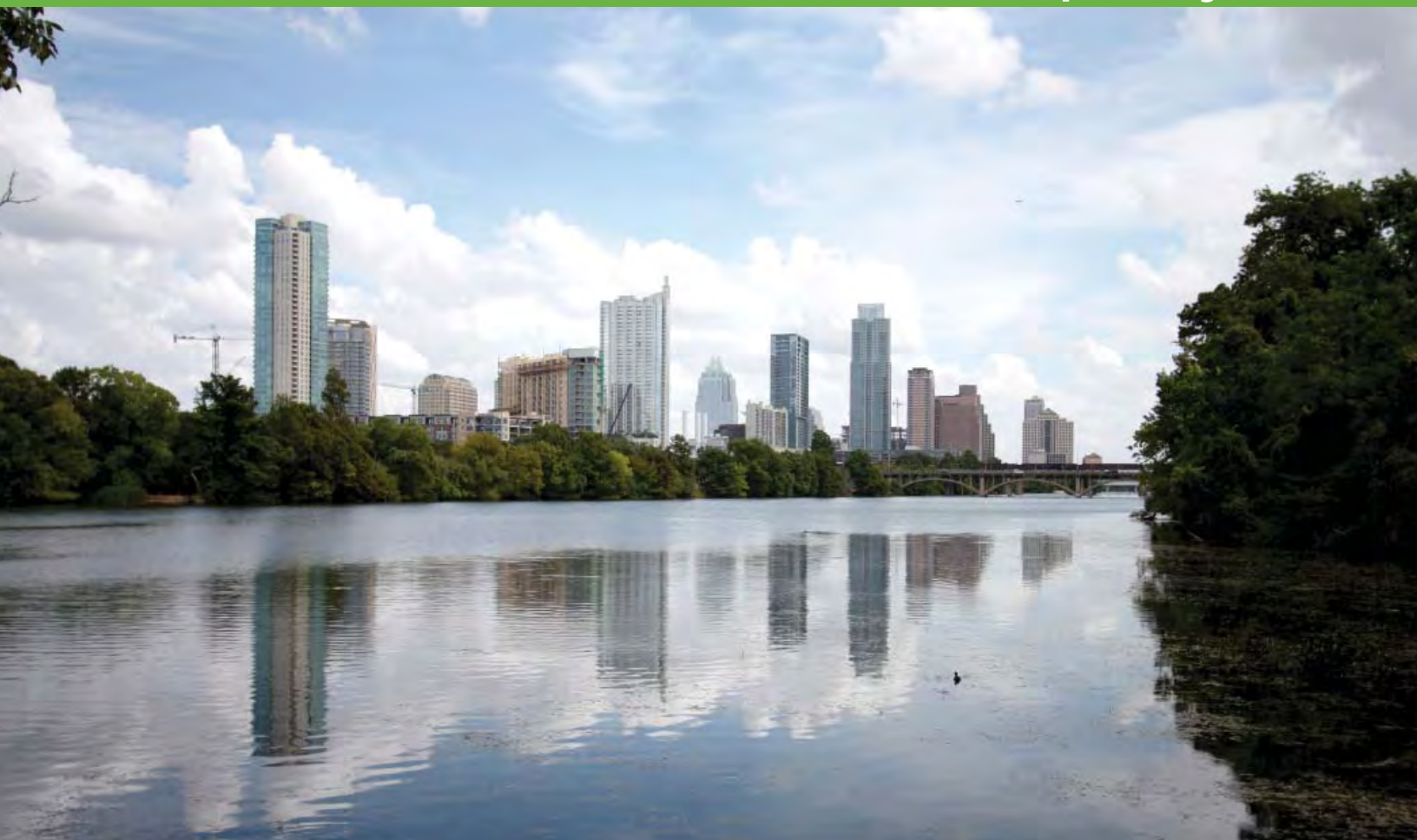




**The City of Austin**  
Urban Forestry Board

# Austin's Urban Forest Plan

## A Master Plan for Public Property









## *Our Vision...*

*Austin's urban forest is a healthy and sustainable mix of trees, vegetation, and other components that comprise a contiguous and thriving ecosystem valued, protected, and cared for by the City and all of its citizens as an essential environmental, economic, and community asset.*



Credit: City of Austin, Urban Forestry Program

Downtown Austin through the trees at Auditorium Shores

## Letter from Urban Forestry Board

---

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

We are happy to present Austin's Urban Forest Plan – A Master Plan for Public Property for your consideration. Sections 6-3-5 and 1-1-183 of City Code require that the Urban Forestry Board (UFB) develop a comprehensive plan for management of trees and other vegetation located on Austin public property. A large portion of the trees and other vegetation within the City is located on private property, which is outside of both the scope of this plan and the purview of the UFB.

For almost three years, both the UFB and Urban Forestry Department staff have worked closely on this strategic master plan, which represents the first major step towards comprehensive management of Austin's urban forest. Implementation is envisioned over the next several years through separate Departmental Operational Plans (DOPs) where specific issues such as existing tree care, new plantings, and canopy coverage goals will be outlined. The UFB will work closely with the Urban Forester and other departments on both development and implementation of the DOPs. We are proposing to have the UFB review and update the master plan no later than five years after it is approved.

Since work began in 2011, board members and City staff have contributed countless hours on plan development in regular UFB meetings, working group meetings, special called meetings, and public input events. We are very grateful for the contributions to this plan from other boards, various City departments, and countless members of the public. These contributors are far too numerous to mention individually, but specific thanks is warranted for the very in-depth review and suggestions from the Environmental Board, the Parks and Recreation Board, and the Austin Heritage Tree Foundation. At the staff level, no amount of gratitude is enough for the enormous effort from Angela Hanson, the Urban Forester, and her very dedicated staff. All of us on the UFB have contributed countless hours to this effort, but it has been led from start to finish by former Chair Patrick Brewer, who has provided far more time and professional expertise than any other board member.



We are happy to answer any questions that you may have and include any improvements. We look forward to working with you and staff to provide Austin residents with the beautiful and healthy public forest that our very special city deserves.

Sincerely,

The Urban Forestry Board

Patrick Brewer

Nicholas Classen

Ryan Fleming

Christopher Kite

Peggy Maceo

Len Newsom



# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the citizens of Austin, Texas who contributed 2,160 responses and provided helpful feedback to shape and guide this plan.

## URBAN FORESTRY BOARD

Patrick Brewer  
Chris Kite  
Nicholas Classen  
Ryan Fleming

Peggy Maceo  
Len Newsom  
Dan VanTreeck

## CITY OF AUSTIN STAFF

Angela Hanson  
Leah Haynie  
Emily King  
Warren Whitehead  
Cheyenne Krause  
Keith Mars  
Rob Grotty  
Tonya Swartzendruber  
Josh Portie  
Lucia Athens  
Mario Porras  
John Robinson  
Mike Personett  
David Lambert  
Mark Baker  
Christopher Meyer  
Kristin Carlton  
Denise Delaney  
Carl Wren  
Matt Hollon  
Bonny Holmes

Walter Passmore  
Alan Halter  
Keith O'Herrin  
  
Michael Embesi  
Jessica Wilson  
Humberto Rey  
Jon Meade  
Carol Haywood  
Mitzi Cotton  
Mark Cole  
Jim Linardos  
Ray Henning  
Andy Halm  
Michael Bogard  
Pamela Abee-Taulli  
Pharr Andrews  
Margaret Valenti  
Kathryn Murray  
Justice Jones  
Larry Schooler



## **OTHER AGENCY STAFF**

Brad Hamel — Texas A&M Forest Service

Paul Johnson — Texas A&M Forest Service

## **COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**

Austin Heritage Tree Foundation

Tree Folks

# Table of Contents

## **1 INTRODUCTION (TO BE UPDATED)**

Austin's Urban Forest Plan at a Glance  
Introduction to the Urban Forest Plan  
Benefits of the Urban Forest  
The Goals of the Urban Forest Plan  
The Process  
The Vision for Austin's Urban Forest  
Guiding Principles

## **15 STATE OF THE URBAN FOREST**

Regional Context & History  
Indicators of Sustainable Urban Forestry  
- Vegetative Resource  
- Community Framework  
- Resource Management  
Urban Forestry Challenges

## **57 IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementation Goals  
Policy Elements  
Urban Forester Implementation Responsibilities

## **75 APPENDICES**

- A. Austin Performance Indicators
- B. Public Engagement Process
- C. Public Comments
- D. Departmental Operational Plan Template
- E. Tree & Vegetation Regulations
- F. Tree & Vegetation Policies
- G. Professional Standards
- H. Standard Operating Procedures
- I. Organizational Structure
- J. Supporting Plans
- K. Models
- L. Glossary

## **79 BIBLIOGRAPHY**



## List of Figures (TO BE UPDATED)

- 1.1 | City of Austin Owned Land & Parkland
- 1.2 | Tree Benefits
- 1.3 | Public Interest in Urban Forestry
- 1.4 | Citizen Participant Goals for the Urban Forest
  
- 2.1 | Austin Ecoregions
- 2.2 | Total Annual Precipitation in Austin (1943-2012)
- 2.3 | Austin Climate Graph (1943-2012)
- 2.4 | Average Annual Wind Prevalence in Austin (1984-1992)
- 2.5 | Historic Tree Canopy Cover
- 2.6 | Percent Tree Canopy Cover in Austin, 2010
- 2.7 | Top 10 Tree Species in Public Right-of-Way and Parks
- 2.8 | DBH Classes of Austin Trees by Small, Medium, and Large Growth
- 2.9 | Comparison of Austin DBH Classes vs. Recommended
- 2.10 | Structural (Wood) Condition by Percentage
- 2.11 | Functional (foliage) Condition by Percentage
- 2.12 | Cost-Benefit of Public Street Trees
- 2.13 | Tree-Related Responsibilities by City of Austin Departments
  
- 3.1 | Citizen Prioritization of Urban Forestry Policy Elements
- 3.2 | What Urban Forest Management Items are Important to Fund?

# Austin's Urban Forest Plan at a Glance

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of Austin's Urban Forest Plan is to establish a broad-scoped, long-range vision for Austin's public urban forest. It will provide a framework for City of Austin (City) departments to use as a guide for managing Austin's public urban forest resources in the form of Departmental Operational Plans, and includes a road map for implementation to reach that comprehensive vision. The end result will be a superior plan that identifies positive aspects, responsibilities, and innovations, but serves also as a model to the abutting neighbor, regional property owner, and the larger community.

The document itself is organized into three chapters with associated appendices. Chapters 1 and 2 bring the reader up to speed on the importance of trees and vegetation, while Chapter 3 lays out the implementation strategies for which City departments shall utilize in caring for their respective portions of the urban forest.

The implementation chapter is the true essence of this plan. It is intended to address urban forestry challenges discussed in Chapter 2 and to reflect community visions as outlined in Chapter 1. Ultimately, community visions have informed local urban forestry policies that are embodied in our existing Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, City Code, and other policy documents. The creation and adoption of Austin's Urban Forest Plan seeks to guide overall citywide urban forest management such that implementation tools and Departmental Operational Plans conform to community visions.

