

Communication from Public

Name: South LA Tree Coalition
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Comments for Public Posting: South LA Tree Coalition's comment letter regarding the CVA, attached.



March 27, 2026

City of Los Angeles City Council
Planning and Land Use Committee
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Council File: 15-0103-S4, Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA)

Dear PLUM Committee Members:

The South LA Tree Coalition (SLATC) submits this letter in response to the Department of City Planning's Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA). SLATC is a community-based organization rooted in South Los Angeles, working at the intersection of urban forestry, climate resilience, public health, and equity. Our work includes direct community engagement, implementation of tree planting and stewardship projects, and applied research conducted in partnership with academic institutions.

SLATC has worked closely with residents, community leaders, and public agencies across South Los Angeles – where many communities are consistently identified in the CVA as experiencing some of the highest cumulative climate vulnerabilities in the City. Our perspective is informed not only by data, but by lived experience and sustained engagement with residents navigating extreme heat, limited shade, aging infrastructure, and uneven access to environmental protections.

We recognize the CVA as an important analytical step. However, analysis alone will not reduce heat exposure, improve public health, or correct longstanding inequities. This letter focuses on the urgent need to translate CVA findings into immediate, accountable, and equity-driven implementation, particularly as it relates to urban heat and tree canopy conditions in South Los Angeles.

Heat Is a Present Public Health Emergency in South Los Angeles

For South Los Angeles residents, extreme heat is not a future projection - it is a current and escalating public health emergency. Many neighborhoods in South LA experience sustained exposure to high daytime temperatures, elevated nighttime heat, and limited access to cooling

resources. These conditions are compounded by low tree canopy coverage, narrow or paved parkways, limited green space, and high reliance on walking and transit.

In practice, this means that residents - particularly seniors, children, outdoor workers, unhoused individuals, and those with underlying health conditions - are routinely exposed to dangerous heat with little relief. Shade is not evenly distributed across the public right-of-way, and the absence of a mature, healthy urban forest amplifies surface and ambient temperatures.

The CVA accurately identifies extreme heat as a major climate hazard and maps its overlap with social vulnerability. What remains unresolved is how quickly and decisively these findings will be translated into on-the-ground action in the neighborhoods most affected.

Tree Canopy as Survival Infrastructure, Not an Amenity

In South Los Angeles, trees are not decorative amenities; they are survival infrastructure. Shade from a healthy tree canopy directly reduces exposure to extreme heat, supports walkability and transit use, protects public health, and improves neighborhood safety and comfort.

Yet South LA continues to experience some of the lowest canopy coverage in the City. In many cases, existing trees are small, poorly maintained, or at risk of removal due to infrastructure conflicts, deferred maintenance, or development pressures. Planting alone is insufficient unless trees are established, protected, and maintained over time.

SLATC urges the City to treat urban forestry - particularly street trees and parkway trees - as essential climate infrastructure. This requires prioritizing shade outcomes, not just planting counts, and ensuring that canopy expansion efforts are paired with long-term care, inspection, and enforcement capacity.

The Implementation Gap: From Mapping to Measurable Change

SLATC echoes the concern raised by other stakeholders that the CVA's strength lies in its analysis, but its impact will depend entirely on implementation. Communities that have been historically over-studied and under-served cannot afford further delays between diagnosis and action.

Key implementation questions remain unanswered:

- How will CVA heat and vulnerability findings be operationalized across departments responsible for streets, sidewalks, trees, and public space?
- How will equity-based prioritization be applied when resources are limited?
- How will progress be measured and reported in ways that reflect real improvements in shade, safety, and health outcomes?

Without clear timelines, designated responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms, the CVA risks reinforcing a pattern in which vulnerable communities are mapped repeatedly but experience little change on the ground.

Maintenance, Protection, and Enforcement Are Central to Climate Resilience

SLATC's experience on the ground confirms that tree loss in South LA is not driven solely by lack of planting. It is also driven by insufficient maintenance, inconsistent enforcement, and unclear responsibility for care and protection.

Illegal pruning, premature removals, infrastructure conflicts, and deferred maintenance all undermine canopy goals and erode community trust. Climate adaptation efforts focused only on planting, without addressing protection and enforcement, will fail to deliver durable benefits.

As CVA findings are implemented, SLATC urges the City to ensure that climate adaptation efforts do not result in increased canopy loss or weakened regulatory oversight. Existing tree-protection frameworks must be resourced and enforced consistently, particularly in neighborhoods already experiencing cumulative environmental burdens.

Community Trust, Engagement, and the Legacy of Disinvestment

South Los Angeles residents are acutely aware that environmental conditions did not arise by accident. Historic planning decisions, discriminatory policies, and uneven public investment have shaped today's landscape of vulnerability. As a result, climate adaptation efforts that are perceived as top-down or disconnected from community priorities risk further eroding trust.

SLATC's work with community leaders highlights that residents value trees and green space, but also navigate competing priorities related to housing stability, safety, and basic needs. Successful climate implementation requires genuine engagement, transparency, and alignment with community-identified needs - not one-size-fits-all approaches.

Tree planting and shade interventions must be paired with clear communication about maintenance responsibilities, long-term stewardship, and safeguards against unintended consequences such as displacement or infrastructure damage.

Recommendations for City Council and PLUM Committee Consideration

To ensure that the CVA delivers meaningful benefits to South Los Angeles and other heat-vulnerable communities, SLATC respectfully urges the City Council and the Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee to:

- Direct departments to develop an implementation plan that clearly links CVA heat and vulnerability findings to prioritized investments in shade, tree canopy, and public right-of-way improvements.
- Establish timelines and accountability measures for addressing extreme heat in the most vulnerable neighborhoods, with public reporting on progress and outcomes.
- Ensure that urban forestry is funded and treated as essential climate infrastructure, including resources for tree establishment, maintenance, inspection, and enforcement.
- Strengthen coordination among Planning, StreetsLA, Urban Forestry, Public Works, and related departments to reduce conflicts that delay or undermine canopy expansion.
- Center community engagement and stewardship as core components of climate adaptation, recognizing that long-term success depends on trust, local knowledge, and sustained care.

Conclusion: From Planning to Protection

The Climate Vulnerability Assessment provides a clear and compelling picture of where climate risks are most severe. For South Los Angeles, the challenge is no longer identifying vulnerability - it is acting on it.

SLATC urges the City to move decisively from planning to protection, from mapping to measurable change, and from short-term interventions to durable climate resilience. Trees and shade are among the most immediate, cost-effective tools available to reduce extreme heat and protect public health. Their success, however, depends on political will, sustained investment, and accountability.

South Los Angeles communities have waited long enough for relief. The CVA must now be matched with action.

Sincerely,

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