



**Oakland's Fifty-Year Urban Forestry Master Plan (UFMP)
RECOMMENDATIONS BY TREES FOR OAKLAND
August 22, 2022**

The mission of Trees for Oakland (TfO) is to contribute to the urban forest in all of Oakland by planting and maintaining trees in the city, with emphasis in areas with limited canopy. By doing so, we aim to educate people about trees, combat climate change, and provide a more equitable distribution of trees within Oakland. We have been a fiscally-sponsored project of the Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation since 2015 and the Sierra Club Northern Alameda Group from 2010 until 2015 (as the Sierra Club Tree Team).

This document was developed by TfO's UFMP committee and reviewed prior to distribution by its Advisory Board. TfO expects to make additional comments throughout the City's process of developing an UFMP, including as draft documents are developed and released, and upon submittal to elected bodies.

Note: Many of the items listed below are already included in the Open Space, Conservation and Recreation (OSCAR) Element of the Oakland General Plan and are therefore official City policy.

General Principles

1. **Encourage and protect** new and existing large growing, long-lived trees wherever site conditions allow. Provide appropriate care and preventative maintenance as needed to promote the health and preservation of these historic trees.
2. **Provide a broad and varied range of tree species** to encourage biodiversity, help the urban forest adapt to pests and diseases, and prepare for climate change. The approved Street Tree List posted on the City's website (dated April 2017¹) lists approximately fifty-five distinct species of trees; yet in practice we do not observe much diversity in recently planted street trees. This can lead to mono-cultures, vulnerability to species-specific pests and diseases, and lack of biodiversity.
 - a. Review and modify as needed the existing approved street tree list, Increase the species on the list to promote diversity in the urban forest.
 - b. Consider creation of a list of discouraged species.
 - c. Proactively experiment, utilizing best available scientific research as available, with new or unusual species/varieties to evaluate their suitability in Oakland, initially in parks and other open spaces, and as street trees once an adequate track record has been established².

¹ https://cao-94612.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Oakland_StreetTreeList_April-2017-v2.pdf

² See Section 9.5 of 1998 Street Tree Plan.

3. **Select trees that are well adapted** to existing and possible future conditions and climate-change scenarios.
 - a. Identify environmental and site constraints that may impact tree selection and health, including but not necessarily limited to: soil conditions, micro-climate (especially areas exposed to high prevailing winds and/or occasional subfreezing temperatures), and high water tables. (*Example: Coast live oaks planted in irrigated turf/grass; redwoods planted in saline high-water tables.*)
 - b. Provide maps of each of these conditions and provide lists of trees that are well-suited to each current and possible future condition.

Policy Considerations

4. Rename the Urban Forestry Master Plan to the Urban Forestry **Management** Plan (hereafter “Plan”).
5. **Require the Plan to be affirmed and adopted by the City Council**, to help ensure that it is truly “official” and does not ultimately “sit on the shelf”. Consider possible review by the City Planning Commission and Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC) to further confirm standing as official city policy. Consider including the Plan as an Element of the Oakland General Plan or as a subchapter in the General Plan’s Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Element. Provide a clear process for future changes to the Plan. Future changes should be done in consultation with community participation utilizing umbrella groups like the Oakland Urban Forestry Forum (OUFF).
6. **Funding.** In order to ensure sufficient and predictable funding for essential tree services, the City Council should put on the ballot a dedicated, permanent funding mechanism for urban forestry. For example, Proposition E, City Responsibility for Maintaining Street Trees was approved by over 75% of San Francisco voters in 2016, which provides \$19M annually funded by a progressive parcel tax. The measure also clarified liability issues.
7. Create an **Urban Forest Technical Advisory Council** composed of arborists, landscape architects and other professionals, and others knowledgeable about urban forestry to advise on issues such as approved tree lists, tree removal permit appeals, changes to the Tree Protection Ordinance, and other issues to be decided. Or, designate seats on the PRAC for these experts.
8. **Volunteer Engagement:** Include in the Plan a structure for engaging and encouraging citizen action around tree planting and maintenance. Encourage continued activity of the (OUFF) and other similar voluntary civic group, which brings together community organizations and individuals involved in improving the urban forest. Encourage regular attendance by staff of appropriate City departments such as Public Works, Transportation, Parks and Recreation, and Information Technology, as well as regional and state agencies (e.g. Cal Fire). Encourage regular coordination between agency officials and the public to maximize utilization of resources and expertise.