Implementation tools consist of goals and actions, time frames for action, and policy elements. Together these strategic tools will work to guide City departments in managing and caring for our urban forest. City departments are intended to use these strategic implementation tools in writing their Departmental Operational Plans. Finally, an annual performance report card will comprehensively address progress towards our community's goals.



### A ROADMAP

Chapter 1  
Page 1

#### **Why do we need a plan?**

Introduction to the Urban Forest Plan

Chapter 2  
Page \_

#### **What is Austin's Urban Forest?**

State of the Urban Forest

Chapter 3  
Page \_

#### **How Will We Reach Our Vision?**

Implementation Goals & Actions

Policy Elements

↳ Departmental Operational Plans

Appendix

#### **Annual Reporting**

Performance Report Card

Departmental Operational Plans


# Community Voices



The Urban Forestry Board and City of Austin staff engaged the public at key intervals to prioritize the elements of the Plan. One method was through Leaf the Tree pop-up activities designed to capture a sample of public opinion concerning Austin's urban forest. Gathered on these two pages is a sample of the comments received from the community.

For a full list of public comments including all email and SpeakUp Forum discussions please visit [austinurbanforestry.org](http://austinurbanforestry.org).

# We asked, “What should be done for trees and vegetation in our public spaces?”



Preserve older trees and protect their critical root zone.



Plant shade trees in public cemeteries, including large species.



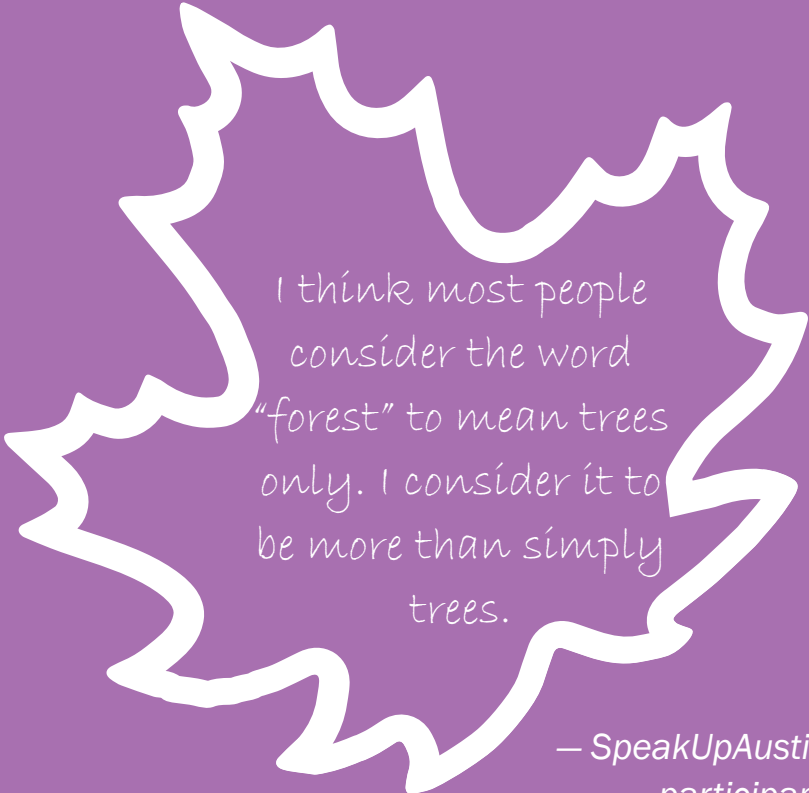
More native vegetation.



Establish standards for tree care that are based on scientific principles and applied uniformly.




# Introduction



I think most people consider the word "forest" to mean trees only. I consider it to be more than simply trees.

— *SpeakUpAustin*  
participant

1



The plan has to be specific and include goals with action plans with time lines.

*Leaf the Tree —*  
participant

This chapter introduces Austin's Urban Forest Plan by providing information on why we should care about our trees and vegetation and the benefits derived from them. In addition, this chapter lays out Austin's vision, goals, and guiding principles.

**WHAT IS AN URBAN FOREST?**

**SCOPE OF THIS PLAN**

**BENEFITS OF THE URBAN FOREST**

**THE NEED FOR A PLAN**

**GOALS OF THE PLAN**

**PROCESS**

**A VISION FOR AUSTIN'S URBAN FOREST**

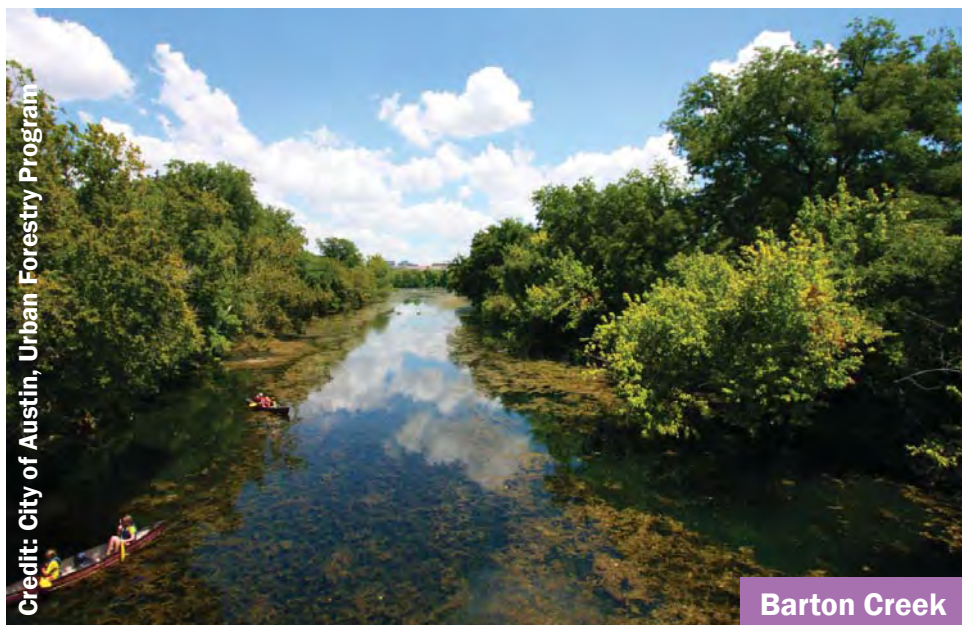
**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

**COMMUNITY VOICES**

Austin is an attractive and vibrant combination of its unique cultural and physical landscape. As the city has grown and changed, Austinites have voiced their love and concern for the impact of that growth and a changing climate on trees and vegetation. As the city faces an unknown future, broad comprehensive planning becomes of paramount importance to support the health and long term-vitality of our public green infrastructure resource.

### WHAT IS AN URBAN FOREST?

At first glance, the term “urban forest” seems like an oxymoron. A forest in a city...how could that be? To understand what we mean by urban forest, it is important to first understand the term “urban” which is a geographic area bound by a municipal jurisdiction and containing a large concentration of people—typically 50,000 or more people according to the United States Census Bureau (2013). The “forest” element consists of all trees and vegetation within an urban area regardless of public or private ownership. A city’s urban forest increases the quality of life for people residing there. The key to ensuring increased quality of life lies in maximizing the various benefits we derive from trees and vegetation located in our parks, along our streets, and in our yards.



#### Defining “Urban Forest”

“The aggregate of all community vegetation and green spaces that provides a myriad of environmental, health, and economic benefits for a community”

(Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition, 2013).

“Urban Forest encompasses all the vegetation, both public and private, within the city.”

— *SpeakUpAustin* participant





### **What is the Public Right-of-Way?**

The City of Austin's public rights-of-way are a land areas owned and maintained by the City. It consists of the street surface, sidewalks, and grassy areas between the street pavement and a property boundary. In Austin, they are usually defined as the roadway plus 10 feet behind the curb. This definition of the City rights-of-way may vary depending on the physical conditions at any given location. The public rights-of-way cover approximately 47 square miles in Austin (City of Austin, 2013 right-of way & public parcels data).

### **SCOPE OF THIS PLAN**

The urban forest does not stop at the edge of our local parks, natural areas, residential yards, and green spaces. It includes trees located within the public right-of-way (i.e. along streets, medians, and sidewalks), along our waterways, and many similar places.

Whether a tree is publicly or privately owned is greatly tied to land ownership. In the United States, urban foresters primarily focus on trees situated on public lands even though, in many cities, the major portion of an urban forest is situated on private land and forest ecosystems exist beyond political boundaries. Sure enough, single-family residences in Austin provide the second-highest acreage of tree canopy coverage after parkland and open space (City of Austin, 2006 tree canopy data). Despite this reality, this plan focuses on trees and vegetation located on public lands over which the City of Austin can exert the most direct influence. The following list contains various land owned by the City. These are the most common areas in which the City manages and maintains the urban forest. See the map on the following page to view the distribution of these land components throughout Austin.

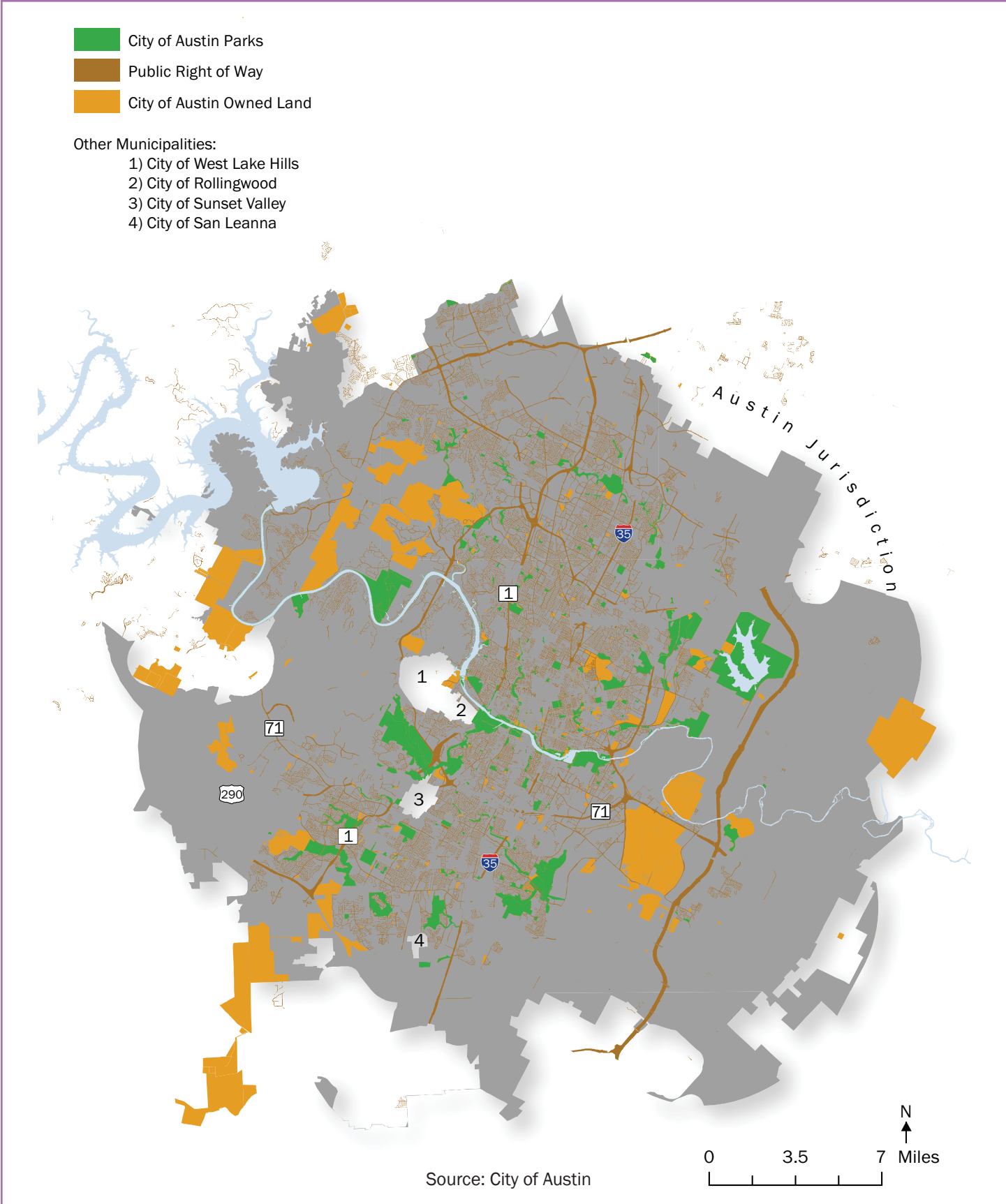
#### **Parkland**

- Neighborhood parks (Eastwoods)
- Pocket parks (Comal)
- District parks (Pease)
- Golf courses (Hancock)
- Greenbelts (Barton Creek Greenbelt)
- Metropolitan parks (Zilker)
- Nature preserves (Decker Tallgrass Prairie Preserve)
- School parks (Kealing Jr High)

