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Community Forest Advisory Committee
Los Angeles

To Mayor Garcetti and the Mayor's Budget & Finance Committee:

The Community Forest Advisory Committee (CFAC) was formed many years ago to improve the state of our City's urban forest by convening community representatives from the 15 council districts and a Mayor's representative. Committee members are chosen by their councilmember and appointed by the Mayor to advise the City on practices & policies, and advocate on behalf of our urban forest. It is in this capacity that we offer you our recommendations regarding the future of Los Angeles' urban forestry budget.

There's no denying that Los Angeles is in a state of fiscal crisis as a result of the pandemic. Yet, despite the city's grave financial state, CFAC urges you to evaluate trees as an unsurpassed bargain in our City's infrastructure, mitigating air and ground pollution, reducing heat and energy costs, sequestering carbon, holding and cleaning storm water, supporting biodiversity, providing a sense of health and wellbeing, and even decreasing crime. In California, every $1 invested in a street tree returns $5.82 in benefits (McPherson et al. 2016)[i]. But if we scrimp on the tree care they require, not only do we lose these valuable workhorses and their benefits, we also incur unnecessary expenses and liability as trees decline and experience early failure and mortality from lack of care.

It is for this reason that CFAC urges you to increase the budget for Urban Forestry in 2021-2022, and recognize this budget as essential and protected from further cuts.

We further urge you to take seriously the urban forest analysis and recommendations made in the City and grant funded ($150k) study performed by Dudek, *First Step - Developing An Urban Forest Management Plan for the City of Los Angeles*. Some significant take-aways from this document which support CFAC's call for an increased budget for the Urban Forestry Division (UFD) are listed below:

- The report compared several cities' urban forestry budgets and found that "an estimated budget increase of $40–$50 million is needed to manage the urban forest at a sustainable level. The City's annual per-tree urban forestry budget of approximately $27 is 140% to 212% less than what comparable cities invest in their urban forest trees each year."[ii]

- A 2018 study of urban forestry budgets among several cities found that cities typically allot 1% of their entire budget to the urban forest. In contrast, UFD's budget in Los Angeles is ~.25% - a fraction of what it is in other progressive cities[iii].

- The budget cuts to the Urban Forestry Division during the Great Recession of 2008 resulted in city-wide tree neglect and damage, from which we still have not recovered. The cuts "also resulted in many dead standing trees that were not removed in reasonable time frames, increasing hazardous conditions and resulting in upward trending tree-related settlements" (Dudek 2018)[iv].

- Rising temperatures are amplified within a city through the urban heat island effect, which occurs as the buildings, roads, and other infrastructure absorb and reflect heat, making it up to 50-90° F hotter than the air. Shaded surfaces, however, can be 20-45° F cooler than unshaded areas (Environmental Protection Agency 2016)[v].

- Strategically placed trees can even save up to 56% on annual air-conditioning costs (U.S. Forest Service)[vi]. Further, reducing energy use directly combats climate change by decreasing the production of associated air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions (Environmental Protection Agency 2016).

While we advocate for increased budget, we are also keenly aware of the City's current financial status due to the much needed response to the Covid-19 pandemic and civil unrest. Therefore, we offer below our creative suggestions for ways to generate funding for the operations of the Urban Forestry Division (UFD):

1. Instruct the City Attorney's office to strengthen policies and increase illegal pruning and illegal removal fees.

2. Raise inspection fees charged for services from Urban Forestry to truly cover the costs incurred. The current fee structure is outdated and does not accurately reflect staff time investment.

3. Raise Tree Removal Permit fees to reflect the monetary value of the ecosystem services that are provided and would be lost by removing that tree. Increase fees exponentially for Protected Tree species based on diameter and canopy size.

4. Raise bond fees to ensure the survivability of "replacement" trees, and extend bonds to 5 years. Ensure that the cost of staff time to inspect those trees is not only fully recuperated, but increased to prevent neglect or removal. Also appropriate past bond fees.

5. Set a high fee schedule for removal of private property trees which are routinely removed by developers at time of demolition without any consideration of loss of canopy and ecosystem services. Double (or more) the fee if removed illegally (e.g. $10k minimum to remove, $25K if illegal). Simultaneously instruct City Planning & LADBS to require an inventory of all

greencover & trees on site at beginning of permit process (e.g. require an aerial dated prior to purchase date, so razing of lots cannot be performed preemptively, a current common practice).

