Communication from Public

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CFAC Recommendations to City Leadership & Infrastructure Departments on the Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP)

Date: September 4, 2026

Submitted by: Community Forest Advisory Committee (CFAC)

CFAC welcomes the formal recognition of trees as an infrastructure asset within the Capital Infrastructure Program. In reviewing the CIP, the Committee believes that this recognition raises an important question: **what does it mean to treat a living organism as a capital asset?**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Together, these recommendations establish a management framework appropriate to infrastructure that is alive.

CFAC recommends that the City:

- **Recognize Living Infrastructure** as an organizing category for biological assets within the CIP.
- **Manage Living Infrastructure through its biological lifecycle**, applying appropriate standards from planning and installation through establishment and long-term stewardship.
- **Embed biological expertise** alongside engineering, finance, planning, and operations from project inception.
- **Account for the value Living Infrastructure creates across City systems**, not solely where its costs are carried.

1. TREES ARE ALIVE

Trees are living infrastructure.

Trees are unlike every other major asset class recognized within the Capital Infrastructure Program.

Streets begin to deteriorate the day they are opened to traffic. Sidewalks crack. Buildings age. Equipment wears. Maintenance slows depreciation, but it rarely increases an asset's capacity to serve the public.

Healthy trees follow a fundamentally different trajectory.

Trees are planted. They become established. They grow. As they mature, their canopies expand, their cooling capacity increases, they intercept greater volumes of stormwater, remove more air pollution, store more carbon, and provide greater public benefit than they did when they were first planted.

Trees are the only major capital asset whose capacity to serve the public increases through much of its useful life when properly managed.

This distinction is more than biological. It should fundamentally influence how the City evaluates investment, maintenance, lifecycle planning, depreciation, replacement, and long-term public value. Most capital assets depreciate over time despite continued maintenance. Healthy trees generally appreciate in public value throughout much of their useful life. As they mature, the services they provide increase, the return on the City's original investment grows, and the benefits accrue not only to the tree itself, but to surrounding infrastructure, neighborhoods, and the public at large.

The CIP identifies Street Trees, Parkways, Improved Medians, and other biological assets individually. "Living Infrastructure" provides an organizing framework for recognizing what these assets have in common, while preserving their individual asset classifications.

RECOMMENDATION: Establish "Living Infrastructure" as a distinct organizing category within the Capital Infrastructure Program, encompassing the biological assets of the public realm.

2. LIFECYCLE MANAGEMENT

Living Infrastructure has a biological lifecycle, distinct from the lifecycle of engineered capital assets.

The Capital Infrastructure Program establishes expectations for inventory, condition assessment, lifecycle planning, maintenance, investment, performance measurement, and accountability. **These same asset-management principles apply to Living Infrastructure, but their application is unique because the assets are alive.**

For street trees, this distinction can be seen across three interconnected phases of their biological lifecycle.

The first is planning and installation, encompassing species selection, nursery production, procurement standards, site preparation, transportation, inspection, and proper installation.

Installation is the single most consequential moment in a tree's life cycle.

Decisions regarding planting depth, root flare exposure, soil preparation, staking, irrigation, and workmanship create the conditions that will influence the tree's health, structure, and performance for decades.

The second phase is establishment, during which irrigation, inspection, pruning, stake removal, and early maintenance determine whether the tree successfully transitions from a newly installed landscape element into a functioning public asset.

The third phase is long-term stewardship, consisting of routine maintenance, condition assessment, risk management, lifecycle planning, and eventual replacement. Each phase builds upon the one before it, and deficiencies during planning or installation cannot always be corrected through maintenance.

Every hand that touches a tree—from the nursery grower, planting partners, contractor, inspector, maintenance crew, and urban forester—contributes to its long-term performance as a public asset.

Decisions regarding nursery stock quality, root structure, planting depth, staking methods, irrigation, establishment watering, stake removal, pruning, and early maintenance determine whether a tree will mature into a healthy, high-performing public asset or require decades of corrective maintenance.

As the City continues implementing the Capital Infrastructure Program, CFAC recommends that the urban forest be supported by clear biological standards and best management practices throughout its entire lifecycle.

RECOMMENDATION: Manage Living Infrastructure according to biological standards and best management practices throughout its entire lifecycle.

3. BIOLOGICAL EXPERTISE

Living Infrastructure requires biological expertise alongside engineering, finance, planning, and operations.

