

Sierra Club Tree Team

Presentation to the Oakland City
Council Public Works Committee

6.9.15

Purpose of this Presentation

- To indicate to the Public Works Committee the importance of the urban forest to the City's public infrastructure.
- To suggest ways to improve the City's involvement in growing the urban forest.

City's History with Tree Planting

- The City ended the tree planting and aesthetic tree pruning program in 2008.
- Prior to 2008, the City employed 32 FTE in the Tree Division, and planted ~1,250 trees / year.
- Today, the number is 15 FTE, and no trees are planted.
- The City now defacto relies on volunteers to plant trees.
- We estimate we are losing 500-1000 street trees per year of our ~40,000 total.

Trees are the Responsibility of the Municipality

- We support tree planting and pruning as a function of Public Works
 - Paid regular permanent professional staff is the preferred choice
- Urban Forests ARE Urban Infrastructure
 - Urban trees form part of the network of urban infrastructure that supports a city's ability to function in its environment.
 - To achieve the benefits that this infrastructure provides, cities must invest in and maintain this infrastructure, just as they do the streets, water and sewer lines, streetlights, etc.
 - Trees are *long-lived public assets* that provide benefits long after the year in which they are planted.
 - An investment in Oakland's trees is an investment in long-term resiliency.

Multiple Benefits of an Urban Forest

- Mitigate Greenhouse gases
- Improve Air Quality
- Cooling and calming of the urban environment
- Improving water quality and reducing stormwater runoff

- These goals support Oakland's efforts to achieve resiliency, adapt to climate change, improve public health, and reduce pollution.

- These benefits are measurable and achievable.

Who We Are and What We Do

- Founded in 2010 and led by Arthur Boone, with support from several certified arborists, an Advisory Board, and dozens of tree planters.
- All volunteers.
- Affiliated with the Northern Alameda County Group of the Bay Area Sierra Club Chapter
- About 250 trees per year, over 1,300 to date.
- All trees meet the City's guidelines; records are supplied to the Public Works Tree Division.
- This model, even when considering the two other tree planting groups, can not keep pace with Oakland's annual loss of public trees.

How Much Our Program Costs Us

- The SCTT estimates that we spend about \$140 per tree installation
 - taking into account that about half of the sites need to have concrete removed at \$125 per tree well.
- The true cost, when valuing labor, is closer to \$340 per tree installation
- Nobody is paid for labor except for:
 - occasional contract work to draw up planting designs for school sites, and
 - contracting for concrete removal.

How We Are Funded

- We are not funded by the Sierra Club
- Some homeowners now pay using a fee-for-service model
- The rest is donations and grants
- Ultimately, this is an unsustainable model, as it relies too heavily on volunteer coordinators to do work that city staff is needed for.

The City CAN Resume Tree Planting

- We understand that the city will not add back any staff to this function in this biennial budget.
- The city can begin to reclaim its responsibility to plant and maintain the urban forest by:
 1. Dedicating a line item amount in each year of the budget to support tree planting volunteer groups.
 - We recommend a grants program to community groups administered by the Director of Public Works
 - We estimate that \$350,000 per year is achievable and a healthy down-payment on re-establishing the urban forest.
 - This is an incredibly cost-effective way to stem the losses.
 - Competitive grants may encourage more efforts
 2. Beginning a conversation about funding for trees through the Capital Improvement Program.

Questions?

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