6. Although City Council specifically asked for funding for alternatives to tree removals in the Sidewalk Repair Program, BOE says they are not available. We are losing valuable trees that could be saved with ramping, meandering sidewalks and bump outs. Instruct BOE to find ways in which access and rebate requests can reward clients/customers that preserve their parkway trees.

7. Allocate a consistent percentage of funding from Lighting & Landscape Assessment Districts to improve care for existing mature trees.

8. Create a GreenSpace funding mechanism akin to the Public Works Improvement Arts Program (PWIAP) and the Private Arts Development Fee (ADF) for all construction and Development.

9. Leverage more funding from Measure W for medians, continuous parkways designed for stormwater capture, rainwater harvesting for irrigation. Make these standard designs.

10. Coordinate more with other agencies (LASAN, BOE, Planning, Metro, CalTrans) on their capital projects to leverage funding to create multi-benefit-tree inclusive projects.

11. Instruct Planning & LADBS to establish and require tree & root protection zone guidelines, require inspections at the start and end of construction, and a fee to cover staff time. Currently, existing trees are damaged by parking equipment and materials on and around trees during construction projects, damaging trees that are supposed to be preserved.

12. Require a small percentage of tree care, research, and maintenance funding from each department or agency in the City that touches trees, such as Community Planning, Project Planning, ADU Planning, HUD, Housing, LADWP, Building and Safety, Police Department, etc. (e.g. if every department gave a small percentage such as .05%, maybe they would also be more invested in protecting the UF).

13. Increase the In Lieu "Guarantee Fee," especially for residential parkway removals. It's outrageous that during a period of fiscal instability, the community should subsidize the fees for developers to remove trees. This fee should also include the average cost of 5 years of irrigation and maintenance. [Also publish the CAO's study on the financial analysis of preserving vs. removing trees].

14. Release and redirect a portion of the City's Special Funds toward StreetsLA and Urban Forestry ($4 Billion in 700 funds per 2019 Galperin report).

15. Approve the replacement of the Chief Forester position, but with an Urban (Forest) Planner - someone with a biology/ecology background as well as urban planning experience, who informed by science and the most up-to-date arboriculture practices, can serve and lead the

division and align practices with the City's Climate & Biodiversity goals. As funding increases, add an ecologist and architect to assist with Planning & LADBS reviews and redesigns.

The ultimate marker of success for urban forestry in Los Angeles will be when we recognize that urban ecosystems are just as important as roads, power lines, and stormwater infrastructure, and we follow-up that recognition with investment and reverence for all the benefits they provide. This investment would help address equity, public health, safety, and livability. We have all the information we need in this regard. *Now is the time for action*.

We value your time in considering these issues, we look forward to helping with these initiatives, and we appreciate your support.

Respectfully,

Shelley Billik
Chair
Community Forest Advisory Committee

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[i] **McPherson, E. Gregory, Natalie van Doorn, and John de Goede. 2016. Structure, Function, and Values of Street Trees in California, USA. Urban Forestry & Urban 17: April 2016. Pp 104–115. https://www.fs.fed.us/psw/ publications/mcpherson/psw_2016_mcpherson004.pdf**

[ii] **Dudek. *First Step: Developing an Urban Forest Management Plan for the City of Los Angeles*. CityPlants, 2018, https://www.cityplants.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/10939_LA-City-Plants_FirstStep_Report_FINAL.pdf.**

[iii] **Stewart, Jill, Wachtel Ileana 2018. L.A.'s Urban Tree Canopy needs a Better Plan. Los Angeles community members have *untapped power* to guide the General Plan Update.**

[iv] **Dudek. *First Step: Developing an Urban Forest Management Plan for the City of Los Angeles*. CityPlants, 2018, https://www.cityplants.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/10939_LA-City-Plants_FirstStep_Report_FINAL.pdf.**

[v] **Environmental Protection Agency. 2016. "Using Trees and Vegetation to Reduce Heat Islands." August 2016. https://www.epa.gov/heat-islands/usingtrees-and-vegetation-reduce-heat-islands.**

[vi] **Nowak, David J., Robert Hoehn, Daniel Crane, Lorraine Weller, Antonio Davila. 2011. Assessing urban forest effects and values, Los Angeles' urban forest, USDA Forest Service, Northern Research Station, Resource Bulleting (RB), https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/rb/rb_nrs47.pdf**