

## Comprehensive Urban Forestry Plan | DRAFT Policy Elements

✓ Reviewed by Interdepartmental Staff

\_\_\_ Reviewed by Urban Forestry Board Representative Daniel VanTreeck

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### What are the Policy Elements and Why Are They So Important?

The Policy Elements are the guiding framework of the Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan (CUFP). Since the city functions that affect the urban forest, both directly and indirectly, are so varied and widespread throughout City departments, each single Policy Element must be broad enough to encompass all of those functions. Individual Policy Elements are seeds of change. Collectively, the Policy Elements provide a basic strategy for the City to realize the vision for the urban forest. However, the tactical approach to addressing each of these Policy Elements will be the responsibility of each City department in the Departmental Operational Plan (DOP) based on their unique core missions, limitations, and opportunities. In conjunction with the other parts of this Plan they provide a comprehensive approach to urban forest planning and will ultimately guide the management of Austin's public urban forest resource.

### The Policy Element "Test"

Policy Elements are grouped into categories based on their urban forest topical category. The following rules were used in determining the relevance and appropriateness of including each Policy Element:

*Does this policy element support the CUFP vision?*

*Does this policy element support the guiding principles?*

*Is this policy element pertinent to public trees and vegetation?*

*Is this policy element comprehensive?*

*Does this policy element say "what" and not "how"?*

*Is this policy element strategic and not tactical or operational?*

*Will this policy element be relevant for the next 10-20 years?*

### Public Input

Public input was sought in determining which topical categories are most important for the Austin community (see Public Engagement Section). The order in which the Policy Element Categories appear indicate the order of importance to the Austin community based on the input collected. City departments should note which Categories are most important to the community and prioritize those in the course of implementing the Departmental Operational Plans (DOP's). With guidance and support from the Urban Forester, each City department will be required to report on their annual progress in addressing each Policy Element.

### Staff Input

Interdepartmental staff provided feedback and edits to the Policy Elements prior to final editing by the Urban Forestry Board. The following departments provided feedback:

Parks and Recreation Department

Planning and Development Review Department

Austin Fire Department

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Austin Water Utility  
Watershed Protection Department  
Austin Bergstrom International Airport  
Office of Sustainability  
Public Works Department  
Austin Transportation Department

## **How Do The Policy Elements Fit in the Plan?**

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#### **A. URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

Policies related to City organizational structure and staffing levels, staff qualifications, involvement of City forestry staff in other City disciplines and functions, and funding for urban forest programs and efforts.

**UF-1 Management Priorities**

Consider the benefits of the urban forest via scientific research when balancing between the competing needs of the environment, budget limitations, utilities and infrastructure, safety, the rights of property owners, and the desires of the public.

**UF-2 Resource Needs**

Ensure adequate resources are dedicated to the management of Austin's urban forest and its ecosystem function to support the City's urban forest vision.

**UF-3 Urban Forestry Funding Allocation**

Allocate an appropriate proportion of funding from City budgets for urban forest management.

**UF-4 Funding Sources for Maintenance**

Utilize existing or develop new funding sources such as assessment districts, user fees, fundraising, donations, grants, tax benefit financing, an urban forest utility fee to fund urban forest management.

**UF-5 Departmental Urban Forest Management Plan**

Create a Departmental Operational Plan (DOP) for departmental urban forest management, consisting of an analysis of existing conditions and regulatory framework, desired future conditions, and a work plan based on the DOP Action Matrix. Update the DOP to reflect changing policies and regulations, standards, best management practices, and accomplishments.

**UF-6 Standards of Care for Trees and Plants**

Incorporate City of Austin Standards of Care for Trees and Plants into departmental policies and operations. Regularly contribute recommendations to City of Austin's Standards of Care for Trees and Plants revisions, coordinated by the Urban Forester, according to the best available science and current best management practices, accepted standards and guidelines to support the DOP.

**UF-7 Coordination of Efforts and Partnerships**

Develop partnerships between other City departments and coordinate with federal, state, regional and local governmental jurisdictions, local community non-profits and the private sector, to preserve, restore, manage, and design our urban forest.

**UF-8 Staff Qualifications & Training**

For all staff engaged in urban forest management and tree maintenance decisions, employ qualified individuals and provide regular training to maintain qualifications up to and above -recognized standards and best practices and ensure that decisions are being made and maintenance is being performed according to industry-recognized standards and best practices.

**UF-9 Contracts**

In contracting work, employ firms qualified to perform urban forest management according to recognized standards and best practices as well as Austin's standard of care for trees and vegetation. Develop and incorporate standards and best practices into contract specifications. Including IPM BMP's

**UF-10 Urban Forester Support**

Provide support to the Urban Forester and other departments to meet mandated directives assigned to the Urban Forester.