Technical Considerations to include in Plan

9. For street trees:
 - a. **Consider changes to the Official Tree / Unofficial Tree framework**³ to promote retention of desirable trees. Define “desirable tree” in the Plan.
 - b. **Maximize street tree planting area sizes.** Provide a 3’x3’ minimum planting area (4’x6’ or 5’x5’ preferred) whenever possible.
 - c. **Consider planting in the parking lane or on the property side of the sidewalk** (rather than at the curb) which could still be within the public right-of way⁴.
 - d. **To minimize tree damage to sidewalks** and other infrastructure, consider regular root pruning, special sidewalk designs and materials, structural soil, and other strategies.
 - e. **Provide strategies for street trees planted where sidewalk basements exist**⁵.
10. **Clarify tree grate policy** - when required (if it all) - and design criteria. Remove grates that are impeding trunk growth or within 3 inches of tree trunks.
11. **Consider uniform plantings (either single species or multiple species) along specially designated major streets for urban design purposes**⁶. Select species elsewhere to give a distinct identity to neighborhoods⁷.
12. Include in the Plan an approach to effectively **water and/or irrigate city-planted trees** during their establishment period (three to five years). In City parks, do not rely on overhead sprinkler irrigation intended for shallow lawns to properly irrigate trees. Engage volunteer groups to water trees during establishment and high-stress periods and provide resources for them to do so.
13. Some Oakland parks and possibly other facilities use recycled water. **Provide lists of tree species that do or do not tolerate recycled water**, and update the list as new information becomes available. These lists could be part of a comprehensive list or matrix of trees suitable for planting in Oakland. Identify strategies for preserving existing trees intolerant of recycled water if they are already located in areas irrigated with recycled water, especially large or landmark quality trees.
14. **Continue to update the City’s new Tree Inventory.** Do not leave it as a static document showing only the trees as of 2020-21. Add all trees planted by citizens upon submittal of a Tree Planting Permit. To make the information more operational for citizens, combine the tree layer with other layers such as sidewalk widths and high-voltage power lines so citizens can select the appropriate sized tree for a location.

³ See 1998 Street Tree Plan Appendix A: Redesignation of Unofficial Trees to Official Trees.

⁴ On most Oakland streets with front yards the property line is often in the yard. This strategy is good practice since it greatly reduces the possibility of sidewalk damage and the trees usually do better since there is less hardscape.

⁵ See 1984 Central District Street Tree Plan.

⁶ As set forth in Section 5.3 of the 1998 Street Tree Plan. See also the 2013 West Oakland Reforestation Plan, 1984 Central District Street Tree Plan, 1979-1981 Street Tree Plan for Oakland and Oakland General Plan’s Broadway/Valdez Specific Plan.

⁷ Such as included in the 1984 Central District Street Tree Plan and 1979-1981 Street Tree Plan for Oakland.

Long-Term Strategies

15. **Develop maintenance program recommendations** that ensure that all trees are adequately maintained. Identify strategies to reduce tree maintenance costs.
 - a. Consider expanding the use of outside contractors, where appropriate. Clarify City Charter provisions restricting use of outside contractors for maintenance functions normally performed by City employees.
 - b. Use volunteer “tree stewards” trained by Tree Services staff or other qualified professionals, possibly in coordination with outside tree advocacy and urban forestry organizations, to help prune and maintain young trees.
 - c. Examine and research potential for youth training and employment programs to prepare the next generation for expansion and maintenance of Oakland’s urban forest tree canopy. This could include age-appropriate school education programs, as well as more practical training for post-graduate employment opportunities.

16. **Other Sources of Funding** for long-term tree maintenance and sidewalk repair.
 - a. Review the City’s Landscaping and Lighting Assessment District funding framework to better address tree maintenance.
 - b. Consider how funds from the Alameda County Measure B (2000) transportation improvements and services could be used for tree-related sidewalk damage.
 - c. Investigate possible state, federal and other outside public/private funding sources, including recently announced doubling of state Cal Fire funding. Also consider funding from foundations, major local businesses, and sports teams.

17. **Minimize tree / utility line conflicts** by working with PG&E to identify long-term strategies for overhead utility line clearance, including:
 - a. Use of specially insulated ‘tree wire’ or armored cable that eliminates the need for most tree pruning for both primary (high voltage) and secondary electrical lines;
 - b. Utility line configurations that reduce conflicts with trees, such as:
 - i. alley arms: and
 - ii. reducing the cross-sectional area of utility line construction and therefore the amount of tree central canopy that must be kept pruned to provide adequate line clearance such as by attaching high-voltage wires directly to poles using brackets, rather than cross arms, or vertical configuration.

18. **Reduce conflicts between new trees and underground utilities** by working with utility companies to place new or reconfigured utilities under the roadway rather than the sidewalk. **Develop strategies with utility companies that minimize root cutting and tree removals when maintaining or replacing underground utility lines.**