#### **Other**

- Cemeteries
- Street rights-of-way
- Medians
- Sidewalks
- Infrastructure easements
- Hike and bike rails
- Riparian areas (Waller Creek, Lady Bird Lake, Barton Springs Pool)
- Planting strips/triangles

Figure 1.1 | City of Austin Owned Land & Parkland





**Street Trees in the ROW along East 6th Street**

Figure 1.1 displays land owned by the City of Austin including parkland and street right-of-ways. Roughly 24% of Austin's total land area, within the city limits, is owned by the City of Austin (City of Austin, 2013 right-of way & public parcels data). A full list of parkland types can be seen on the previous page. Over 56 square miles of parkland is managed throughout Austin (City of Austin, 2013). This is an area roughly the size of 116 Zilker Parks.



BENEFITS OF THE URBAN FOREST

Today, urban forests are increasingly considered an element of a much larger green infrastructure (GI) network that provides benefits to humans (Benepe, 2013, ImagineAustin, 2012; Young, 2011; American Planning Association, 2009). Within this network, the urban forest plays an integral role in Austin’s health and vitality by providing social, ecological, and economic benefits to the community and by enhancing the quality of life for Austin residents. The following are a few benefits commonly provided by trees:

Figure 1.2 | Tree Benefits

Environmental	Frequently Cited Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Air pollution removal</li><li>• Noise pollution reduction</li><li>• Water quality enhancement</li><li>• Carbon sequestration</li><li>• Rainfall/stormwater interception</li><li>• Flood mitigation</li><li>• Urban heat island mitigation</li><li>• Shading/reducing energy usage</li><li>• Controlled stream channel erosion</li><li>• Habitat provided for wildlife</li></ul>	<p>Nowak et al. 2006; Nowak 2002; Akbari et al. 2001</p> <p>Nowak et al. 2006; Nowak 2002; Akbari et al. 2001</p> <p>Cappiella et al. 2005</p> <p>Nowak et al. 2002</p> <p>Nowak et al. 2007; Raciti et al. 2006; Beattie et al. 2000</p> <p>Cappiella et al. 2005</p> <p>Streiling &amp; Matzarakis 2003; Akbari et al. 2001; Rosenfeld et al. 1998</p> <p>Donovan &amp; Butry, 2009; Akbari et al. 2001</p> <p>Raciti et al. 2006; Cappiella et al. 2005</p> <p>Rudd et al. 2002; Fernandez-Juricic, 2000</p>
Social	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Crime reduction</li><li>• Traffic calming</li><li>• Increased public health</li></ul>	<p>White et al. 2011; Donovan &amp; Prestemon, 2010</p> <p>Naderi, 2008; Wolf &amp; Bratton, 2006</p> <p>Bell et al. 2008; Mitchell &amp; Popham, 2008; Lovasi et al. 2008; Ulrich 1984</p>
Economic	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased property values</li><li>• Improved retail business</li><li>• Enhanced rental rates</li><li>• Infrastructure cost savings</li></ul>	<p>Donovan &amp; Butry, 2010; Crownover, 1991</p> <p>Werner et al. 2001; Wolf, 2004</p> <p>Donovan &amp; Butry, 2011; Laverne &amp; Winson-Geideman, 2003</p> <p>McPherson, 2006</p>

Despite these benefits, Austin’s urban forest faces many challenges. Accelerated land development, harsh environments brought on by climate change, recent periods of drought, increased public use, and public safety related to an aging tree population are but a few concerns associated with our urban forest in Austin. In addition, the fact that trees do not naturally propagate themselves in a highly urbanized area, like they do in natural ecosystems, means the urban forest will not replenish itself as successfully without deliberate human intervention.

Case Study | Urban Heat Island Mitigation

Temperatures get hotter in the city than in rural areas because highways, buildings, parking lots, and other manmade surfaces absorb, and retain far more heat than materials in the natural environment. Shade trees that shelter homes and other structures are a great way to mitigate effects of urban heat. Trees help reduce energy use and utility costs as well as protect homes from sun damage and deterioration.

Top 5 Threats to the Urban Forest Through the Eyes of Citizen Participants

- 1. Development
- 2. Drought
- 3. Climate change
- 4. Soil compaction
- 5. Invasive species

Source: City of Austin, Urban Forestry Program, 2012

### **Imagine Austin | Priority Action CE A22**

“Create an urban forest plan that identifies tree canopy goals, establishes a budget, and presents implementation measures...create a green infrastructure program to protect environmentally sensitive areas and integrate nature into the city” (ImagineAustin, 2012, p.247).

“AUFPP needs to have short and long term goals, with action items, with a plan (what, how, when).”



— *Leaf the Tree*  
participant

## **THE NEED FOR A PLAN**

Austin’s population has increased by 20% each decade since 1970 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). With increasingly more people living in Austin, the need to strategically approach the care and replenishment of the urban forest has reached a critical point. Impacts from continuing growth and development, combined with long-term drought conditions, have created an imperative to move forward with the development of a broad-scoped, Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan for public property.

The requirement for a Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan was initially established in Austin’s City Code in 1992 (§ 6-3-5). Twenty years later, in 2012, the adoption of Austin’s new comprehensive plan, ImagineAustin, placed priority on protecting and expanding Austin’s green infrastructure elements through the creation of an urban forest plan. Austin’s Urban Forest Plan is the direct implementation of ImagineAustin’s call to action.

## **GOALS OF THE PLAN**

- Establish a broad-scoped, long range vision for Austin’s urban forest.
- Provide a road map to implementation to reach the vision for the urban forest.
- Provide a framework for City departments to use as a guide for managing their urban forest resources.

With a plan in place to support Austin’s urban forest, the City will be able to 1) support the health and vitality of the community and its public spaces and 2) manage the needs of a dynamic component of the City’s infrastructure. A primary concern is the assurance of public well-being and safety, and enhancement of urban forest benefits through preservation, care and maintenance, and replenishment. A thriving, healthy urban forest is a reflection of the City’s ability to preserve individual trees and vegetation communities, restore and/or repair degraded lands, protect lands for environmental services, encourage the removal of non-native, invasive species, and replant trees and vegetation. A city that plans its

## Chapter 1: Introduction

---

urban forest is a city that truly and comprehensively plans for its future and the future livelihood of its citizens.

### PROCESS

The Urban Forestry Board, established by Austin City Code § 2-1-183, was tasked with developing and subsequently revising a Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan for public property with administrative assistance from the City of Austin Urban Forester (§ 6-3-5). The Urban Forestry Board is currently comprised of seven members appointed by the City Council who act in an advisory capacity to the City Council, the City Manager, and the director of the Parks and Recreation Department in all matters related to the urban forest. The duties of the Urban Forester (§ 6-3-4), include management of the public urban forest, oversight and supervision of City departments' work involving urban forest management, and ensuring preservation and replenishment of the public urban forest.

Since 1992, attempts were made to develop the Code-mandated plan but none resulted in a final product. Working collaboratively, the Urban Forestry Board and Urban Forester took up the cause in February 2011 and kicked off the process to produce Austin's first Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan for public trees and vegetation. With renewed support and energy, the Urban Forestry Board working group met 16 times from 2011 through 2013.

Two public engagement initiatives reached out into the community with the goal of engaging the public in a discussion on the topic of Austin's urban forest. In April 2012, a public meeting was held for comment on the urban forest plan vision statement, vision components and guiding principles. The Urban Forest Opinion Poll was also conducted through an online survey tool and received 876 responses. July 2013 featured pop-up Leaf the Tree Activities around town to gather a broad sampling of input from the community, and three surveys were initiated on the topics of policy, funding and performance measures. A public education campaign was initiated to raise awareness and engage the public.

“With the assistance of the urban forester, the [urban forestry] board shall develop and revise the [comprehensive urban forest] plan.”

— Austin City Code  
§ 6-3-5

## Chapter 1: Introduction

---

In August 2013 a second public meeting was held as a community workshop and open house to prioritize resources and encourage face-to-face discussion. See Community Voices on page 11 and Appendix A for more information on the public engagement and education process.

For marketing purposes the Urban Forestry Board chose to refer to the Plan as the Austin Urban Forest Plan, A Master Plan for Public Property. Hereafter in this document the Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan will be referred to as the Austin Urban Forest Plan or the Plan.

### A VISION FOR AUSTIN'S URBAN FOREST

Austin's urban forest is a healthy and sustainable mix of trees, vegetation, and other components that comprise a contiguous and thriving ecosystem valued, protected, and cared for by the City and its citizens as an essential environmental, economic, and community asset.

#### VISION COMPONENTS

##### Thriving

A thriving urban forest is one that is optimized according to site and ecosystem capacity.

##### Contiguous

A contiguous urban forest is composed of interconnected, forested corridors for transportation, community, recreation and wildlife throughout the city.

##### Healthy Ecosystem

A healthy urban forest is composed of a diverse, native and uneven aged palate of species adapted to the unique growing conditions of ecosystem types.

##### Valued

A valued urban forest is recognized as an asset that is essential to the well-being of the community and the ecosystem.



# Chapter 1: Introduction

---

## **Protected**

Trees are protected through sustainable site design and land management practices so that long-term ecosystem health is maintained.

## **Cared For**

A well cared for urban forest is proactively managed for health, longevity and safety.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The guiding principles were established during the initial phase of the plan's development and apply to all areas and phases of the plan, its development, and its implementation.

