

Portland Street/Right-of-Way Tree Asset Management Strategy
Draft Proposal for Consideration of the Urban Forestry Commission – April 15, 2017

Proposal: The City Council will establish an Inter-bureau/Community Stakeholder Task Force.

The Task Force will evaluate and recommend actions to:

- Design and implement a comprehensive program to maintain street trees and trees in public rights-of-way (ROW), and initial pilot projects.
- Prioritize the integration of street trees, including large form trees, in street and right-of-way improvement and development projects, through reform of design and construction policies, standards, and procedures, and practices.

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1. **Value of Street/ROW Trees.** Trees in and along Portland’s streets and rights-of-way (ROW) 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 each day they provide valuable public health, environmental, and economic benefits. According to the Portland Parks and Recreation Urban Canopy Report (2007), the replacement value of Portland's street/ROW trees is roughly \$0.5 billion, and the annual benefits they provide are worth more than \$18 million. The City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Services has sponsored the planting, through Friends of Trees, tens of thousands of street trees in recent years.
 2. **Strong new policies for the urban forest.** The City has recently adopted strong new land use and climate change-related policies highlighting the trees and green infrastructure as a key element of City resilience and livability, and that call for improving the quality, quantity, and equitable distribution of Portland’s urban forest. The 2004 Urban Forest Management Plan is scheduled for update in early 2018.
 3. **Tree planting, Street Tree Inventory and City-wide Planting Plan.** Portland Parks and Recreation, Urban Forestry Program, working with hundreds of volunteers, completed a comprehensive street tree inventory last year. More than 218,000 trees were identified, measured, and mapped, providing key information on the status and condition of this valuable asset. Urban Forestry is now contracting with PSU to produce a city-wide tree planting strategy to improve the urban forest and the equitable distribution of trees in the city.
 4. **The Problem.**
 - **Lack of asset management, a comprehensive street tree maintenance program, or funding.** Although the City and Friends of Trees have started some small volunteer tree pruning efforts, the City has no comprehensive program for maintaining Portland’s 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, places a disproportionate burden on those with lower incomes, and can exclude low income homeowners and renters from realizing the benefits of street trees.
 - **Inadequate prioritization for street trees in ROW improvements and new development.** 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. 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 commercial and industrial areas.

5. Proposal.

These issues span multiple City bureaus. The Urban Forestry Commission is considering its Policy Committee proposal that the **City Council launch an Inter-Bureau/Community Stakeholder Street/ROW Tree Task Force**. The Task Force will evaluate and make recommendations to:

- **Design and implement a comprehensive Street/ROW Tree Maintenance program and initial pilot projects.** The Task Force will address:
 - Street/ROW maintenance program elements (e.g., tree pruning, removal, and replacement, sidewalks, and leaves.
 - Level(s) and distribution of service, where partial or total responsibility for street tree maintenance shifts from adjacent property owners to the City.
 - Equity, including maintenance service options focusing on areas with vulnerable, lower income, or historically under-represented communities.
 - Opportunities for new green jobs, vocational training, and collaborative partnerships.
 - Program structure, administration, and funding, including public/private partnerships.
 - Street/ROW tree maintenance programs in other cities, and existing information (e.g., *City of Portland, Oregon – Initial Assessment of the Cost of Managing Street Trees as a Public Asset*, Davey Resource Group, 2009).
 - Pilot projects in areas with different street tree and socio-economic characteristics.
 - Regulatory changes needed for the City to assume street tree maintenance responsibility.

- **Prioritize integration of street trees into street and ROW Improvement and Development projects.** The Task Force will address:
 - 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. Identify changes needed to put street trees “on a level playing field” with other functions and elements of the sidewalk corridor.
 - Areas with large amount of unimproved rights-of-way.
 - Options to reduce regulatory and physical barriers to tree planting, such as rigid parking requirements, and standards for subsurface vaults, poles, signs, and other constraints.
 - Options to ensure adequate soil capacity for trees planted in conjunction with new development.
 - Opportunities better integrate street trees through land use planning efforts.
 - Necessary changes in regulations, procedures and practices.

The Task Force 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.

Task Force Composition and Resource Requirements The Task Force would 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 Task Force would also include arborists, utilities, PSU, community organizations such as Friends of Trees and Verde, and developers. The Task Force would be co-chaired by two parties (could be rotated). Dedicated staff and/or contracted professional services will be needed to coordinate the committee, conduct the technical analyses embedded in this scope, and develop products. Neutral party facilitators will be needed to assist with meetings, mediation and conflict resolution. Once City Council has directed this effort to proceed, a next step is to refine the work plan, and determine if resource needs can be met by existing staff or would require a contract, and whether these services could be provided with existing funds and staff or would require additional funding.

Initial suggested timeline The Task Force would be established by September 15, 2017, and would meet two times per month. Products would be presented to the City Council by June 30, 2018.