



**TO:** Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager  
**FROM:** Geoffrey M. Smyth, P.E., Interim Director, Environmental Services Department  
**COPY:** Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee; Anna Le  
**PRESENTER:** Michael Carey, Urban Forest Program Manager; Lisa Kenny, Community Tree Program Coordinator; Ryan Hebert, Urban Forestry Analyst; Environmental Services Department  
**SUBJECT:** Tacoma Urban Forestry Program Update  
**DATE:** February 12, 2025

Initial  
GMS

**PRESENTATION TYPE:**

Informational Briefing

**SUMMARY:**

Per the request of City Council, staff from the Urban Forestry Program will present on Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) implementation progress from 2020 through 2024. The intent of this briefing is to set a baseline of understanding for the Infrastructure Planning and Sustainability (IPS) Committee on the current programs and services the City offers for urban forest management. During this briefing, staff will also identify opportunities to improve urban forest outcomes and advance the goals identified in the UFMP.

Topics that will be covered during this briefing include:

- Tree planting programs and metrics
- Tree maintenance programs and metrics
- Urban Forestry funding and staffing
- Regulation overview
- Community engagement and partnerships
- Upcoming projects

Throughout the briefing, staff will highlight the mechanisms related to the level of service within these presented topics. The intent is to focus the IPS Committee's recommendations for the next discussion on how much to increase or decrease these "dials" for any given topic. These mechanisms include:

- Incentives (financial and/or technical support to others)
- City responsibility (City staff taking the lead)
- Regulations (setting expectations or requirements)
- Partnerships (strategic relationships to leverage resources)

The IPS Committee is scheduled to reconvene with staff on February 26, 2025, during which time IPS will lead a discussion with staff related to these topics. It is anticipated that the outcome of this February 26 meeting will be directing staff to develop proposals for project, program, code, or policy development.

Attachments: Attached to this memorandum is the tentative urban forestry work plan for the 2025-2026 biennium, including current Council priorities. Staff will not be presenting this work plan at this IPS briefing, however, it is provided here for background to the Committee.



## **BACKGROUND:**

The City Council has adopted numerous policies in support of increasing healthy tree canopy, including improving tree protections, increasing tree planting, updating zoning and development standards, fixing operational workflows, and increasing urban forestry level of service. Relevant adopted policies include: **(2010) Comprehensive Plan Urban Forest Policy Element** (ORD27892), **(2016) Environmental Action Plan** (RES39427), **(2019) Urban Forest Management Plan** (RES40492), **(2019) Climate Emergency Resolution** (RES40509), **(2021) Climate Action Plan** (RES40878), and **(2024) Home in Tacoma Zoning and Standards Amendments** (ORD28986).

### *City of Tacoma Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP)*

Adopted by Council in December 2019 (RES40492), the UFMP consolidates and clarifies City goals and policies, prioritizes strategies and actions for improving urban forest management, and establishes targets to assess progress annually. This UFMP serves as a road map outlining meaningful, high-priority actions the City will take between 2020 and 2030 to strive towards a goal of a healthy, thriving, 30 percent overall tree canopy coverage.

### *Home in Tacoma Zoning and Standards Package*

Adopted by City Council in November 2024, the Home in Tacoma Zoning and Standards Package provides for a significant increase in more diverse, affordable, and sustainable housing options throughout the city. As part of this update to the City's zoning and development code, the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review determined that "development and redevelopment projects would have the potential for localized impacts on plant and animal communities" and found that "these impacts would be most severe in areas where infill projects remove existing mature trees [due to] the absence of regulatory protections." Further, the Home in Tacoma Health Impact Assessment (HIA), developed by the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, determined that "Enhanced urban tree canopy protections can help lessen or mitigate the negative public health impacts that may arise from the removal of trees as more housing is built."

In response to these SEPA and HIA determinations, Council adopted additional requirements for trees as well as an amendment to the Home in Tacoma Zoning and Standards Package, to:

*"Remove all proposed Tree Preservation regulations which are intended to apply to property outside the land use permitting process and refer those proposed regulations to the Council's Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability Committee to immediately initiate a separate, broader policy discussion about expanding the City's Urban Forestry Program and further implementation of the Urban Forestry Management Plan, including examination of:*

- Tree preservation standards citywide (beyond just the UR zones);*
- Appropriate City resources for tree planting and maintenance; and,*
- Regulatory and non-regulatory tools for tree preservation."*

## **ISSUE:**

In urban communities, the pressure of development and an increase in ecological stresses such as urban heat island, storms, drought, and pests require proactive management to avoid significant loss of trees. These stresses pose a significant challenge to the City, and disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Further, as stated in the Home in Tacoma Health Impact Assessment, the Tacoma Pierce



County Health Department considers that “trees serve as essential components of public health infrastructure, offering multiple health benefits including reduced respiratory and cardiovascular disease, reduced urban heat and heat-related illnesses, and improved mental health.” Healthy and vibrant urban tree canopy increases the City’s ecological resiliency, while also lowering the impacts of greenhouse gases, urban heat, air pollution, and other environmental stressors on the community, especially in vulnerable populations.

Further, the City of Tacoma is considered a Phase 1 Municipal Stormwater Permittee, as designated by the WA Department of Ecology (ECY), in compliance with the Clean Water Act National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). The Phase I Municipal Stormwater Permit requires local governments to manage and control stormwater runoff to reduce pollution to downstream waters. On a regular cycle, ECY updates this permit and municipalities governed by the permit are required to comply with the new regulations.

On July 1st, 2024, ECY issued a new permit, effective Aug. 1, 2024. This permit issuance includes new requirements for municipalities to include tree canopy in both planning and regulations related to stormwater management, furthering the relationship of trees as essential stormwater infrastructure.

Since the adoption of the Urban Forest Management Plan, the City has implemented numerous programs in support of increasing healthy tree canopy, including a Community Tree Program, Hazardous Tree Assistance Program, Green Infrastructure Workforce Development Program, and adopting the new TMC 9.20 Urban Forestry which enhances protections on Public Trees including those in the right-of-way. Many proactive management strategies necessary to preserve and manage healthy trees, as identified in the UFMP, however, have not yet been explored or implemented in Tacoma.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

This is an information briefing only. There are no alternatives presented at this time, however, it is the intent that IPS will provide recommendations to staff at a future IPS meeting to explore alternatives.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

This is an information briefing only. There is no fiscal impact at this time, however, IPS may recommend improvements to the urban forest program, which may include future fiscal impacts.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The staff recommendation is for IPS to consider potential opportunities to increase urban forestry levels of service and bring those suggestions forward at the February 26 IPS meeting. Following the February 26 discussion, IPS may consider providing direction to staff to develop proposals for implementation.