- 1. Greatest Good Philosophy**
- 2. Wise Use of Resources**
- 3. Sustainable**
- 4. Science-Based Decision Making**
- 5. Public Safety**
- 6. Industry Recognized Best Management Practices**

## **COMMUNITY VOICES**

Public engagement efforts produced more than 2,360 total responses from online sources and multiple events that occurred throughout Austin. The list below details the major public engagement strategies undertaken for this plan. For more information on the public engagement process please see Appendix A. For a full list of comments please see Appendix \_\_.

## **MAJOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

- Leaf-the-tree pop-up events
- Online and hardcopy surveys
- Community workshop and open house public meetings
- Radio and newspaper media outreach
- Social media and website outreach
- Email correspondence

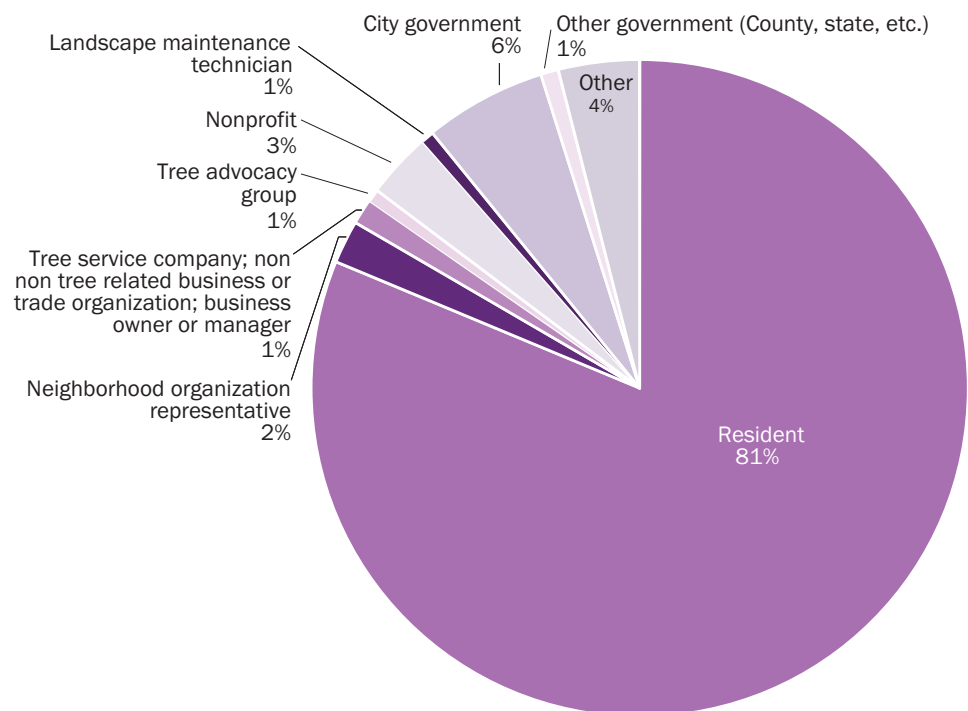
## Chapter 1: Introduction

---

The remainder of this chapter displays some major findings from the most recent surveys conducted in 2013. These results provide a snapshot of general public interest of the urban forest and citizen preferences as they relate to Austin's Urban Forest Plan.

### Figure 1.3 | Public Interest in Urban Forestry

Which of the following best represents your interest in Austin's urban forest?




Source: City of Austin, Urban Forestry Program

### Top 5 Citizen Participant Goals for the Urban Forest

- 1) Sustainability of the urban forest (can withstand drought, climate conditions).**
- 2) Quality of care of public trees**
- 3) Consistent funding and management across City departments**
- 4) Protecting wildlife and habitat**
- 5) Preservation of historic and important trees**

# State of Austin's Urban Forest



Austin does pretty well when it comes to the urban forest. But our urban forest is currently stressed by drought and under siege by new development.

*SpeakUpAustin —  
participant*

The greenery in this city is one of the things that makes it so special.

*Tree Be-Leaf —  
survey participant*

**This chapter presents baseline information regarding Austin's urban forest resources as they stand today. Information such as this is the first step in future planning as it serves as a benchmark for monitoring present achievements against future goals.**

### **REGIONAL CONTEXT**

### **OUR URBAN FOREST'S HISTORY**

### **INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN FORESTRY**

#### **VEGETATIVE RESOURCE**

#### **COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK**

#### **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

### **URBAN FORESTRY CHALLENGES**



### REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Austin metropolitan region is nested within multiple ecosystems defined by similarities and differences in biotic and abiotic traits such as geology, vegetation, climate, soils, land uses, wildlife, and hydrology. When a small area's local ecosystems exhibit enough similarities in these traits over a larger geographic region, the area is deemed an ecoregion. Austin lies at the confluence of three ecoregions as defined by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (Bryce, 1999). These regions include the Northern Blackland Prairie (including the Floodplains and Low Terraces of the Colorado River), the Edwards Plateau (including the Balcones Canyonlands and Live Oak-Mesquite Savanna subregions), and the Oak Woods and Prairies. A survey of Austin's local ecoregions serves as a base understanding of quality, quantity, and type of environmental resources existing within Central Texas. Such an understanding establishes and informs ecosystem management principles and policies. In an attempt to contextualize Austin's regional forest resource, the following surveys the physical and cultural landscape of Austin that has historically shaped the state of our urban forest.

### AUSTIN ECOREGIONS

**Edwards Plateau** | West of the Balcones Escarpment lies the Edwards Plateau. The plateau is an uplifted geological region and the largest of Austin's ecoregions. Moving west in this region, the terrain becomes rugged with eroded limestone and granite rock forming what is known as the Texas Hill Country. Historically, the Edwards Plateau was a grassland savanna with intermittent forest patches. Originally, fire played a major role in determining vegetation types within the Edwards Plateau. That ended when wildfire suppression and overgrazing converted this area from grassland to brushland (Texas A&M Forest Service, 2008; Texas Parks & Wildlife, Edwards Plateau ecological region). As a result, Ashe juniper and mesquite dominate the landscape today. Cattle avoid the juniper's bitter-tasting seed allowing for selective removal of other plant and tree species.

#### **Ecoregion**

A region of ecosystems defined by a distinctive geography and ecological characteristics.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

"...some parts of Austin are supposed to be prairie with limited trees."



— Tree Be-Leaf  
survey  
participant

**Balcones Canyonlands and Live Oak Mesquite Savanna** | The Balcones Canyonlands and Live Oak-Mesquite Savanna subregions provide variation on the plateau. The Live Oak-Mesquite Savanna dominates most of the western and northern portion of the Edwards Plateau, although intermittent finger-like portions exist in the eastern portion of the Plateau. The Live Oak-Mesquite Savanna subregion is dominated, as its name suggests, by mesquite shrubland and live oak trees. Elsewhere, limestone canyons cut by tributaries of the Colorado River identify the Balcones Canyonlands. Karst topography further characterizes the terrain, the result of acidic rainfall reacting with limestone bedrock, which creates Swiss cheese-like formations in the ground. Water percolating through the porous limestone contributes to recharge of the Edwards Aquifer lying below. Slopes are particularly steep along stream courses, with soil depth varying by topography. Hilltops usually have thin soils while flat areas and lowlands have thicker soils. Vegetative cover in the Canyonlands consists of evergreen woodlands and deciduous forests composed of Texas mountain laurel, Lacey oak, Black cherry, Bigtooth maple, Ashe juniper, sumac, acacia, and Honey mesquite.

**Blackland Prairie** | The Blackland Prairie is a grassland ecoregion covering the eastern portion of Austin. Its boundaries form a thin strip spanning from the Red River in the north to San Antonio in the south. Its Cretaceous chalk, marl, and limestone formations created productive black clay soils suitable for farming. Initially the prairie consisted of tallgrasses; however, agricultural production converted much of the terrain into cropland and grazing pastures (Texas Parks and Wildlife, Blackland Prairie ecological region). The region is identified as the most altered ecoregion in Texas with 1% of the native Blackland Prairie remaining today (Ramos and Gonzalez, 2011; Clymer Meadow Preserve website, 2013). Like the Edwards Plateau, this region was historically influenced by natural fires; however, human settlement has introduced woody vegetation including pecan, Cedar elm, hackberry, mesquite, and various oaks.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

### Ashe juniper, *Juniperus ashei*



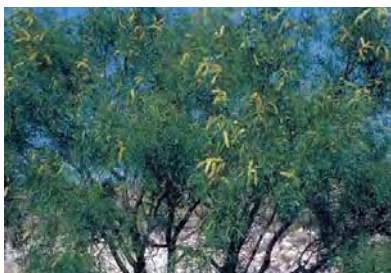
Native to Edwards Plateau. Provides habitat for the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler. Major allergy irritant.

### Texas mountain laurel, *Sophora secundiflora*



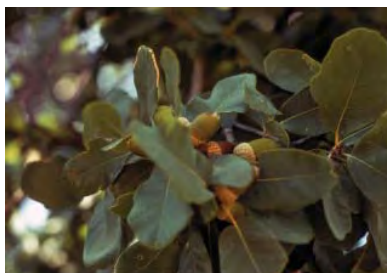
Native to Edwards Plateau. Ornamental flowers give off grape-scented fragrance.

### Honey mesquite, *Prosopis glandulosa*



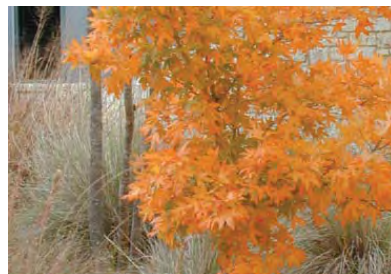
Aggressive spreader native to both Edwards Plateau and Blackland Prairie. Produces nectar and thorns.

### Lacey oak, *Quercus laceyi*



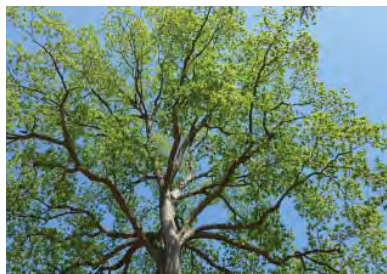
Native to Edwards Plateau. Resistant to oak wilt. Largest known specimen grows 50 miles west of Austin in Blanco, Texas.

### Bigtooth maple, *Acer grandidentatum*



Native to Edwards Plateau. Leaves turn red and gold in fall.

### Pecan, *Carya illinoensis*



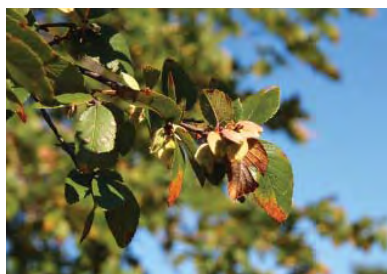
Native to Blackland Prairie. Official Texas state tree. Nut producing.

