



TO: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Michael P. Slevin III, P.E., Environmental Services Director
James G. Parvey, P.E., LEED AP, OEPS Manager
COPY: Infrastructure Planning and Sustainability Committee; Rebecca Boydston
PRESENTER: Michael Carey, Environmental Services
SUBJECT: State of Tacoma's Urban Forest Informational Update
DATE: April 25, 2018

PRESENTATION TYPE:
Informational Briefing

SUMMARY:

By request of Council Members Beale and Mello, City of Tacoma Staff will provide an informational briefing on the state of Tacoma's urban forest. The presentation will include background on the importance of healthy urban tree canopy, and provide statistics on urban forest management from other jurisdictions across the United States. Staff will conclude with identifying opportunities to improve long-term sustainability of the City's urban forest asset, and request a recommendation from the Committee to explore these in greater depth at a future Committee meeting.

BACKGROUND:

In 2010, Tacoma City Council adopted the Urban Forest Policy (UFP) Element of the Comprehensive Plan, which identified a 30% tree canopy cover goal by the year 2030, "30 by 30". In 2009, the City's tree canopy was assessed at 19%. In order to address increasing healthy canopy cover, the UFP defines core focus areas including changes to regulations and standards to address tree retention and leading by example through responsible planting, care and maintenance of trees on City owned property.

In 2016, the City's Environmental Action Plan (EAP) was adopted by Council with a focus on increasing healthy urban forest canopy, specifically benefiting low income neighborhoods and communities of color most susceptible to the heat island effect. The EAP also identified the priority of improving regulations to encourage tree preservation and protection on private property and in the City right-of-way.

In 2015, Tacoma's Ten-Year City-wide Strategic Plan and Vision (*Tacoma 2025*) was adopted. Several of the key community priorities identified include improving Neighborhood Business Districts, strengthening downtown Tacoma as the business core, and sustaining and improving Tacoma's Natural Environment. Studies show that shoppers are willing to spend 9-12% more for goods and services in Central Business Districts with high-quality tree canopy, and pedestrian oriented retail areas experience 20-40% more foot traffic (*Outside Our Doors*, 2017).

ISSUE:

In urban communities, the pressure of development, and an increase in ecological stresses like storms, drought and pests, require proactive measures to protect and enhance the urban forest. Measures that many communities throughout the U.S. have adopted include:

- Protecting native forest tracts through acquisition, conservation easements or regulations;
- proactive and routine tree management on public lands and rights-of-ways;



- preventing tree loss and increasing planting through site development standards/regulations; and,
- regulating tree removal outside of development.

The City of Tacoma has adopted policies to increase healthy tree canopy cover, however, many of the strategies necessary to preserve and manage healthy trees -consistent with other communities- have not been explored or implemented. In fact, in 2005 the City's tree maintenance program was defunded, and the City effectively stopped proactive maintenance on the 5,000 street trees and 2,500 facility trees we have historically cared for.

Over the years Tacoma has fallen behind other cities in preserving and enhancing our urban forest. For example, according to the report "Protecting and Developing the Urban Tree Canopy", 95% of the cities surveyed have ordinances guiding tree management and care, 85% have ordinances pertaining to retaining trees on site, and 63% of the cities have ordinances covering removal of trees from private property (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2014). In the City of Tacoma, tree preservation is not required outside of regulated critical areas (steep slopes, wetlands, streams, etc.).

The American Public Works Association has developed Urban Forestry Best Management Practices for municipal forest managers, which include recommendations for exploring measures to keep the public safe and our neighborhoods thriving, while realizing the benefits of a healthy urban forest. Staff will present on the current state of Tacoma's urban forest, and ask for direction on whether to develop recommendations for discussion in a future Committee Meeting.

ALTERNATIVES:

This is an information briefing only. There are no alternatives presented.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This is an information briefing only. There is no fiscal impact.

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an information briefing only. There is no recommendation.