands trees
 - a. Can't plant on reservoirs, but maybe other opportunities exist
5. Private property trees

Based on development of reasonable targets by land use type; develop target stocking goals; based on this analysis recommend policies to the city as a whole

6. Attract Additional Funding for Tree Planting and Protection

1. Convene a mini-summit
 - a. Invite people from cities that have been successful in funding their urban forestry programs
 - b. Key stakeholders in SF to identify practices and funding sources for trees
 - c. Based on the summit, come back to the full Council to develop action plan
2. Explore financial incentives to plant and establish trees both for developers and for private land owners
 - a. Look at what other cities are doing in that realm
 - b. Look at what Planning Department might consider in to offer incentives to go beyond requirements to get credits for things like transportation requirements, or permeable requirements
 - c. Based on that research recommend policies to be adopted by the Planning Department, or to the Board of Supervisors (e.g. for a tax break as an incentive)
3. Review existing regulations for restitution payments on the removal of trees to expand or revise current policies

TWO-YEAR PLAN 2013 – 2015 – Progress Report

Overarching Themes

1. We are dedicated to building widespread commitment to the concept of the urban forest as a critical part of San Francisco’s capital infrastructure.

The value of the San Francisco urban forest is estimated at \$1.78 Billion – it is unique as a capital asset in that it appreciates in value over time. Nonetheless the awareness of the importance of the forest remains low and limits political support for increasing and maintaining the forest.

2. The urban forest is not just trees – it includes a wide array of greening.

The benefits that accrue from greenery include rainwater absorption, air quality improvement, aesthetic contribution and more. These benefits result from all types of living plant life, not just trees.

3. As a Council – we are committed to becoming relevant.

The Council is potentially an important catalyst for change, with a membership including representatives from key City Department representatives, nonprofit leaders, private sector leaders and at-large community members. In order to achieve greater impact, we will reposition the Urban Forest Council as a center of expertise and influential advisory body to both government and private entities with respect to major policies and development projects that affect the urban forest.

Specific Goals

1. Increase funding for the forest

Without increased funding it will not be possible to even maintain the current forest. As the Planning Department has documented, San Francisco’s “canopy” is less than half that of most major cities. Thus, the Council is committed to finding ways over the next two years to contribute to raising more funds.

a. Initiate a “Funding Clearing House” for City Departments

This is a role that used to be played by a City Hall staff person. When this staff position was eliminated, a void was created in supporting SF Departments to jointly identify, prioritize and take action on responding to funding opportunities. Providing a forum for information sharing, and development of common priorities

is seen as highly valuable by several City Departments. The mechanics of playing this role and setting targets for additional funding to be raised will be the first priority of the Funding Committee.

It took a while to develop, but the Urban Forestry Council has now adopted an approach to sharing funding opportunities, and working collaboratively to respond.

- b. Play a leadership role in supporting other efforts to generate funding.
The Council anticipates other efforts to generate funding for growing and maintaining the urban forest. For example the feasibility of a campaign to pass a parcel tax for this purpose is underway currently. Just how the Council can best contribute will be determined based on the circumstances of each effort.

It is hard to imagine addressing this goal more completely. The idea of a “parcel tax” was floated in 2013 and seemed at the time to be a very big stretch!

2. Drive the creation of sound policy regarding the Urban Forest

Currently the Council’s role in various public and private developments is ad hoc at best. While the Council may not play an analogous role to the City Planning Commission soon, the Council will proactively seek to review and comment on all major developments and begin to build the expectation that any major project requires Council input.

- a. Develop a “roundtable” process for policy review on critical issues
Many issues and controversies surface during the course of a year regarding the forest. For example there is a major debate over plans by UCSF and the Mount Sutro Forest. However, there is no forum where these issues can be debated in a constructive manner. The Council will experiment with creating an ongoing “roundtable” function where important issues can be debated and policy implications developed.

One example of success in this domain is the role the Urban Forestry Council played helping to achieve resolution on difficult issues through holding contentious public hearings on the Significant Natural Areas Management Plan.

- b. Assist in completion and passage of new Urban Forest Master Plan:
Both individual Council members and the Council as a whole have been supportive of the Planning Department in the drafting process of the Master Plan. This is clearly a high visibility and high impact policy document and is naturally a very high priority for the Council in the coming year.

Done! Now we are on to ensuring that Phase 2 and Phase 3 get their due.

c. Play an active role in reviewing all major projects

The Policy Committee will work on the definition of what constitutes “major projects” and determining the level of review that can be consistently delivered.

This is an area where there has been successful engagement with development project, and other times where the Council has been left out, or addressed too late in the process to have a meaningful impact. Still on our priority list!

Urban Forest Council Management Goals

In order to pursue the overarching themes and two broad goals, the Council saw the need to restructure its committees. Currently there are two committees – Planning and Funding, and the Landmark Tree Committee. The Landmark Tree will continue as an ad hoc committee and two new committees will be formed: Funding Committee and Policy Committee. Membership and Chairs for each committee has been determined.

Council leadership in partnership with SFE staff will focus on three priorities in support of growing the relevance and influence of the Council:

1. Strengthen relationships with key decision makers
Progress was achieved with increased intentionality in “recruiting” Council members from each of the key stakeholder groups, and with direct outreach to elected officials.
2. Develop stable funding for UFC
Increased funding was achieved, but to do some of the things we envision going forward, it would be helpful to increase the annual budget.
3. Invest in Council knowledge – ongoing
Partly through who has been brought on to the Council and partly through asking outside experts to meet with the Council we have invested in the shared knowledge base of the Council.

In addition, it is understood that the Council will continue to:

4. Produce the annual report, and
5. Produce the annual tree list.