

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

DATE: March 1, 2019

TO: Public Works and Gang Reduction Committee

FROM: *for* Adel H. Hagekhalil, P.E.
Executive Director and General Manager
Bureau of Street Services

SUBJECT: 2018-19 ADOPTED BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS PERTAINING TO URBAN FORESTRY: CF 18-0600-S84, CF 18-0600-S85, CF 18-0600-S86, AND RELATED CF 15-0467-S6

As part of the adopted budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018-19, the Council instructed the Bureau of Street Services (StreetsLA) to report on three Urban Forestry Related Topics.

- CF 18-0600-S84: Updating Street Tree Inventory and Access to Grant Funding
- CF 18-0600-S85: Implementation of Recommendations from the 2015 State of the Street Trees Report
- CF 18-0600-S86: Fines for Illegal Tree Pruning and Tree Removal

In this report, StreetsLA will provide an update on the above-mentioned topics, all of which relate to the strategic direction of the Urban Forestry Division. This report is also responsive to CF 15-0467-S6, which pertains to an Urban Forest Management Plan.

Background

Several detailed reports on the management of the City of Los Angeles (City’s) urban forest have been published over the past four years. Created by different entities, these reports share a common set of recommendations that will guide the strategic development of the StreetsLA Urban Forestry Division in the coming years. A table of the key recommendations from these reports is included below:

Recommendations: (L=launch, E=enhance)	State of the Street Trees (StreetsLA, 2015)	First Steps (Dudek, for City Plants, 2018)	Turning Over a New Leaf (Controller, 2019)
L: Updated Tree Inventory	YES	YES	YES
L: Work Management System		YES	YES
E: Tree Trimming	YES	YES	YES
E: Dead Tree Removal	YES	YES	
E: Tree Planting + Watering	YES	YES	
L: Citywide Tree Policy Leader	YES	YES	

StreetsLA concurs with these recommendations, and is in the process of identifying funding and/or implementing each recommendation, as described below:

Tree Inventory and Work Management System

All three reports recommended the creation of an updated street tree inventory as a necessary step towards the development of an Urban Forest Management Plan. It is likely that the completion of a street tree inventory will assist StreetsLA in competing for grant funding pertaining to implementation of an Urban Forest Management Plan.

In November 2018, StreetsLA Urban Forestry Division applied for a CalFire grant to partially fund a comprehensive inventory of the 700,000 street trees in Los Angeles. The grant application was modeled after a successful grant application submitted by the Recreation and Parks Department to inventory the park trees. StreetsLA has proposed to license the same tree inventory and work management software that is currently used by Recreation and Parks. In January 2019, the StreetsLA grant proposal was advanced to the next round by CalFire. StreetsLA will report back to Council later this year regarding progress towards securing this grant.

Concurrently, StreetsLA has been meeting with stakeholders including the Department of Water and Power, City Plants, and nonprofit planting partners to explore the possibility of all users managing tree work and tree inventory data within the same software currently used by Recreation and Parks. The use of a common system could improve coordination of tree planting, watering and maintenance activities and enable comprehensive, cross-departmental analysis of the urban forest.

In response to CF 15-0467-S6, StreetsLA currently is unable to calculate net loss or gain of the City's tree canopy over time. StreetsLA does not maintain data on park trees or trees on private property, and the data set StreetsLA possesses relating to street trees is from the 1996 inventory which has not been comprehensively updated.

Tree Trimming and Dead Tree Removal

In the summer of 2018, the Mayor and Council provided StreetsLA with four additional tree trimming crews and one additional dead tree removal crew. StreetsLA is currently hiring and equipping these new crews. By the spring of 2019, StreetsLA will be operating five tree trimming crews and two dead tree removal crews on weekdays. The addition of these crews represents substantial progress in the implementation of one of the key recommendations in the 2015 State of the Street Trees Report (at the time of the report's publication, StreetsLA relied entirely on contractors for proactive tree trimming and did not have any capacity for non-emergency dead tree removals.) As of July 2018 through January 2019, StreetsLA trimmed 11,539 trees and removed 950 dead trees.

Tree Planting and Watering

In the summer of 2018, the Mayor and Council provided StreetsLA with crews for tree planting and watering (previously these functions had no dedicated staff). StreetsLA is currently hiring and equipping these new crews. The creation of dedicated tree planting and watering staff represents substantial progress in the implementation of one of the key recommendations in the 2015 State of the Street Trees Report (at the time of the report's publication, StreetsLA only planted trees for grant-funded streetscape projects, and provided tree watering using staff borrowed from other programs.) We are working on planting trees along critical corridors to maximize benefits and to increase efficiency of watery crews and looking at stormwater capture system to help water trees in certain medians.

Citywide Tree Policy Leader

In the summer of 2018, the Mayor and Council approved a new Street Tree Superintendent position within the Board of Public Works to serve as the City Forest Officer, coordinating the strategic development of tree policy across City departments. The Board of Public Works advertised the position in late 2018 and is currently in the process of evaluating candidates. It is anticipated that the City Forest Officer will be the lead in shaping the City's development of a comprehensive Urban Forest Management Plan.

The design and objectives of an Urban Forestry Management Plan will be one of the core topics of the upcoming Los Angeles Tree Summit to be held in April 2019. Since the December publication of the Dudek report, StreetsLA has been advancing the development of selected street tree components of an Urban Forestry Management Plan, including pursuing grant funding to begin the street tree inventory.

Penalties for Street Tree Violations

An update to Council on this topic was provided in October 2018 in the attached City Administrative Officer report pertaining to CF 15-0448 (Attachment 1).