### Southern live oak, *Quercus virginiana*



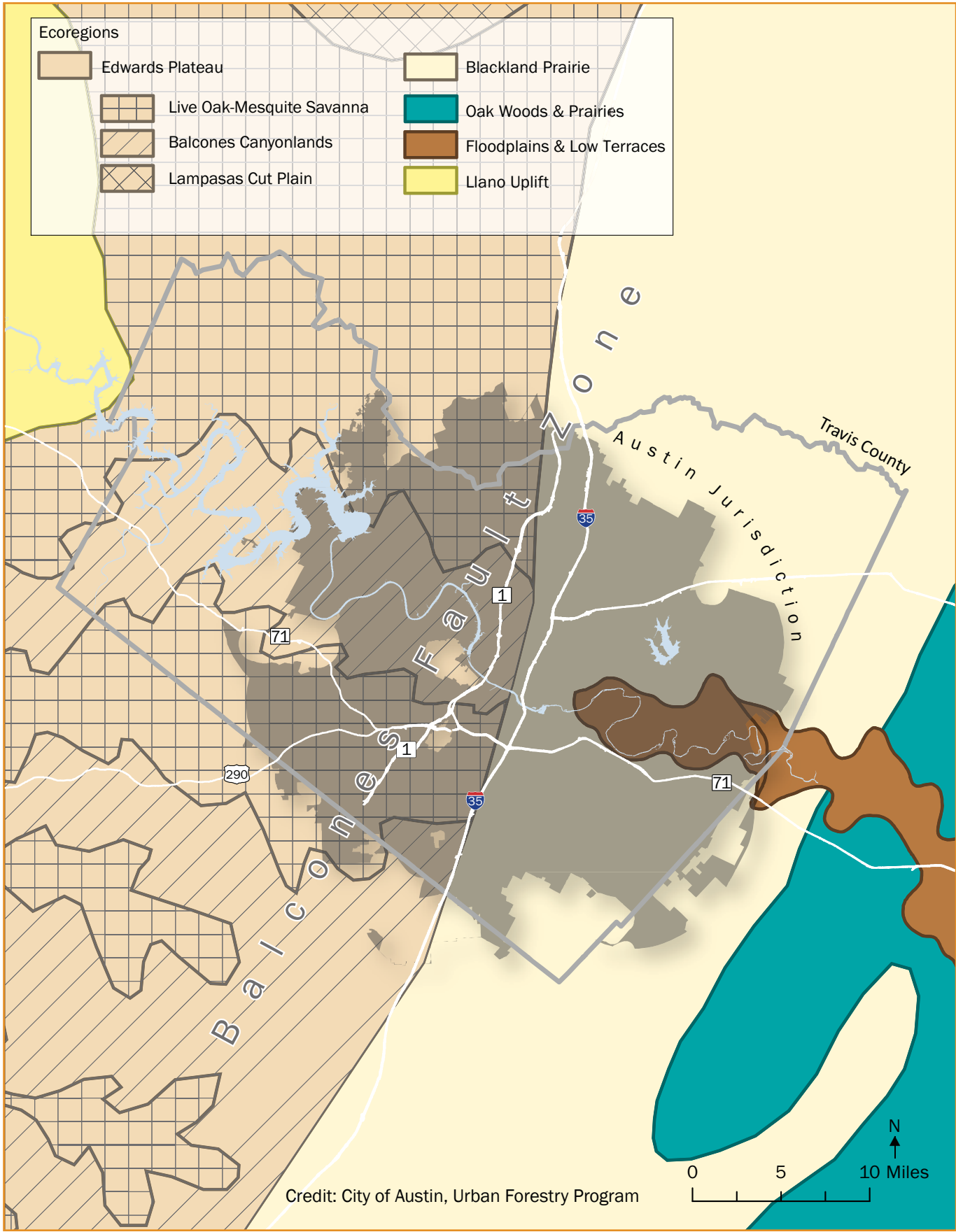
Native to Edwards Plateau and Blackland Prairie. Susceptible to oak wilt. Very popular shade tree.

### Cedar elm, *Ulmus crassifolia*



Native to Edwards Plateau and Blackland Prairie. One of the most common species in Austin.

Figure 2.1 | Austin Ecoregions





## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

**Floodplains and Low Terraces** | The Floodplains and Low Terraces subregion is part of the Blackland Prairie and includes the broad floodplains of the Colorado River. Historically, bottomland forests contained bur oak, Shumard oak, sugar hackberry, elm, ash, eastern cottonwood, and pecan, although most forested land has been converted to agricultural land.

**Oak Woods and Prairies** | The Oak Woods and Prairies region is characteristic of savanna grasses, brushlands, and forest patches. Originally a diverse savanna of native grasses and patches of Post Oak trees, the region has given way to denser undergrowth due to fire suppression, farming, overgrazing, soil disturbance, and land parcelization beginning in the 1800s. Today, common species found in the region include blackjack oak, water oak, winged elm, hackberry, yaupon, and concentrations of loblolly pines near Bastrop.

### **Focus Point | Balcones Escarpment**

Austin straddles a major geologic formation—the Balcones Fault. This is an inactive yet distinct fault zone stretching north to Waco. The surface expression of the fault is the Balcones Escarpment, which impacts local climate patterns and greatly influences east-west spanning ecosystems to create unique variation in vegetation types, soils, topography, species biodiversity, and climate patterns throughout the region.

Culturally speaking, the Balcones Escarpment has influenced human settlement throughout Central Texas' history (Palmer, 1986; City of Austin, Community Inventory Report, 2011). Early European economies in Central Texas were delineated by arable soils. In the west, shallow clay soils covering limestone bedrock discouraged farming yet promoted cattle grazing, while the fertile black soils to the east promoted agriculture (Johnson, 2013). As a result, most of Austin's agricultural lands exist today east of Austin.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

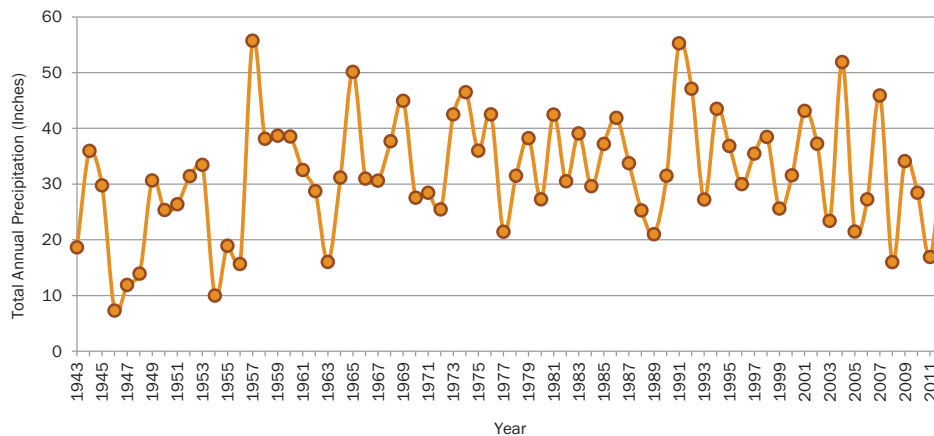


## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

### AUSTIN'S CLIMATE

Austin spans the climatic transition zone between humid East Texas and semiarid lands of West Texas. Summers are hot with temperatures exceeding 90°F most summer days, while winters are mild with daytime temperatures hovering around 50°F (NOAA, 2010). Weather patterns stem from Mexico's Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Occasional Arctic cold fronts intrude from the north. Austin experiences unreliable precipitation with peak rainfall typically occurring in May and September. Average yearly rainfall is near 30 inches, with periodic droughts and occasional flooding impacting normal precipitation levels. Because Austin sits between climatic regions, water levels are variable, which ultimately influences vegetative species growing throughout the Central Texas region.

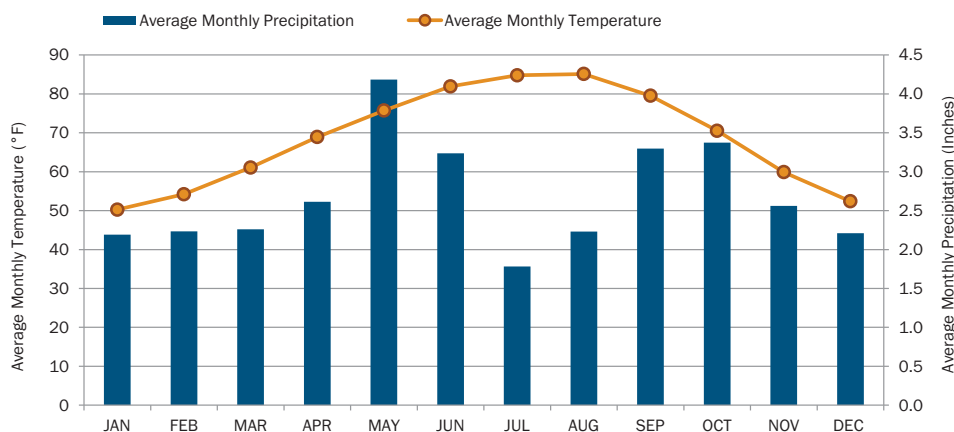
**Figure 2.2 | Total Annual Precipitation in Austin (1943-2012)**



\*1946 precipitation total is inconclusive due to incomplete values.

Source: NOAA, 2013

**Figure 2.3 | Austin Climate Graph (1943-2012)**



\*These values reflect monthly averages over a 69 year period.

Source: NOAA, 2013

“In this climate, you can’t have too much tree canopy with the urban heat island effect increasing each year.”

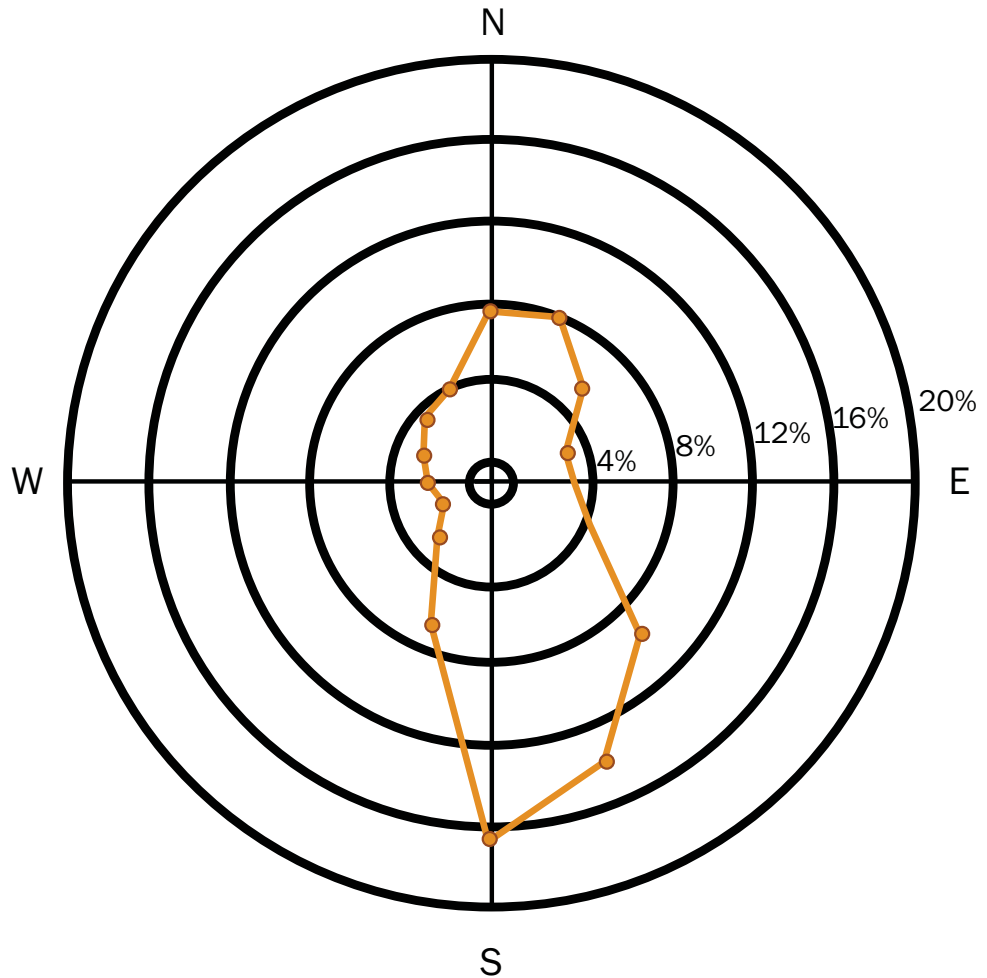


— Tree Be-Leaf survey participant

### Wind Rose | A Graph of Austin's Wind Patterns

The graph at right displays the direction from which the wind blows (from the outer circle toward the center). The size of the orange area within each circle shows the amount of time that wind blows from a particular direction.

