RESOLUTION NO. 41682

BY REQUEST OF COUNCIL MEMBERS DIAZ, HINES, SADALGE, AND WALKER

A RESOLUTION relating to urban forestry; directing the City Manager and Planning Commission to advance a phased set of actions to expand the City's Urban Forestry Program and advance implementation of the Urban Forestry Management Plan.

WHEREAS the City has historically lacked robust regulations regarding tree planting and preservation, resulting in low citywide tree canopy cover, and

WHEREAS we recognize today that a thriving urban forest is a fundamental component of healthy, resilient, and livable communities, and

WHEREAS tree cover and urban landscaping play a major role in supporting urban wildlife, reducing stormwater runoff, filtering pollution, reducing the urban heat island effect, and also contribute to the aesthetic environment, providing an attractive urban setting to enhance livability and foster economic development, and

WHEREAS there are public gains and financial benefits related to increasing tree canopy and tree preservation, including amplifying the impact of City infrastructure investments, providing economic benefits to our residents by lowering air conditioning and heating costs, buffering excessive noise and wind, and reducing flood damage, and serving as a form of public health infrastructure that can help reduce feelings of stress and depression, protect against skin cancer, and foster a sense of community, and

WHEREAS as of 2017, an analysis of Light Detection and Ranging ("LiDAR") data showed the City's tree canopy is not distributed evenly across the City, with some census blocks in low priority areas experiencing as low as three percent tree

canopy cover, while having as great as 64 percent tree canopy cover in high opportunity areas, and

WHEREAS as a result, low opportunity areas experience greater urban heat island effects, as well as limited access to other social, environmental, and economic benefits provided by greater tree canopy, and

WHEREAS in the past several years, the City Council has begun enacting new regulations to better protect and enhance our urban forest, including revising landscaping and tree standards to support better environmental and community health outcomes during development, updating regulations for tree removal, pruning and planting in the right-of-way, and creating a heritage tree program, and

WHEREAS in November 2024, the City Council also adopted an amendment to the Home in Tacoma ("HIT") Zoning and Standards Package, per Amended Substitute Ordinance No. 28986, directing the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability ("IPS") Committee to initiate a broader policy discussion regarding the City's urban forest, and

WHEREAS on February 12, 2025, the IPS Committee received an informational briefing about the Urban Forest Management Plan ("Plan") and the current programs and services the City offers for urban forest management, which provided a baseline review of tree planting and maintenance programs, urban forestry staffing and funding, and other relevant information to help guide opportunities to adjust City regulations, financial incentives, and City responsibilities to help improve the tree canopy, and

WHEREAS on February 26, 2025, IPS Committee Chair Kristina Walker led a discussion on a set of new policy proposals for expanding the City's Urban Forestry Program ("Program") and advancing implementation of the Plan, which included discussion of tree preservation standards citywide, appropriate City resources for tree planting and maintenance, and regulatory and non-regulatory tools for tree preservation, and after this discussion IPS members agreed to advance a resolution request to the full City Council for consideration, and

WHEREAS this proposed resolution would direct the City Manager and Planning Commission ("Commission") to advance a phased set of actions aimed at creating a thriving urban forest in the City by expanding the City's Program and advancing implementation of the Plan, which has four phases, and

WHEREAS the intention of Phase One is to deepen the City's understanding of the public demand for expanding the City's Program and advancing implementation of the Plan through Council-led public engagement, while also identifying contract services to work on data collection and analysis needed to advance more complicated City actions regarding land use and development regulations, and

WHEREAS Phase One has a tentative timeline of June 2025-December 2025 and should include the following directions to the City Manager:

(1) Launch a series of City Council-led public engagements and updates to gather community input on expanding the City's Program and advancing implementation of the Plan;

(2) Provide options for expanding "Make a Splash" grant funding for depaving and tree planting projects, with sponsors recommending starting with a one-year pilot program in 2026 with a set total amount up to $150,000 to gauge community interest, as well as potential opportunities to allow corporate matching funds; and