**UF-11 Data Collection and Management**

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Collect data regarding Austin's urban forest, such as quantity of canopy cover, forest condition and diversity of species, to support the creation of a Departmental Operational Plan (DOP) and inform urban forest management decisions. Collaborate with federal, state, regional, and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, and the private sector to collect and manage data.

#### **UF-12 Urban Forest Risk Management**

Consider and incorporate urban forest risk into city functions related to emergency management planning.

#### **UF-13: Land Classification**

Establish or adopt a common land classification system to identify landcover and public purpose to inform management functions and application of standards of care.

#### **UF-14: REGULATORY REVIEW**

Identify and modify City regulations that are conflicting or hinder achievement of the vision for the urban forest. Where possible, work with intra and interdepartmental partners and external stakeholders to better align the CUFP or regulations with one another.

### **B. EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

Policies related to public education, outreach, stewardship, and training of residents and public and private entities as well as incentives for urban forest promotion to achieve the vision for the urban forest.

#### **EO-1 Education**

Provide appropriate resources, technical, and educational materials to communicate values, goals, objectives, policies, incentives, standards, and regulations in relation to the management of Austin's urban forest. Increase awareness of urban forest ecosystem issues and support citywide urban forest education efforts.

#### **EO-2 Promote Stewardship**

Develop capacity programming that leverages the commitment of citizens to engage in stewardship of Austin's urban forest.

#### **EO-3 Incentives**

Develop voluntary and incentive-based programs to build broader community support for the urban forest.

#### **EO-4 Partnerships**

Partner with federal, state, regional, and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, the private sector and others in education and outreach efforts to improve collaboration and ensure consistent messaging.

#### **EO-5 Records and Information**

Collect and make available urban forestry information to the public.

#### **EO-6 Education of Urban Forest Service Providers**

Ensure that private urban forest service providers, individuals that wish to provide professional urban forest maintenance services, and others whose work may impact the urban forest are educated about Austin's policies, regulations, and standards.

#### **EO-7 Public Demonstration Projects**

Develop and support publicly accessible demonstration projects that achieve the City's urban forest vision and highlight sound urban forest management. Document and implement effective strategies citywide.

### **C. PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION**

Policies related to responsible public urban forest preservation via regulatory approach, flexibility in City requirements for development, modifications of City fiscal policies and other approaches that enhance preservation.

#### **PR-1 Flexible Regulatory Approaches**

Recognize differing land use needs and characteristics, structure regulatory approaches in a manner that provides flexibility and various options to support the preservation of the urban forest. Examine regulations to reconsider disincentives for urban forest preservation.

#### **PR-2 Protection of Trees During Development**

Evaluate and enhance urban forest protection during and after development to promote the long-term health and survival of urban forest elements retained during development.

**Prominent and Rare Urban Forest Elements** Provide additional protection for prominent, sensitive, native, and/or rare urban forest elements during and after development. Protect trees based on species type/habitats.

#### **PR-3 Protect Steep Slopes**

Increase retention of existing trees and vegetation that help stabilize steep slope areas in order to increase public safety, maintain slope stability, decrease soil erosion, and retain environmental function and natural character.

#### **PR-4 Partnerships**

Partner with federal, state, regional, and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, City departments, the private sector and others to increase preservation and protection of the urban forest.

#### **PR-5 View Obstructions**

Establish incentives, regulations and education efforts to reduce conflicts between public and private interest and prioritize the urban forest in decisions regarding eliminating scenic or commercial view obstructions, except with regard to public safety or in established view corridors.

#### **PR-6 Vegetation Valuation**

Support and update tree valuation methods to closely reflect the complete functional value of vegetation for use when assessing fines, determining damages or estimating loss.

#### **PR-7 Recovering Vegetation Value**

When preservation of urban forest components is not feasible, recover the complete functional value of the lost resource and mitigate the loss as close in proximity to the loss and as soon as possible.

### **D. PLANTING, CARE AND MAINTENANCE**

Planting, care and maintenance policies are related to the consideration of existing public urban forest resources and proactive planning for sustainable future urban forest resources, understanding inherent conflict between active site use and healthy forests.

#### **PCM-1 Planting Priorities**

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Prioritize tree planting and landscaping on public property particularly in highly visible locations such as business districts and major corridors to maximize environmental, social and economic benefits. Avoid and/or minimize conflicts with existing public infrastructure.

#### **PCM-2 Species Selection**

Encourage the selection of appropriate native species based on project, location, and site conditions.

#### **PCM-3 Urban Forest Planting and Maintenance Plan and Program**

Establish and maintain a strategic planting and maintenance program based on national standards and best management practices. Promote the long-term survival of the urban forest through proactive maintenance to reduce resources expended on reactive or emergency response, to maximize urban forest benefits, and to reduce urban forest mortality.

#### **PCM-4 Planting Stock**

Utilize high-quality planting stock originating from Central Texas region seed-sources and grown in nurseries that simulate Central Texas growing conditions.

