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COPY: Infrastructure Planning and Sustainability Committee; Rebecca Boydston
PRESENTER: Michael Carey, Environmental Services
SUBJECT: Urban Forest Program Actions for Improvement
DATE: July 16, 2018

M.P.S. →

PRESENTATION TYPE:
Informational Briefing

SUMMARY:

Per the request of the Infrastructure Planning and Sustainability (IPS) Committee, staff will continue the state of Tacoma's urban forest discussion started at the IPS meeting on April 25, 2018. During this second informational briefing, Staff will present recommendations for improving long-term sustainability of the City's urban forest asset. Staff requests that the Committee provide direction on which actions (if any) to explore in further detail at a future IPS meeting.

BACKGROUND:

Across the Puget Sound, the urban tree canopy is declining at a rapid rate (American Forests, 1998). When compared to other Puget Sound communities, the City of Tacoma has the lowest assessed tree canopy in the region. In recognition of Tacoma's tree decline, the City Council has adopted several policies to increase healthy tree canopy across Tacoma.

In 2010, Council adopted the Urban Forest Policy (UFP) Element of the Comprehensive Plan, which identified a 30 percent tree canopy cover goal by the year 2030, (30 by 30). This UFP defines core focus areas including changes to regulations and standards to address tree retention, as well as leading by example through responsible planting, care and maintenance of trees on City-owned property.

In 2015, Tacoma's ten-year, City-wide Strategic Plan and Vision (*Tacoma 2025*) was adopted. Several key community priorities were identified, including improving community health and the vitality of our Neighborhood Business Districts, and sustaining and improving Tacoma's Natural Environment. Studies show a direct correlation between improved human health and more vibrant and profitable business districts in areas with higher quality tree canopy.

In 2016, the City's Environmental Action Plan (EAP) was adopted by Council with a focus on increasing healthy urban forest canopy. Specific EAP actions include improving regulations to encourage tree preservation and protection on private property and in the City right-of-way.

ISSUE:

In urban communities the pressure of development and an increase in ecological stresses like the urban heat island, storms, drought and pests require proactive management in order to avoid significant loss of trees. Proactive management actions contributing to a more sustainable urban forest can generally be broken into the following three categories:

- Effective urban forest management (planning, regulation, protection and enforcement);



- Proactive tree care (asset management); and
- Stewardship and engagement (partnerships, education and community engagement).

The City of Tacoma has adopted policies to increase healthy tree canopy cover, however, many of the proactive management strategies necessary to preserve and manage healthy trees, consistent with other communities, have not yet been explored or implemented.

Staff will present to the Committee recommended actions targeted at translating adopted policy into tangible measures to keep the public safe and neighborhoods thriving, while realizing the benefits of a healthy urban forest.

ALTERNATIVES:

This is an information briefing. Staff will present to the Committee recommended feasible near-term, moderate-term and long-term actions towards a more sustainable urban forest, and ask for direction from the Committee on which near-term actions to further explore in a future Committee meeting.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This is an information briefing. Fiscal impacts will not be explored at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an information briefing. Staff will ask the Committee for recommendations on which alternatives to explore at a future IPS meeting.