(3) Use non-General Fund resources to initiate a contract with a consultant to support analysis, planning, and development of code and tasks in this phased approach as needed, and

WHEREAS the intention of Phase Two is to prepare the City Council to potentially advance a budget request that expands City tree maintenance in the right-of-way for the 2027-2028 biennial budget, and has a tentative timeline of January 2026-June 2026, and

WHEREAS Phase Two should include the following directions to the City Manager, considering the information collected in Phase One:

(1) Create a fiscal impact note and legal analysis for City Council consideration to create a program that offers business districts the option to pay the City to provide services to maintain trees within the business district, and outlines three potential service level options that range in cost, as well as costs for staff and administration of the program; and

(2) Create a fiscal impact note and legal analysis for City Council consideration of a range of options to raise funding for expanded City management of tree maintenance in the right-of-way, with options that could include a

wastewater excise tax, stormwater utility rate enhancement, shared tree crew with other agency, or other recommendations. The analysis should also include information about the benefits to the City and community of expanded City tree maintenance in the right-of-way, as well as some suggestions based on LiDAR data for optimal locations to plant new trees in the right-of-way, and

WHEREAS the intention of Phase Three is to launch Commission engagement on new land use and development regulations regarding tree canopy management and preservation, with the Commission's engagement being required by law when creating new land use and development regulations, and has a tentative timeline of January 2026-December 2026, and

WHEREAS Phase Three should include the following directions to the Commission, taking into consideration the housing crisis and the vital need to meet the City's responsibilities to the Growth Management Act, as well as broader City budget constraints:

(1) Study and make recommendations for ordinance options to be considered by the City Council around tree canopy management and preservation for development sites citywide, with the Commission including consideration of the possibility of applying the established tree preservation and tree credits for development sites under HIT to all additional zones beyond Urban Residential (UR);

(a) The Commission should also consider the appropriate amount of time before a development permit is applied for and after a development project is completed for when these permit regulations apply;

(2) Study and make recommendations for ordinance options to be considered by the City Council that create a new permit structure for a Canopy Loss Fee on sites without active development permit(s) in all zones;

(a) The permit structure could offer exemptions for a tree or trees located on a site if it is a hazardous tree, nuisance tree, prohibited tree, tree damaging the sidewalk, significantly damaged tree, or a tree located within a View Sensitive District, as well as penalties for removing a tree without a permit. This work should also consider implications around equity and access in the City. Additional tree protection requirements could include tree size and zoning, as well as other potential data and analysis collected in Phase One;

(3) Study and make recommendations for ordinance options to be considered by the City Council that increase tree canopy requirements for parking lots that are currently exempt (e.g. small parking lots) and also increase the tree canopy requirement for all parking lots; and

(4) Study and make recommendations for ordinance options to be considered by the City Council that determine and require increased tree canopy requirements for commercial, manufacturing, and industrial uses in very low equity areas, and

WHEREAS the intention of Phase Four is for the City Council to consider adopting potential new code developed through the Commission process and advance potential budget requests for the mid-modification budget discussions for implementation, and has a tentative timeline of January 2027-June 2027, and

WHEREAS this consideration should carefully balance the vital need for additional housing development to address our housing crisis and broader City budget constraints, and Phase Four should include the following directions to the City Manager:

(1) Create a fiscal impact note for City Council consideration regarding options for implementation of potential new land use and development regulations regarding tree preservation, tree credits, and canopy loss identified in Phase Three, and

WHEREAS information and data gathered during Phases One through Four should also be used to help inform future work on setting realistic tree canopy goals and policies and be incorporated into the City's stormwater manual; Now, Therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TACOMA:

Section 1. That the foregoing recitals are hereby incorporated as the City Council's legislative findings.

Section 2. That the City Manager and Planning Commission are hereby directed to advance a phased set of actions aimed at creating a thriving urban forest in the City by expanding the City's Urban Forestry Program and advancing implementation of the Urban Forest Management Plan.

Adopted _____

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Mayor

Attest:

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City Clerk

Approved as to form:

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Chief Deputy City Attorney