

Healthy Urban Forest, Healthy City

City of Sacramento's Proposed Tree Ordinance

"An urban forestry program really has no end...It will require the continued commitment of citizens, local tree groups and the elected officials of this generation and those of the future."

USDA Forest Service

The Sacramento Tree Foundation is very supportive of the proposed revisions to the City's Tree Ordinance, with one significant recommended revision. As a member of the ordinance citizens review committee the proposed ordinance updates are based on best practices and uniformity, while recognizing a shift from focusing on individual trees to the value and benefits of protecting and expanding the City's tree canopy.

In recognition that up to 90% of the City's urban forest is controlled and managed by private property owners, we believe educating private citizens and establishing an incentive program to meet City standards is the best approach to protecting our existing tree canopy. We strongly support the ordinance provision that states it is in the public interest to protect and promote the City's tree canopy by protecting trees citywide that are 12" dbh and greater. We recommend the city substitute the requirement for a city permit for pruning private protected trees with a 'no-topping' provision and issuing free permit to remove qualified trees.

Background: The majority of trees in the City of Sacramento have been hand-planted since cityhood in 1849. Only narrow ribbons of native trees graced the sides of rivers and creeks. Unique to many western cities, our city grew as our tree canopy grew. Tree canopy protection and planting new trees has been a shared, and necessary, civic and public value for generations. Today, our city's health can be measured by the extent of its tree canopy that cleans our air, conserves summer energy, reduces stormwater runoff, sequesters and stores carbon. In recent

years growing evidenced-based research has shown the inextricable link between abundant, robust, healthy urban forest and the quality of life of city neighborhoods and the health and well-being of its residents. Optimizing tree canopy throughout city neighborhoods, street systems and business districts is a practical and compelling policy goal; yet, a goal that has not been met. Too many neighborhoods, specifically in north and south Sacramento are deprived of tree canopy and their related benefits and values.

During the beginning years of the 21st century, urban forest management began to place more emphasis on the life supporting, environmental friendly benefits of protecting and expand tree canopy. Trees and tree canopy have become even more critical today as key elements in addressing climate readiness and resiliency. The city's carbon footprint can be measurably reduced by adopting citywide tree canopy protection and tree planting policies.

Recommendations: The proposed tree ordinance calls on all citizens and property owners to participate in supporting the health and expansion of our city's tree canopy. On the one hand the ordinance has widened the protection of trees to both public and private trees. On the other hand, it has also has made tree removal simple for homeowners and property owners. If your tree is 12" dbh or greater and dying or dead, or poses a risk to property or life it can be removed. However, the typical removal can be costly and time consuming as proposed in the revise ordinance. We recommend for private protected trees that qualify under the ordinance for removal that the city provide free inspection and a free removal permit. In consideration of staffing levels and resources, the good intent of the majority of city residents and the implementation of a best practices pruning educational program, we recommend the ordinance allow the pruning of private protected trees without a City permit. In order to stop the most

dangerous and improper pruning of trees, we recommend an additional provision in the ordinance that prohibits the topping of all trees citywide.

Growing and managing one of our City's greatest assets – our urban forest - will only be successful when approached as a collaborative undertaking. In this approach, citizens, City urban forest services, private tree and landscape companies, nurseries and community benefit tree groups will all be working together to continue the deservedly earned national recognition as the City of Trees, second to only Paris, France.