Because trees and Living Infrastructure are unlike other capital assets administered by the City, their establishment, growth, health, risk, longevity, and performance cannot be evaluated solely through engineering standards or material specifications. They require professional expertise in arboriculture, urban forestry, and plant science **from project inception.**

RECOMMENDATION: As implementation of the Capital Infrastructure Program becomes increasingly centralized, ensure biological expertise is institutionally embedded alongside engineering, finance, planning, and operations from project inception, with urban forestry leadership participating in decisions affecting the City's Living Infrastructure.

4. VALUATION

A living asset that grows in capacity and produces benefits across City systems requires a broader way of accounting for its value.

The value of the ecosystem services provided by Los Angeles' urban forest has been measured. Research conducted by the United States Forest Service (USDA, 2011) estimates the structural replacement value of Los Angeles' urban forest at approximately $12.4 billion. That same research estimates the City's trees provide approximately $10.2 million annually in residential energy savings, $14.2 million annually in air pollution removal, and $1.6 million annually in carbon sequestration, while storing approximately $26.3 million in carbon value. These figures represent only a portion of the measurable ecosystem services provided by the urban forest and do not fully capture broader public health, environmental, and quality-of-life benefits.

These 2011 estimates also predate the City's current emphasis on extreme heat, climate adaptation, stormwater capture, and equitable canopy distribution, further underscoring the importance of accounting for these services in current capital planning.

The long-term value of continued investment has also been demonstrated. The Million Trees Los Angeles (USDA, 2011) benefit-cost analysis projected cumulative public benefits between $1.33 billion and $1.95 billion over thirty-five years, with annual benefits of approximately $38 to $56 per tree, depending upon survival rates. These studies demonstrate that the urban forest can be measured, valued, and evaluated using the same analytical framework applied to every other public asset.

While neglected trees can pose hazards that require responsible inspection and maintenance, a healthy urban forest also reduces many of the risks already confronting Los Angeles.

Expanded canopy moderates extreme heat, reduces stormwater runoff, lowers energy demand, improves air quality, protects surrounding infrastructure, and contributes to healthier, more resilient neighborhoods.

Investment in the urban forest should therefore be understood not simply as maintenance of one asset class, but as an investment that strengthens the performance and resilience of many others.

The costs of planting, establishing, and maintaining Living Infrastructure may be assigned to the departments responsible for those assets, while the resulting benefits reduce demands and future obligations across other City systems. The Capital Infrastructure Program should recognize this cross-system return when evaluating the value of investment in Living Infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION: Account for the value Living Infrastructure creates across City systems, not merely where the costs of the asset are carried.

