

Portland Street Tree Asset Management Strategy

Draft Proposal Prepared by the Urban Forestry Commission Policy Committee – March 9, 2017

1. **Importance of Street Trees.** Street trees are a unique and critical component of Portland's urban forest and public infrastructure. They help define the look and feel of our neighborhoods and provide valuable public health, environmental, and economic benefits daily. The replacement value of Portland's Street trees is roughly 1/2 billion dollars.
2. **Strong new policies for the urban forest.** The City has recently adopted strong new land use and climate change related policies to improve the quality, quality, and equitable distribution of Portland's urban forest. The 2004 Urban Forest Management Plan will be updated in early 2018.
3. **Street Tree Inventory and City-wide Planting Plan.** Portland Parks and Recreation, Urban Forestry Program, working alongside hundreds of volunteers, completed a comprehensive street tree inventory just last year. The inventory contains information about the status and condition of this valuable asset. Urban Forestry is also contracting and partnering with PSU to develop a city-wide tree planting strategy to improve the urban forest and the equitable distribution of trees in the city.
4. **The Problem.** We know that:
 - **Lack of street tree maintenance program or funding.** The City has no comprehensive program for maintaining our street tree assets. As a result, the health and longevity of Portland's street tree assets are at risk. Also, the cost to maintain street trees falls on adjacent property owners. This creates public resistance to planting street trees and places a disproportionate burden on those with lower incomes.
 - **Inadequate prioritization for street trees in ROW improvements, new development, and land use planning.** City street/ROW improvement projects, new development, and land use plans do not adequately address preservation of existing street trees, nor do they provide adequate space to plant new street trees for the future. Competition for the ROW and sidewalk corridor is fierce, and trees are not on a level playing field with other infrastructure, utility vaults, etc.
 - **Need for more strategic street tree planting.** Street tree planting spaces are under-utilized and Portland is losing its large form street trees. More investment is needed to increase street tree stocking levels, to ensure that planting spaces planted with the largest tree practicable for the space. We need to increase tree canopy in tree deficient neighborhoods, where urban heat island effect is strongest, e.g., high density and industrial areas.
5. **Proposal for inter-bureau/community stakeholder effort to develop Street Tree Asset Management Strategy.** These issues span multiple City bureaus. The Urban Forestry Commission Policy Committee proposes that the City Council establish an inter-bureau committee to work with key community stakeholders to address to specific these street tree related priorities:

- A. Street Tree Maintenance.** The committee will evaluate and develop recommendations for a City street tree maintenance program and initial pilot projects. The committee will consider:
 - Program options involving different levels of service, where partial or total responsibility for street tree maintenance shifts from adjacent property owners to the City.
 - Program structure and administration options.
 - Options that focus on areas with vulnerable, lower income, or historically under-represented communities, along with citywide options.
 - Different public and public/private funding options and partnership strategies.
 - Options for pilot projects in areas with different street tree and population characteristics.
 - Opportunities for new green jobs, vocational training, and collaborative partnerships.
 - Regulatory changes needed for the City to assume street tree maintenance responsibility.
 - Existing information, such as the report *City of Portland, Oregon – Initial Assessment of the Cost of Managing Street Trees as a Public Asset* (Davey Resource Group, 2009) and street tree maintenance programs in other cities.

- B. Street and Public ROW Improvement and Development Reform** – The committee will evaluate options and recommend actions to:
 - Modernize or create new street design standards, criteria, and procedures for ROW improvements and new development to 1) Improve preservation of existing, healthy, large and medium form trees, and 2) provide space for large and medium form street trees on a level playing field with other sidewalk corridor functions.
 - Address areas with large amount of unimproved rights-of-way.
 - Reduce barriers to tree planting (in addition to maintenance), such as rigid parking requirements and subsurface vaults associated with new development.
 - Ensure adequate soil capacity for trees planted in conjunction with development projects
 - Address goals, functions, and design of streets and rights-of-way, including street trees, in conjunction with land use planning (e.g. Mixed Use Project, RIP).
 - Necessary changes in regulations, procedures and practices.

The committee will evaluate and recommend specific strategies for the above topics, and will address relative benefits, costs, impacts, and risks and how they are distributed across the city.

Committee Composition and Resource Requirements. The committee should include representatives for PP&R/Urban Forestry, PBOT, BES, BPS, BDS, PWB, ONI, and PDC, and will require participation by program finance experts from the infrastructure bureaus and OMF. The committee should also arborists, utilities, community organizations such as Friends of Trees and Verde, and developers. The committee should be co-led by at least two bureaus.

Dedicated staff or contracted professional services will be needed to coordinate the committee and conduct the technical analyses embedded in this scope. Neutral party facilitators will be needed to assist with meetings, mediation and conflict resolution. A next step is to determine if these needs could be met by existing staff or would require a contract, and whether these services could be paid for with existing FY 2016-17 funds or would require additional funding in the FY 2017-18 budget.

Timing. Products would be presented to the City Council by _____.