#### **PCM-5 Tree Canopy Cover**

Identify canopy goals according to site and ecosystem capacity and develop a plan to achieve them.

#### **PCM-6 Landscape Maintenance Management Plans**

Ensure that trees and vegetation are properly cared for and survive, both during the plant establishment period and in perpetuity through such means as landscape management plans, maintenance agreements, and/or monitoring.

#### **PCM-7 Partnerships**

Partner with federal, state, regional, and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, City of Austin departments, the private sector and others to increase the replenishment, maintenance and care of Austin's urban forest.

#### **PCM-8 Public Safety**

Take reasonable measures to reduce risk of urban forest elements that impact public health and safety.

### **E. PLANNING AND DESIGN**

Policies related to the consideration of existing public urban forest resources and planning for sustainable future urban forest resources on a site level scale.

#### **PD-1 City Design Coordination**

Establish coordination among City departments and utility providers when planning and designing public projects that include landscaping, urban forest protection, planting, maintenance, and urban forest impacts.

#### **PD-2 Infrastructure Design**

Design streets, sidewalks, utilities and other infrastructure with a thorough consideration of existing and proposed vegetation, site use, and standards of care during the planning, design and construction processes.

#### **PD-3 Soil Quality**

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Encourage retention and use of native soils for areas in new developments. Where native soils and growing conditions are not sufficient or optimal encourage use of soils engineered to be supportive of long-term urban forest health and provide a sustainable growing environment for the urban forest.

**PD-4 Soil Volume**

Increase the dedicated airspace and root volume available for urban forest elements to account for long-term desired growth and to assist with achieving the canopy coverage and maintenance goals.

**PD-5 Reduce Soil Compaction**

Avoid the compaction of soils and encourage soil protection and enhancement during and after development to increase or maintain infiltration of stormwater on-site to reduce run-off. Design for site uses that minimize soil compaction in critical areas.

**PD-6 Landscaping and Stormwater Management**

Align the City's landscape regulations and specifications with the integration of landscaping elements and low impact development stormwater management approaches. Incentivize use of techniques that can effectively achieve multiple urban forestry and stormwater management objectives. Some examples include native vegetation preservation, native soil retention and soil amendment, stormwater dispersion and bio-engineering.

**PD-7 Partnerships**

Partner with federal, state, regional and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, the private sector and others to enhance the planning and design of public and private development and improvements in Austin.

**PD-8 Planning Infrastructure Maintenance**

Consider the needs and benefits of Austin's urban forest in conjunction with other infrastructure systems when planning for the long-term maintenance of infrastructure and utilities.

**PD-9 Tailored Incentives**

Develop incentives, programs and/or regulations that are tailored to the needs and characteristics of differing land uses.

**PD-10 Urban Forest and Transportation**

Utilize or enhance urban forest elements in transportation designs to improve flow and safety of traffic and encourage alternative transportation.

**PD-11 Designing for Human Health**

Establish or retain urban forest elements during planning and design to maximize physical and mental human health as well as social health benefits

**PD-12 Design with Maintenance in Mind**

Incorporate pre-planning site assessments and design vegetation plans with consideration for long-term maintenance and resource use. Design for minimal long-term maintenance and resource use while still meeting site use goals.

**F. SUSTAINABLE URBAN FOREST**

Sustainable Urban Forest policies are related to sustainability of the urban forest resource itself and the resources related to its management, such as water (and city assets).

**S-1 Species, Age, and Geographic Diversity**

Increase species diversity, an regionally-appropriate mix of vegetation, mixed-age poluations and a varied distribution of species throughout the City to protect and improve the vigor and the resilience of our urban forest. Align urban forest composition with consideration of predicted flimate patterns.

**S-2 Urban Wood Utilization**

Recycle green waste generated by urban forest maintenance and encourage the highest and best sustainable uses of removed trees and woody material, including reuse on site. Strive for 100% green waste recycling or reuse.

**S-3 Integrated Pest Management**

Incorporate Integrated Pest Management principles into land management practices.

**S-4 Wildlife Habitat**

Enhance wildlife habitat to the maximum extent based on site use through urban forestry policies, design and management practices.

**S-5 Wildfire Risk**

Achieve a balance between community desires for wildfire risk reduction and responsible vegetation management especially within the Wildland Urban Interface

**S-6 Invasive Species Management**

Identify and suppress non-native invasive species. Provide public education about the detriment of non-native invasive species to the urban forest particularly when related to other management policies.

**S-7 Water Conservation**

When utilizing water for urban forestry engage in water use practices that maximize the use of non-potable sources and conserve potable sources.

**S-8 Urban Forest Pests**

Identify, plan for, and respond to critical urban forest pests to reduce their impact on the community's urban forest.

**S-9 Partnership**

Partner with federal, state, regional, and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, the private sector and others to accomplish the sustainability goals of Austin's urban forest ecosystem.