



City Council Memorandum

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL **DATE: FEBRUARY 6, 2024**
FROM: PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT **WARDS: ALL**
SUBJECT: URBAN FORESTRY POLICY MANUAL UPDATE

ISSUE:

Approve an update to the City’s Urban Forestry Policy Manual.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council approve the updated Urban Forestry Policy Manual.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Land Use, Sustainability, and Resilience Committee met on May 8, 2023, with Chair Plascencia, Vice Chair Fierro and Member Edwards present to consider updates to the Urban Forestry Policy Manual. Following discussion, the Committee voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council approve the Urban Forestry Policy Manual update.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Riverside is known as a City of Trees, having been designated as a “Tree City, USA” by the National Arbor Day Foundation every year since 1987. The purpose of the Urban Forestry Policy Manual (Manual) is to provide guidelines for the preservation and protection of our tree heritage and the Urban Forest of Riverside. The Manual provides guidelines for the planting, pruning, preservation and removal of all trees in City rights-of-way based on specifications established by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), the National Arborists Association (NAA), and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

On January 11, 2021, staff provided an update on the 2015 Manual to the Land Use, Sustainability, and Resilience Committee (Committee) for the Committee to provide recommendations on any desired modifications to the Manual. At that time, the Committee directed staff to work with an Ad-Hoc Committee of the Park and Recreation Commission (Commission) to receive further recommendations on updating the Manual to reflect current needs and changes. In addition, the Committee requested the following items be considered with the Commission’s Parks Ad Hoc Committee:

1. Research ways of providing advanced notice to area residents when trees are being removed.
2. Research ways of planting new trees before trees are removed to help maintain continuity of the urban forest in neighborhoods.
3. Work with additional community, volunteer, and environmental groups throughout the city.
4. Provide public outreach regarding the benefits and assets of the urban forest.
5. Draw clear distinctions between public and private trees.

On April 2, 2022, the first meeting was held with the Commission's three-member Ad Hoc Committee and Public Works staff. A background of the Manual and the requests from the Land Use, Sustainability, and Resilience Committee were provided to the members. A guest speaker from the Inland Empire Forest Council was in attendance and provided an update on current industry practices. Additionally, a presentation was provided to the Ad Hoc Committee on the urban forestry database and a field trip was conducted to view "stately" trees of Riverside.

On May 4, 2022, a second meeting was held with guest speakers from TreePeople and board members of Victoria Avenue Forever. A discussion was held on items that should be included for updating the Manual.

On June 15, 2022, a third meeting was held with the Regional Urban Forester for CalFire as the guest speaker. Discussions continued on items related to the update of the Manual.

On July 13, 2022, a fourth meeting was held at the Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District headquarters with their Public Affairs Manager as a guest speaker. Discussions continued on items related to the update of the Manual, along with a tour of the Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District's gardens.

In conducting the Ad Hoc Committee meetings and hearing from the guest speakers, many ideas and suggestions came forward to help enhance the Manual and bring public awareness to the benefits of the urban forest. Examples of these items include but are not limited to:

1. Creating an in-house database of tree inventory instead of relying on contractors
2. Adding information regarding construction management when working around trees
3. Adding a 'tree standards acknowledgment' before businesses can obtain a Business Tax License for landscapers/tree workers
4. Working with the Planning Division on trimming standards for new developments
5. Airing RiversideTV educational segments on trees
6. Providing training for arborists working in the City
7. Creating a flow chart of responsibilities and processes
8. Streamlining the Manual by adding more pictures and fewer words
9. Periodic Manual updates in accordance with ANSI Standards which release every five years
10. Creating a campaign for people to sign pledges on Anti-Topping
11. Improving public outreach efforts

On January 9, 2023, staff provided a progress update on the Manual to the Committee for feedback and to allow additional time to continue working on the updates. The Committee received the report, approved additional time to continue working on the updates, and requested the following items be considered:

1. Update the branding of the Manual so it has a City of Riverside look and is consistent with City branding
2. Provide a clear method for notification to the community about tree removals
3. Provide options relative to a Perpetual Tree Care and Planting Fund for the City of Riverside
4. Bring updates to the Committee on the Manual periodically

On March 3, 2023, an updated draft of the Manual was received from the Office of the City Manager, Office of Communications Division. It incorporated the look and consistency of City branding.

On March 13, 2023, a Standard Operating Procedure came into effect for tree removal. Anytime a tree is scheduled for removal that has not been deemed a hazard to public safety, the following will occur:

1. Personal notification is provided to the resident/property owner via telephone call, in-person, email, and/or text. A door hanger is left at the door of the property/residence or mailed within one working day.
2. An 18" x 24" removal notification sign is placed on or near the tree depending on the site location.
3. A work order will be created for removal within three working days of the inspection.
4. 48 hours prior to removal, the tree removal contractor will provide a door hanger to the affected address advising of the tree removal.
5. 48 prior to removal, the tree removal contractor will place a No Parking sign on the tree.

Staff is currently researching options for the most effective method of hosting a Perpetual Tree Care and Planting Fund to pursue and secure additional funding to assist with the long-term care of the urban forest.

Staff is committed to providing continuous updates on the Manual to the Committee and Council as they come forward.

City staff conducted additional review of the Manual and has made several other revisions to ensure the document reflects our current best practices, and these updates are included in the attached draft Manual.

DISCUSSION:

Moving Forward with the Urban Forestry Policy Manual and Sustainability

The Public Works Department will continue to provide informational updates to the Land Use, Sustainability, and Resilience Committee, Park and Recreation Commission and the Commission's Ad Hoc Committee following City Council's approval of the Manual.