**Figure 2.4 | Average Annual Wind Prevalence in Austin (1984-1992)**



Source: Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

Figure 2.4 shows the most common wind patterns in Austin averaged over an eight-year period. This shows that Austin winds blow from the south and southeast 40% of the time and north or northeast 21% of the time, typically at speeds from 4 to 18 mph. These are light to breezy style winds. Winds blow much less from the east and west. Wind patterns are important to consider since they can greatly impact the structure of trees and vegetation throughout their lifetime. Intense or extended winds may topple entire trees or limbs.



## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

### **Drought: 2010-2011**

Between October 2010 and September 2011, Texas experienced what could possibly be its worst drought in recorded history. Low precipitation resulted in devastating crop and vegetation loss throughout the state. For example, Texas lost an estimated 5.6 million urban trees—roughly 10% of Texas' urban forests—resulting in a projected \$560 million to remove said dead trees (Texas A&M Forest Service, 2012, February). On the other side, drought-related tree mortality in rural areas across Texas was estimated at 301 million trees with roughly 6.6% of tree loss occurring in Central Texas (Texas A&M Forest Service, 2012, September). These numbers are significant considering that Central Texas was estimated to have the largest count of live trees (1,540 million), out of any other Texas region, prior to the recent drought (Texas A&M Forest Service, 2012, September).

### **Focus Point | Bastrop Wildfire 2011**

The 2011 Bastrop County Complex Fire burned from September through October across 16,200 acres of pine and mixed pine-deciduous forests just east of Austin. The fire most likely started from electrical power line sparks igniting dry vegetation. It was the most destructive wildfire in Texas history, destroying more than 1,000 homes and burning an estimated 1.5 million trees of at least 5-inch diameter (Hanna, 2011; Texas A&M Forest Service, 2011). The fire's severity was exacerbated by the lengthy drought and by strong winds created by Tropical Storm Lee. Together, these factors created prime conditions for a devastating wildfire.

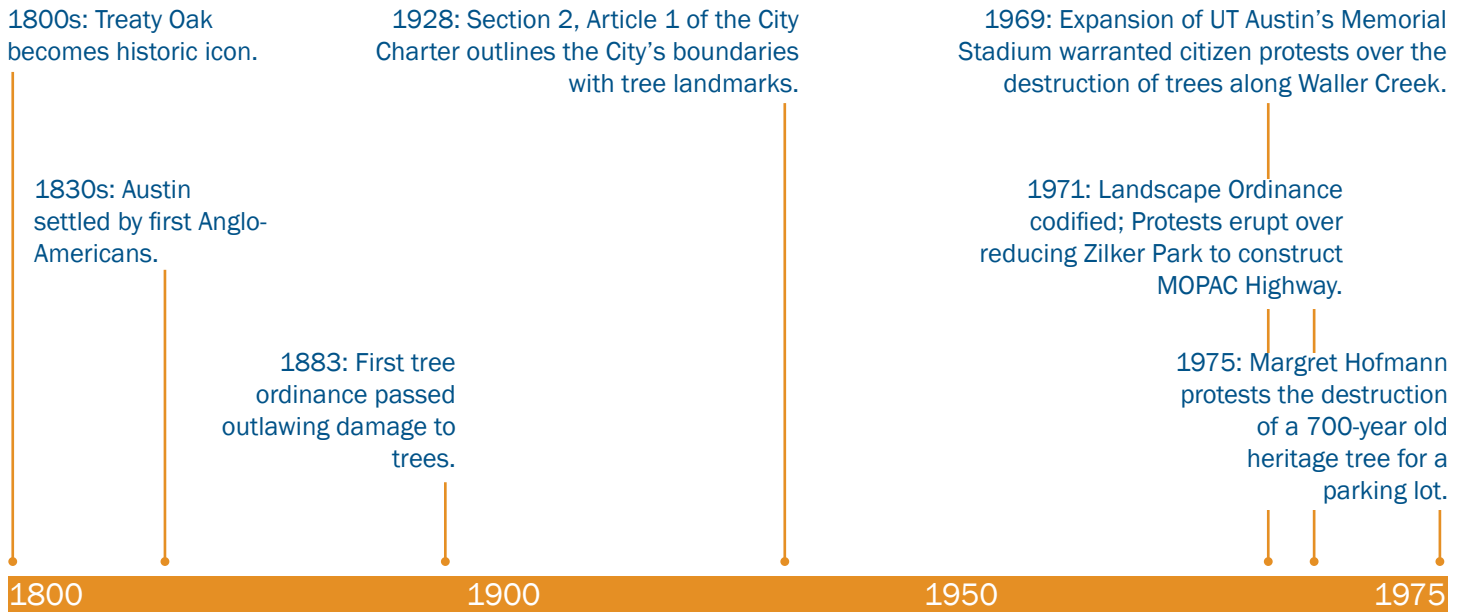




This image was taken on September 11, 2011 from the Landsat 5 satellite. It shows burned vegetation in red compared to healthy vegetation in green. The burn mark shown here spanned 15 miles north-south in Bastrop County.



## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest



### OUR URBAN FOREST'S HISTORY

Traveling to Austin in the 1850s, legendary landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted wrote, “the country around the town is rolling and picturesque, with many agreeable views of distant hills and a pleasant sprinkling of wood over prairie slopes” (Olmsted, 1857). Since then, Austin’s natural landscape has changed greatly from a “sprinkling of wood over prairie slopes” to a forested city. This forestation is a result of human activities and a level of support for our urban forest throughout history. The importance of trees to Austinites is largely solidified in historical events and

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

1983: Margaret Hofmann backs tree protection ordinance.

2013: Urban forest comprehensive plan created.

1988: Urban Forestry Board established.

2008: Clear-cutting of 100-year-old pecan grove in Oak Hill increases proponents of urban forest.

2010: Heritage Tree Ordinance passed.

2006: Appointment of the Tree Task Force.

2012: Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan adopted.

1980

2000

2010

2013



City rules initiated by local residents. These human actions continue to impact local policies and goals in preserving a healthy urban forest citywide. The following timeline details important historical events impacting Austin's urban forest over the years.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

### Focus Point | Austin's Tree Lady

Margret Hofmann was Austin's best-known tree advocate. Hofmann's fame as Austin's "Tree Lady" began in 1973 when she challenged the removal of an ancient Live Oak on South 1st Street, establishing her "Think Trees" campaign. Soon after, Hofmann served a short-lived but influential City Council term from 1975 to 1977, in which she advocated protecting trees from destruction in the face of new development. Her efforts materialized in Austin's first major heritage tree registry and the passage of Austin's first modern tree protection ordinance in 1983. Hofmann's tree-minded legacy persists today, influencing local environmental activism and City decisions. In 2010, the City passed its Heritage Tree Ordinance to further protect Austin's aged urban forest, owing its formation to Hofmann. Her legacy is honored in Margret Hofmann Oaks Park standing across from City Hall at the intersection of South 1st and Cesar Chavez streets.



"Trees are a part of the City's story and history"

— Tree Be-Leaf



survey participant



### Overview of Historical Code

Title 2. Administration  
Chapter 2-1 City Boards

Article 2. Boards  
§ 2-1-183 Urban Forestry Board

Source:

Ord. 20071129-011

Ord. 20101209-003

Title 6. Environmental Control and Conservation  
Chapter 6-3 Trees and Vegetation

Article 1. General Provisions  
§ 6-3-2 Urban Forester

Source:

1992 Code Section 15-10-4

Ord. 031023-10

Ord. 031211-11.

§ 6-3-5 Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan

Source: 1992 Code Sections 15-10-4(A) and (C)

Ord. 031023-10

Ord. 031211-11

§ 6-3-6 Standards of Care for a Tree or Plant on Public Property

Source: 1992 Code Section 15-10-4(D)

Ord. 031023-10

Ord. 031211-11

### OVERVIEW OF KEY HISTORICAL TREE-RELATED ORDINANCES, REGULATIONS

#### 1983

Ordinance | March 1983 [1983-0324-N] Establishes a new chapter 9-11 of the Austin city code of 1981 to be entitled “Trees.” This provided for the protection of the largest and most valuable trees in the city of Austin. Also established the City Arborist position.

#### 1996

Ordinance | March 1996 [19960328-B] Public Tree Care Ordinance. Regulating the planting, maintenance, and removal of trees on public property; establishing the office of Urban Forester; the issuance of written approvals for the maintenance, and removal of trees on public property; the removal of vegetation that obstructs public travel on private property; the protection of public trees; value recovery when public trees are damaged or removed; for trees as part of street improvements; prescribing penalties for violations of its provisions.

#### 2010

Ordinance | February 2010 [20100204-038] Amendments to CH. 25-8, subchapter B, article 1 and section 6-3-48 relating to tree protection; protected tree provisions; and adding new division for heritage trees.

#### 2012

Ordinance | June 2012 [20120614-058] Adoption of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive plan.

#### 2013

Resolution | June 2013 [20130627-070] City Manager “to assess the value and benefits that public trees provide to the community and to various municipal functions... using existing city resources... quantify the value and benefits of...trees.”

