



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

**MEMO**

**DATE:** November 13, 2014  
**TO:** Planning Commission  
**FROM:** Jon Swae, Department Staff  
**RE:** Urban Forest Plan (Phase 1: Street Trees)  
Response to Commission Requests

1650 Mission St.  
Suite 400  
San Francisco,  
CA 94103-2479

Reception:  
**415.558.6378**

Fax:  
**415.558.6409**

Planning  
Information:  
**415.558.6377**

This memo provides responses to Commission comments and requests made at the November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014 hearing on the adoption of General Plan amendments related to the Urban Forest Plan (Phase 1: Street Trees). At the hearing the Commission voted to continue the item until November 20<sup>th</sup> and directed staff to conduct the following actions:

1. Develop a Glossary with definitions of terms related to trees and foliage throughout the document; and
2. Create a matrix of funding mechanisms (property and non-property based) for a potential citywide street tree maintenance program.

In response to comments made at the hearing and public correspondence received, staff is providing the following clarifications on and amendments to the Urban Forest Plan (Phase 1: Street Trees).

- The Urban Forest Plan (Phase 1: Street Trees) focuses primarily on street trees within the public right-of-way with a particular focus on addressing challenges related to funding, maintenance and tree planting. Phase 1 of the Plan is not intended to direct urban forestry actions or policy in parks or open spaces nor should it be considered as a document to do so. Future phases will specifically address and develop recommendations for trees in parks and open spaces (Phase 2) and on private property (Phase 3).
- While the focus of the Plan is street trees, the document does recognize the city's urban forest, like any forest, contains varying canopy layers including an "understory" layer. In the urban context, this understory layer most often involves plantings other than trees (i.e. other vegetation) such as grasses, shrubs, or hedges located in the public right-of-way. The Plan does not propose to be a comprehensive plan for all vegetative types – its focus is street trees. However, the Plan would be remiss to not recognize and support compatible urban greening efforts taking place in the public right-of-way often in conjunction with street trees such as sidewalk gardens and median greening. These activities are often managed, maintained and planted by urban forestry related professionals and volunteers.
- Staff is proposing amendments to the Plan based on Commission discussion and public correspondence to clarify the document's focus on street trees. These changes are described below. In addition, a Glossary of key terms has been added as requested by the Commission.

## Proposed Plan Edits:

Page 1: San Francisco was once a largely treeless landscape of expansive grasslands, sand dunes, coastal scrub and wetlands.

Page 9: New street tree plantings are not keeping pace with deaths and removals.

Page 15: Maximize the benefits of ~~urban~~ street trees

Page 16: Maximize the benefits of ~~urban~~ street trees

Page 39: Goal 2: Protect the urban forest from threats and loss by preserving the city's existing street trees.

Page 46: Goal 2: Protect the urban forest from threats and loss by preserving the city's existing street trees.

Page 62: Goal 2: Protect the urban forest from threats and loss by preserving the city's existing street trees.

## Glossary:

In order to clarify terms used in the Plan document, staff has created the following glossary. These definitions will be added to the document as requested by the Commission.

**Tree:** Any large perennial plant having a woody trunk(s), branches, and leaves. Trees also shall include palm trees (Source: Public Works Code, Article 16).

**Urban forest:** The collection of trees and other vegetation found along San Francisco's streets and within the built environment (Source: Urban Forest Plan – Phase 1: Street Trees, pg.4).

**Street tree:** Any tree growing within the public right-of-way, including unimproved public streets and sidewalks (Source: Public Works Code, Article 16).

**Understory (including 'other vegetation' and 'greening' and 'landscaping'):** Lower-level plantings located in sidewalk planters, such as grasses, shrubs, hedges, and the like (Source: Better Streets Plan, 2010).

**Ecological function:** The term "ecological function" is used in the Plan to refer to the capacity of street trees to provide a variety of ecosystem services, including but not limited to: filtering air pollution, absorbing greenhouse gases, reducing stormwater runoff and providing wildlife habitat. It is understood that different tree species have varying capacities to provide more or less of one service or another.

**Potential Funding Mechanisms: Citywide Street Tree Maintenance Program**

At the request of the Commission, staff assembled the following inventory of potential financing mechanisms that could support the cost of a Citywide Street Tree Maintenance Program. As requested, these are divided by “property based” and “non-property based.” The majority of these were evaluated in the 2013 report, *Financing San Francisco’s Urban Forest: The Benefits + Costs of a Comprehensive Municipal Street Tree Program (AECOM 2013)*.

<b>Property Based</b>	
<i>Funding Mechanism</i>	<i>Description</i>
Landscape and Lighting District (LLAD)	Special assessment for landscaping, lighting, open space improvements and acquisition
Parcel Tax	Assessment levied independent of property value, can be equal amount per parcel or dependent on lot size
General Obligation (GO) Bond	Low-interest loan for capital projects & improvements; repaid by levying tax revenue
Maintenance Assessment District (MAD)	Special assessment for maintenance of open spaces, parks, playgrounds and other public areas
Community Benefit District (CBD)	Special assessment for revitalization, economic development, streetscape improvements and security
County Service Area (CSA)	Special assessment for expanded services provided by counties, typically in rural areas
Mello-Roos Community Facilities District (CFD)	Special tax for range of improvements and services, typically for new developments & capital projects but growing use in urban areas for streetscape maintenance
Service Fee	Tree Planting Act of 1931 authorizes assessment of property owners for planting, maintenance, removal of trees along city streets and City employee labor
Green Benefit District (GBD) <i>(not examined in AECOM study)</i>	The City is currently exploring the feasibility of creating Green Benefit Districts. Similar to Community Benefit Districts, but located in any area and focuses on creation and maintenance of trees, greenery and green spaces.

<b>Non-Property Based</b>	
<i>Funding Mechanism</i>	<i>Description</i>
Parking Benefit District (PBD)	Variant of CBD, revenue stream from parking meters for range of ROW and streetscape improvements and maintenance
General Fund	City’s primary funding pool for wide range of municipal services
Partnerships	Non-profits, corporate partners and grant funding, primarily for tree planting and establishment
Urban Forestry Joint Powers Authority	Cost sharing among entities with street tree responsibilities & benefits (e.g., SFCTA, SFPUC, Caltrans, PG&E, SFMTA)
Sales Tax <i>(not examined in AECOM study)</i>	Tax paid to a governing body for the sales of certain goods and services. San Francisco’s existing ½ cent sales tax (Prop K) is used to fund transportation improvements with a small portion funding urban forestry activities.