Through funding from the Inflation Reduction Act, signed into law by President Biden on August 16, 2022, the United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service (USDA-FS) is making historic investments in boosting the nation's tree cover in urban, suburban and rural communities nationwide. The Forest Service received 842 applications seeking over \$6 billion and selected 385 grant proposals for award of \$1.13 billion to entities working to increase equitable access to trees and green spaces, and the many benefits they provide. All of the funding will flow to disadvantaged communities and funded proposals are located in all 50 states.

On June 1, 2023, the City of Riverside Public Works Department submitted a grant proposal to the United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service requesting \$8.3 million, including dollar for dollar in-kind matching, to create a city-wide tree inventory and canopy assessment, development of a tree management database, completion of an urban forest management plan, planting 1,500 trees and a suite of outreach and educational activities to support these efforts. TreePeople, a southern California nonprofit, was designated as a key partner, along with numerous local organizations. The project prioritized the city’s disadvantaged neighborhoods to enhance their access to the urban forest and provide environmental justice.

On September 14, 2023, the Public Works Department received notification from the USDA-FS that we were awarded \$1,000,000. This was a highly competitive grant process and Public Works received one of 43 awards made to entities in California. Staff are currently working with the USDA on the usage of the award funds to create an in-house database of street trees, park trees, facility trees, and an estimated count of private trees. The database will be regularly updated by City staff and contain details such as work history, tree species, locations, conditions, and more. Additionally, it will offer insights into canopy coverage and heat-prone areas, aiding resource allocation for cooling efforts. The public will have access to this database, fostering engagement with our urban forest.

Further, this comprehensive tool will play a pivotal role in shaping our urban forest's future, supporting the development of a long-term Master Urban Forest Management Plan in alignment with the Urban Forestry Policy Manual. Together, these initiatives will advance our goals of reducing heat indexes, optimizing water usage, improving tree placement, and promoting public outreach for the good of our urban forest.

The City’s Urban Forest provides social, communal, environmental, and economic benefits to the entire community. These benefits include calming effects associated with being around trees, reduced noise and glare, habitat for wildlife, improved air quality, reduction of heat indexes and water runoff, and help to increase property values. With an estimated value of over \$449 million, the City’s urban forest provides value to the entire community.

Ongoing Actions Related to Urban Forestry

To meet the objectives set forth within the City’s planning documents, staff have worked diligently to pursue grant funding that allows for the planting of additional trees. The following is a summary of awarded grant funds:

1. The 2018 Urban Greening Grant includes the planting of 453 trees at a new urban farmland resource & training center.
2. The 2019 Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities program grant includes the planting of hundreds of trees across the right of way and surrounding the upcoming Vine Street Mobility Hub.
3. The 2019 Urban Greening Grant includes planting of trees along a two-mile stretch of the planned Gage Canal Trail.
4. The 2020 Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) grant program includes the planting of 1,000 trees on city right of ways and 1,000 trees on private property in the Eastside Neighborhood.
5. The 2022 CaliforniansforAll Grant includes funding for Youth Fellows that are assigned to both the TreePeople non-profit organization and the City of Riverside Public Works Department, Landscape and Urban Forestry Division, to assist with planting, caring for and assessing trees throughout the City.

The City will continue to pursue funding opportunities to augment and care for its urban forest.

Other Noteworthy Endeavors Pertaining to the Urban Forest

- The Public Works Department is partnering with Feeding America, to glean fruit from the public right-of-way City-maintained orange trees along Victoria Avenue, to stock local food pantries and feed the hungry.
- The Complete Streets Ordinance increases opportunities for tree plantings as part of public roadway projects and requires that all participating development projects provide street trees.
- An additional \$2 million was allocated from Measure Z to trim all City palms on a two-year cycle.
- An additional \$250,000 was allocated from Measure Z to plant additional trees throughout the city.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This item contributes to **Strategic Priority 4 – Environmental Stewardship** and **Goal 4.5 - Maintain and conserve 30% of Riverside’s natural lands in green space including, but not limited to, agricultural lands and urban forests in order to protect and restore Riverside’s rich biodiversity and accelerate the natural removal of carbon, furthering our community’s climate resilience.**

This item aligns with each of the five Cross-Cutting Threads as follows:

1. **Community Trust** – Management of the city’s urban forest and landscapes benefit all city residents, businesses, and visitors by helping to remove gaseous air pollutants, sequestering carbon, and provides shade helping to cool our city during hot summer days.
2. **Equity** – Approval of this action benefits all who live near or travel through the city.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – Maintaining City-owned trees and landscapes and their infrastructure supports Public Works’ efforts to minimize inefficiencies and maximize reliability.
4. **Innovation** – By updating the Urban Forestry Policy Manual and looking for additional methods of funding, such as grants to improve technology that manages the urban forest, the Public Works Department is committed to using the best possible resources available in today’s ever-changing markets.
5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – Trees have been noted as being the “lungs of the earth.” Updating the Urban Forestry Policy Manual through researching and implementing current improved methods in the industry that will better enhance the long-term care of our urban forest demonstrates that the City of Riverside is committed to sustainability and resiliency by maintaining and supporting our valuable urban forest on a continuous basis, helping to improve the environment and the quality of life for our community.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this update.

Prepared by: Robert Filiar, Urban Forestry Manager
Approved by: Gilbert Hernandez, Public Works Director
Certified as to availability of funds: Kristie Thomas, Finance Director/Assistant Chief Financial Officer
Approved by: Kris Martinez, Assistant City Manager
Approved as to form: Phaedra A. Norton, City Attorney

Concurs with;



Gaby Plascencia, Chair
Land Use, Sustainability, and Resilience Committee

Attachments:

1. 2015 Urban Forestry Policy Manual
2. Draft of 2023 Urban Forestry Policy Manual
3. Presentation