*For a full list of historical Ordinances, Resolutions and Code, please see the Appendix.*





- |                              |  |  |                                     |  |   |  |
|------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| 1. New State Capitol.        | 11. Bird's Eye View.                     | 21. Midland's Cotton House.              | 31. McDonald Building.              | 41. Central M. E. Church.                  | 51. Home Cook Church of the Evangelical | 61. Wesley Chapel, M. E. (col'd) Church. |
| 2. Temporary State House.    | 12. Bird and Irons Asylum.               | 22. Clay Hall.                           | 32. Capital Business College.       | 42. St. Martin's (French) Catholic Church. | 52. Congregational.                     | 62. West M. E. Church.                   |
| 3. Third County Court House. | 13. City Hospital.                       | 23. City Water Works.                    | 33. St. Andrew's Church.            | 43. First Baptist Church.                  | 53. Church.                             | 63. Church.                              |
| 4. County Prison.            | 14. St. Mary's Academy.                  | 24. St. Mary's Academy.                  | 34. Christian Church.               | 44. Jewish Synagogue.                      | 54. Southern Presbyterian Church.       | 64. Church.                              |
| 5. State University.         | 15. U. S. Post Office and Customs House. | 25. U. S. Post Office and Customs House. | 35. Metropolitan A. M. E. Church.   | 45. St. Paul's Church.                     | 55. St. Paul's Episcopal Church.        | 65. First Baptist (col'd) Church.        |
| 6. Judge's Office.           | 16. The Orphan (Hotel).                  | 26. The Orphan (Hotel).                  | 36. Cumberland Presbyterian Church. | 46. St. Paul's Church.                     | 56. St. Paul's Church.                  | 66. St. Paul's Church.                   |





Augustus Koch's hand drawn map of Austin 1887

Credit: Amon Carter Museum

**AUSTIN,**  
STATE CAPITAL OF TEXAS.

- |  |   |  |  |                            |
|--|---|--|--|----------------------------|
| 41. M. W. Moore Co. Paints and Carpet Store.                                     | 45. Calumet Lumber Yard.  | 49. Geo. B. Ruppelman & Son's Dry Grocery. | 53. Austin Gas & Coal Co.'s Works.                 | 57. High School.           |
| 42. A. Hartman's Plumbing, Mill, Saw, Chair and Blank Furniture and Lumber Yard. | 46. W. W. Fennell & Co's Lumber Yard and Plumbing Mill, Saw, Chair and Blank Furniture. | 50. City National Bank.                    | 54. A. Van Dusen's Lumber Yard.                    | 58. Bessie's Bakery.       |
| 43. Hotel City.  | 47. C. E. Missett's Lumber Yard, Plumbing Mill, Saw, Chair and Blank Furniture.         | 51. First National Bank.                   | 55. Joseph Natta's Lumber Yard and Furniture Mill. | 59. Central National Bank. |
| 44. Moore's Mill, industrial and proprietor of Bridge Station.                   | 48. J. H. Henshaw's Wholesale Store.  | 52. Henshaw & Henshaw's Bank.              | 56. Turner Hall.                                   | 60. Austin Public School.  |



### INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN FORESTRY

The remaining three sections present baseline information regarding Austin's urban forest resources. Such information helps in understanding our current situation and serves as a benchmark for monitoring present achievements against future goals.

This analysis follows a nationally recognized framework for evaluating strategic urban forest planning and management through the implementation of urban forestry criteria and measures proposed by Kenney et al. (2011). This framework was born out of The Montréal Process in 1994—an intergovernmental call for sustainable forest management worldwide—and later modified by Clark et al. (1997).

The following three sections mirror the Kenney et al. approaches to urban forestry sustainability: vegetative resource, community framework, and resource management. Each approach houses a set of criteria and performance measures for gauging urban forestry management success. These off-the-shelf criteria were reviewed and modified when deemed appropriate.

In cases where issues were not addressed by these criteria, new criteria were created. There are 30 total criteria for Austin. The following sections provide a snapshot of Austin's urban forest in terms of the most comprehensive measures available at this time. These measures will be updated and reported on, when new data become available, culminating in a reoccurring “state of the urban forest” report.

The full list of Austin's performance measures is shown on the following page. They are displayed in order of citizen prioritization as revealed through online polling and public engagement events. Citizen-guided prioritization will help set up the order in which urban forestry policies are implemented in the future.

### **Vegetative Resource**

What things are most important when we decide how healthy our urban forest is?

### **Vegetative Resource**

- 1) Native vegetation
- 2) Species suitability
- 3) Relative canopy cover
- 4) Species distribution
- 5) Condition of the urban forest
- 6) Publicly owned natural areas
- 7) Urban forest pests
- 8) Size-class distribution

### **Community Framework**

What is the most important way that community members can get involved with taking care of the urban forest?

### **Community Framework**

- 1) Complete urban forest recognition
- 2) General urban forest awareness
- 3) Neighborhood action
- 4) Public agency cooperation
- 5) Involvement of State and Federal landholders
- 6) Regional urban forest cooperation
- 7) Green industry cooperation

### **Resource Management: Coordination, Support & Planning**

What is more important for the City to spend money on to keep the urban forest healthy?

### **Resource Management: Coordination, Support, & Planning**

- 1) Urban forest establishment planning and implementation
- 2) Municipality-wide funding
- 3) City-wide urban forest funding
- 4) City staffing
- 5) Urban forest inventory
- 6) Tree canopy cover inventory
- 7) Urban forest risk management

### **Resource Management: Protection & Practices**

What is more important for the City to focus on in order to protect our urban forest and manage it sustainably?

### **Resource Management: Protection & Practices**

- 1) Urban forest protection from development
- 2) Water use and drought response
- 3) Urban forest habitat suitability
- 4) Wildlife and human habitat
- 5) Sustainable practices
- 6) Carbon sequestration and woody biomass



### VEGETATIVE RESOURCE

The vegetative resource refers to the physical components of an urban forest including but not limited to trees, plants, grasses, soils, and water. Managing these physical resources by monitoring criteria such as tree canopy cover, age structure, and species diversity will help plan for a healthy and resilient urban forest well into the future. This section covers the following measures:

- Tree canopy distribution
- Species composition
- Age structure
- Tree condition
- Tree values and benefits

**Tree Canopy Distribution |** Tree canopy is a simple measurement of an urban forest's spatial distribution. Canopy refers to a tree's aboveground layer of leaves, branches, and stems. When tree canopy density is high, we receive various benefits from trees such as cleaning our air, cooling our homes through shading, and providing habitat for wildlife. Monitoring tree canopy distribution is one way to measure the health of our urban forest over time and to ensure we continue receiving benefits.

The percent of land covered by tree canopy provides a baseline indicator of an urban forest's extent, and is easily acquired with relatively little cost. Tree canopy covered an estimated 38% of Austin's land area (City of Austin's full purpose and 5 mile ETJ area) in 2010. Tree canopy has consistently decreased since the 1970's until 2010 as shown in Figure 2.5 on the next page.

### Canopy goals | A distraction?

Often cities set tree canopy cover targets to be achieved through tree planting programs. American Forests (1996) recommends overall citywide canopy cover of 40% for humid cities and 30% for arid cities. Although new tree plantings are necessary in ensuring forest regeneration, tree planting programs attempting to achieve canopy cover goals often distract communities from other, equally-important management opportunities. Kenney et al. (2011) proclaim tree canopy cover does not paint a full picture of the urban forest. Species diversity, condition, age distribution, and mortality rates are equally important in forestry management.

Figure 2.5 | Historic Tree Canopy Cover

Canopy goals in other  
U.S. cities

- Baltimore  
40% by 2040
- Denver  
18% by 2025
- Fairfax  
45% by 2037
- Philadelphia  
30 by 2025
- Phoenix  
25% by 2030
- Seattle  
30% by 2037

Year	% Tree Canopy Cover	Source
1977	39%	Rodgers & Harris, 1983
1982	37%	Crownover, 1991
1990	34%	Crownover, 1991
1996	34%	American Forests, 1996
2006	31%	City of Austin, 2006
2010	38%	City of Austin, 2010

Recent declines in canopy cover are most likely due to natural factors such as extended drought periods, as well as human impacts such as urban development. To put these numbers into perspective, American Forests recommends 30% tree canopy cover within arid cities and 40% cover within humid cities. Since Austin lies at a climatic transition zone between humid and dry, identifying appropriate canopy levels for Austin proves difficult. Furthermore, municipalities which have established canopy cover goals tend to focus urban forest management resources on tree planting instead of a comprehensive approach including care, maintenance, preservation, and planning. Nevertheless, measuring tree canopy distribution helps to identify forest loss over time and to inform tree-planting programs in underserved communities.

At the neighborhood level, variations in tree canopy distribution are more complex. Many areas with high population density actually contain some of the highest tree canopy cover (e.g., Hyde Park). In fact, residences and open space areas contain the largest shares of tree canopy cover in Austin. The map on the following page shows a clear distinction between east and west Austin with greater tree canopy cover occurring in west Austin, and lower tree canopy cover occurring in east Austin. For instance, the Edwards Plateau region to the west contains the majority canopy coverage at 165,595 acres while the Blackland Prairie region to the east contains only 44,148 acres of tree canopy cover. This pattern is consistent with the natural and cultural histories of Central Texas, and reflects the dominance of agricultural practices resulting in fewer trees

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

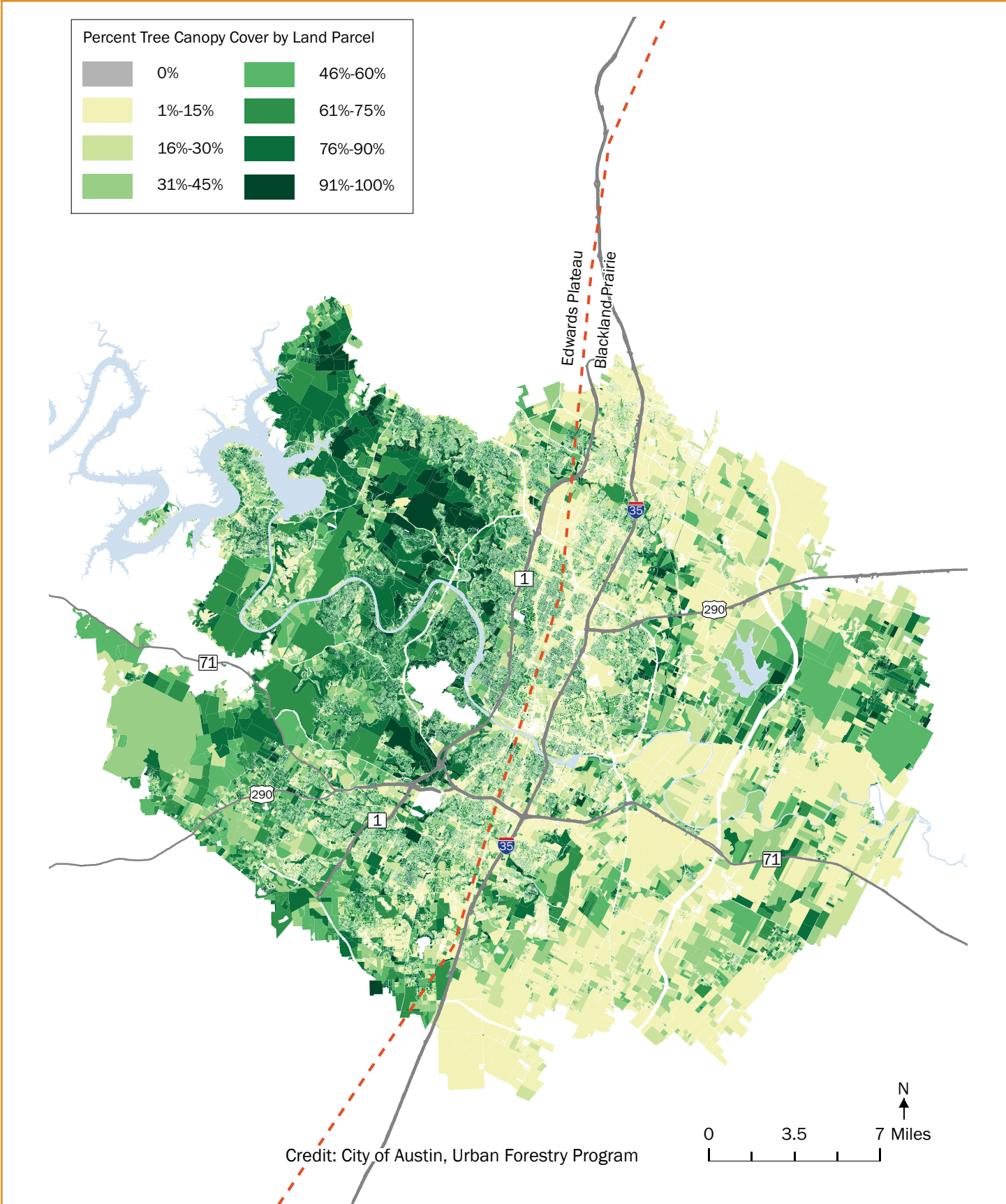
---

occurring in far east Austin. Additionally, the prevalence of high canopy cover may reflect distributions of wealthier neighborhoods in west Austin while lower canopy cover percentages reflect distributions of less affluent neighborhoods in east Austin. Studies show a positive relationship between income and the demand for trees as rich communities have larger budgets and larger private lot sizes for trees to grow (Zhu and Zhang, 2008).