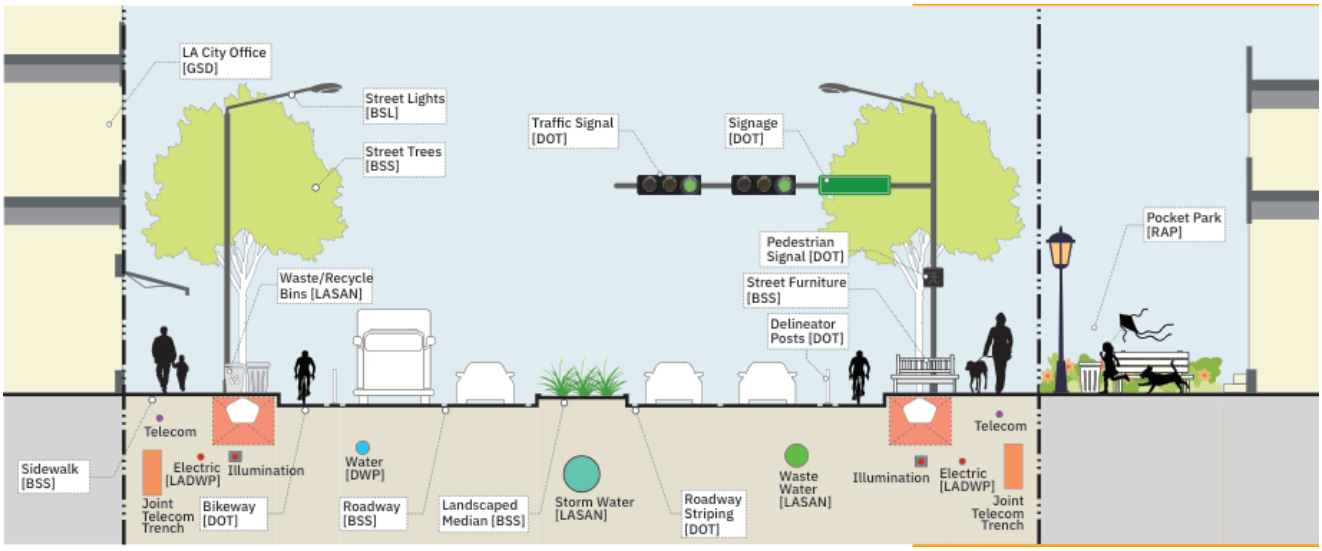
RECOMMENDED CIP REVISIONS

The recommendations above can be incorporated into the existing CIP framework at specific points without restructuring its underlying asset classifications.

CIP LOCATION	CFAC RECOMMENDATION	PROPOSED REVISION	WHY HERE
§2.5.1, p.29 Program Taxonomy	Living Infrastructure	Add “Living Infrastructure” to the CIP taxonomy as an organizing category encompassing biological assets while retaining individual asset classes.	The CIP is developing its citywide asset categories and taxonomy.
§5.0.2, p.51 Asset Class Reporting	Lifecycle Management	For Living Infrastructure, structure condition, maintenance, staffing and forecasting around the biological lifecycle: planning/installation → establishment → long-term stewardship.	Asset Class Reports already require condition, maintenance, staffing, forecasting and strategic recommendations.
§5.2, p.53 Maintenance	Lifecycle Management	Distinguish Living Infrastructure maintenance from maintenance based principally on deterioration and failure. Establishment and stewardship enable living assets to mature and increase in capacity.	The existing maintenance framework focuses principally on deterioration, deferred maintenance and replacement.
§2.5.1, p.29 Governance	Biological Expertise	Include biological expertise in the governance and decision-making structure for projects involving Living Infrastructure.	The CIP is establishing roles for project evaluation, finance/budget advisors and asset-owning departments.
§3.2.2 Investigation Phase / §4.5.3 Intake Gate	Biological Expertise	For projects involving or affecting Living Infrastructure, include biological and urban forestry expertise during the Investigation Phase and in the documentation supporting Intake Gate scoring.	The Investigation Phase establishes asset condition, feasibility, preliminary engineering, and supporting data before the project receives its baseline policy score at the Intake Gate.
§5.4, p.56 Asset Manager Assignments	Living Infrastructure / Biological Expertise	Retain individual asset-manager assignments while recognizing Living Infrastructure as a system crossing asset classes and requiring biological expertise across departmental responsibility lines.	The CIP recognizes that multiple departments participate in assets over their lifecycle.
§4.5, p.49 Project Scoring	Valuation	Include measurable ecosystem services and cross-system benefits of Living Infrastructure in applicable project scoring.	The scoring framework is intended to compare measurable policy outcomes across departments and asset types.
Recommendation 1 CIP Financial Reporting	Valuation	Recognize cross-system return where the department carrying the cost of Living Infrastructure differs from the City system realizing the benefit.	The CIP already calls for accounting for investment, maintenance funding, funding sources and forecast need.

§5.4 ASSET MANAGER ASSIGNMENTS — GRAPHIC OPPORTUNITY

Existing CIP graphic, p. 56:



Source: City of Los Angeles, 2026 Capital Infrastructure Program, §5.4 Asset Manager Assignments, p. 56.

CFAC recommends retaining the individual asset and responsible-party designations while graphically identifying the biological components of the public realm as part of the City's broader Living Infrastructure system.

LIVING INFRASTRUCTURE

Living Infrastructure does not replace existing asset classes or asset-manager assignments. It identifies the shared biological character of assets that require lifecycle management, biological expertise, and valuation appropriate to living systems.

Graphic direction: retain the existing diagram and add one restrained annotation—a thin dashed enclosure, bracket, or light screened field linking the biological elements, labeled "LIVING INFRASTRUCTURE."

On behalf of the Community Forest Advisory Committee, we thank you for your consideration of these recommendations and urge the City Council, Public Works Committee to include these essential revisions to the Capital Infrastructure Program to ensure our city's living infrastructure thrives for generations to come.

Respectfully,

Adele Slaughter

Adele Slaughter, Chair

Los Angeles Community Advisory Committee (CFAC)