Communication from Public

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Council File No:	26-1050
Comments for Public Posting:	Please see letter below prepared by the South LA Tree Coalition in support of Council File 26-1050.

August 17, 2026

Los Angeles City Council
Energy & Environment Committee
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Council File 26-1050, Street Tree Spacing Guidelines

Dear Honorable Committee Members:

The South LA Tree Coalition (SLATC) strongly supports Council File 26-1050 and its direction to the Urban Forestry Division and other relevant City departments to review and modernize Los Angeles' street tree spacing guidelines.

For communities in South Los Angeles, this is ultimately about shade.

South Los Angeles has historically experienced some of the City's lowest tree canopy coverage and greater exposure to extreme heat. Expanding tree canopy in these communities requires not only planting more trees, but creating the conditions that allow appropriately selected trees to grow to maturity and provide meaningful shade.

Los Angeles' existing street tree spacing guidelines require trees to be located at set distances from numerous elements of the public right-of-way, including intersections, traffic control devices, driveways, streetlights, utility poles, fire hydrants, water and gas infrastructure, transit shelters, and other features. Many of these requirements serve legitimate purposes. However, collectively they can substantially reduce the number of locations available for planting, particularly in older, densely developed communities where infrastructure and available public right-of-way are already constrained.

SLATC has experienced these limitations firsthand. During a community greening project around 6th Avenue Elementary School, SLATC worked alongside a Los Angeles Sanitation and Environment team to identify locations where concrete could be removed to create new tree wells. Walking the blocks and marking potential locations required consideration of distances from intersections, the school's parking-lot driveway, light poles, underground utilities serving the school, and other infrastructure. Each requirement was reasonable to

consider, but together they significantly influenced where new trees could actually be planted.

Research conducted by the USC Urban Trees Initiative in partnership with the City provides compelling evidence that Los Angeles can reconsider some of these requirements without abandoning the important purposes they serve. USC found that Los Angeles' street tree spacing guidelines are generally more restrictive than those of many peer cities and that modifications to several guidelines, including those involving intersections, utility poles, streetlights, and driveways, could substantially increase potential planting locations. Importantly, the research found that the cumulative benefit of modifying multiple guidelines can be greater than considering each requirement individually.

The equity implications are particularly important. USC's modeling found that existing spacing requirements have a greater impact on planting opportunities in a lower-income, more densely developed neighborhood than in a higher-income neighborhood with more available planting space. Under the alternative spacing scenario studied by USC, the disparity in the number of potential street-tree locations between the two communities was dramatically reduced.

However, increasing the number of potential planting locations alone will not achieve shade equity.

The same research found that even after modifying spacing requirements, significant differences remained in the ability of neighborhoods to accommodate large-stature trees. USC concluded that larger planting spaces and other changes to the public right-of-way will also be necessary to address shade inequity.

This distinction is important for South Los Angeles. Success should not be measured solely by how many additional locations become available for trees. The City's goal should be to increase healthy, sustainable mature canopy and shade, while maintaining pedestrian accessibility and protecting essential infrastructure.

As the departments prepare the report requested by Council File 26-1050, SLATC respectfully recommends that the City:

- evaluate existing spacing requirements collectively, recognizing their cumulative effect on planting opportunities;
- identify which distances are required by law, code, safety standards, or infrastructure requirements and which are administrative guidelines that can be reconsidered based on current evidence and best practices;

- evaluate proposed changes not only by the number of additional planting locations created, but by their potential to support healthy mature canopy and meaningful shade;
- prioritize the effects of proposed changes in historically low-canopy and heat-vulnerable communities; and
- explore opportunities, where feasible, to create larger planting areas and adequate soil volume capable of supporting appropriately selected large-canopy trees while maintaining accessible pedestrian routes.

Modernizing Los Angeles' tree spacing guidelines will not by itself solve the City's canopy inequities. But it is an important and achievable step toward removing unnecessary barriers that make it more difficult to plant and grow trees in the communities that need shade most.

SLATC thanks Councilmember John Lee for bringing this motion forward and encourages the City to use this review as an opportunity to advance Los Angeles' broader goals for urban forest equity, climate resilience, and shade.

Sincerely,

Theresa Maysonet
Co-Founder
South LA Tree Coalition

The South LA Tree Coalition (SLATC) is a community-based nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding and sustaining tree canopy in South Los Angeles. Founded in 2022, SLATC works to address inequities in urban tree coverage through community engagement, advocacy, and on-the-ground greening efforts.