**Austin Tree Canopy Map (Right)** | Austin's tree canopy varies across the city. The map at right shows a clear distinction between east and west Austin with greater tree canopy cover occurring west of IH35 in the Edwards Plateau region, and lower tree canopy cover occurring east of IH35 in the Blackland Prairie region. Intuitively, many areas adjacent to or near water features show high tree canopy percentages.

Open space, single family, and undeveloped lands contain the highest distribution of tree canopy cover in the city (City of Austin, 2006 tree canopy data). In open-space park areas, the amount of land covered by tree canopy (37,705 acres) is substantial—roughly 50 times the size of Central Park in New York City.

Figure 2.6 | Percent Tree Canopy Cover in Austin, 2010



## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

### Focus Point | Tree Inventory

Examining the characteristics of a city's tree population helps resource managers understand the urban forest as it stands today and helps them prioritize future management focus. Species composition, age, condition, and tree values and benefits indicate the relative importance of individual tree species to Austin's urban forest.

A 2008 tree inventory sampled 14,925 park and street trees in Austin to gather information on tree attributes. This number was extrapolated to over 300,000 trees on public lands, including street and active use park lands, based on the City's total parkland area and major street lengths. There are approximately 200,000 trees growing on Austin's developed park lands, and 155,762 street trees. The inventory also indicated 190,940 planting spaces available in street rights-of-way. The 2008 inventory was limited by cost and time, so the sample size was small; the true number of Austin's public trees is likely much higher. In addition, the inventory omitted trees within natural areas, greenbelts, and preserves. Regardless, this is the most recent and largest sample of information for trees growing on public lands in Austin. City staff is currently undertaking a more up-to-date tree inventory and analysis using the U.S. Forest Service's i-Tree Eco software.

**Species Composition |** Within transit corridors and parks, Austin's public tree population consists of 166 different species mostly constituting deciduous trees. Cedar Elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*) is the dominant species followed by Southern Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*) and Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*).

Older oaks and semi-mature non-native invasive trees thrive in many areas of Austin as well. Non-native invasive trees, such as Glossy Privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*), were not surveyed in 2008 and are therefore not discussed in this section although it is important to mention they pose a significant challenge in park management as they crowd out native plants. For more information, contact Austin's Invasive Species Management.

### What is a deciduous tree?

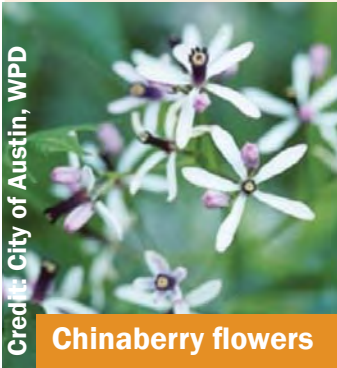
Deciduous trees shed their leaves annually during the cold season.

They typically exhibit broadleaf leaves that are flat and thin as opposed to needle-like or scale-like leaves. Examples of deciduous trees include oak, ash, and pecan.

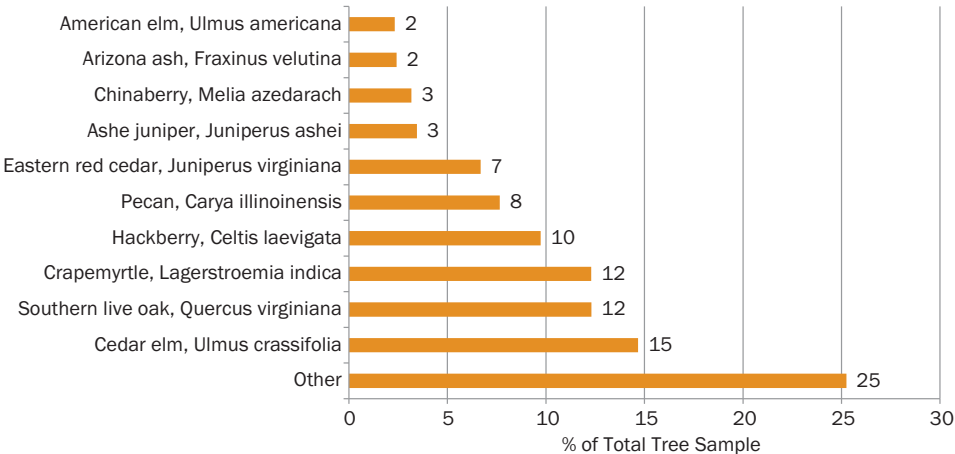


**Invasive Species | Chinaberry**

Chinaberry, *Melia azedarach* is a top 10 species in Austin’s rights-of-way and parks. It accounts for roughly 3% of the tree population in these areas. Chinaberry is invasive to Austin and is listed as one of Austin’s top 24 invasive species (City of Austin, Central Texas Invasive Plants Field Guide, 2013). The tree is known to crowd out native plants as its leaves alter pH and nitrogen levels in the soil.



**Figure 2.7 | Top 10 Tree Species in Public Right-of-Way and Parks**



Source: City of Austin Urban Forestry Program, 2008

Species diversity ensures forest resiliency against arboreal diseases (e.g., oak wilt) and devastating insect infestations (e.g., elm bark beetle). Figure 2.7 shows the top 10 species representing 75% of the total tree population. According to a recommended rule of thumb, called the 10/20/30 rule, no single species should constitute more than 10% of the total tree population, no single genus should comprise more than 20%, and no single family should contain more than 30% (Clark et al, 1997). As shown in Figure 2.7, the top three species each comprise more than 10% of the total tree population, while no single genus represents greater than 20% of the population. The graph above shows its prevalence as Austin’s eighth most common tree species within street rights-of-way and parks.

**Age Structure** | Age structure refers to the abundance of individual trees in a population according to their age. Documenting a tree population’s age structure provides insight into the overall age of the urban forest, the value of individual tree species, and future maintenance costs. A diverse age structure of young to old trees ensures new generations replace older generations, thus reducing the possibility of substantial tree mortality due to age.

Multiple avenues exist for determining tree age. Because a tree’s trunk diameter and the age of a tree are closely related, tree diameter at breast height (DBH) is often used as a proxy for determining tree age. This is the most widely used and easiest technique. In Austin, DBH is measured at 4.5 feet above the ground.

A healthy urban forest consists of uneven age distributions where young trees comprise a larger share of the total tree population relative to larger diameter classes to compensate for tree mortality. Austin’s street and park tree population follows closely to the Richards-recommended DBH shares. Overall, Austin’s public tree age structure consists of 45% young trees (less than 8 inches DBH), 47% established trees (8-23 inches DBH), and roughly 7% mature trees (24 inches DBH or greater). See Figure 2.8 Alternative version

Of the top 10 public tree species in Austin, Crape Myrtle, Lagerstroemia indica; Sugarberry, Celtis laevigata; and Chinaberry, Melia azedarach all have their largest share of trees in the small size class (<8 inches DBH). Considering large-stature trees, Pecan, Carya illinoensis and Southern Live Oak, Quercus virginiana represent the largest single shares in the large class size (24+ inches DBH).

The prevalence of Crepe Myrtles, a naturally small-growing species, may be affecting the overall age structure shown in Figure 2.8.

**Suggested DBH Classes  
for a Healthy Street  
Tree Population**

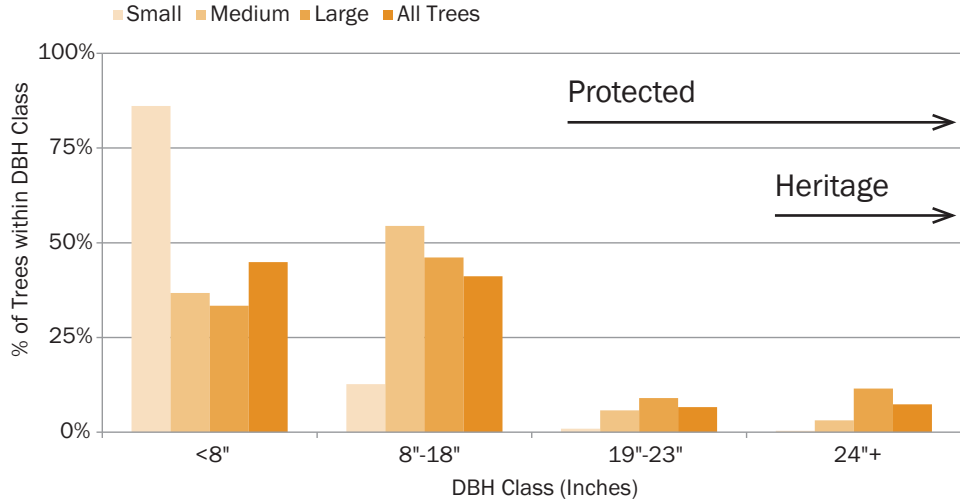
Richards (1982/1983) recommended the optimal distribution of relative age classes for stability in a street tree population. His suggestion breaks tree DBH into the following classes:

- 40% <8” DBH**
- 30% at 8”-16” DBH**
- 20% at 16”-24” DBH**
- 10% >24” DBH**

These classes have been modified to better reflect the City’s “protected” and “heritage” tree sizes: 19 inches or greater DBH and 24 inches or greater DBH respectively.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

**Figure 2.8 | DBH Classes of Austin Trees by Small, Medium, Large Growth**



Source: City of Austin Urban Forestry Program, 2008

It is important to note the seemingly small percentage deviations from the Richards (1982/1983) recommended percentage for DBH classes. Figure 2.9 displays these differences and estimated amount of trees over or under Austin's public tree count in 2008. For example, public heritage trees in Austin fall short of the recommended percentage by 3%. This means Austin requires an estimated 9,000 more trees in the 24"+ DBH class to meet the recommended goal. Such a deficit points to tree preservation and protection measures. On the other hand, the nearly 22,000 additional trees in the <8"-18" class shows an overabundance of younger and smaller stature trees.

**Figure 2.9 | Comparison of Austin DBH Classes vs. Recommended**

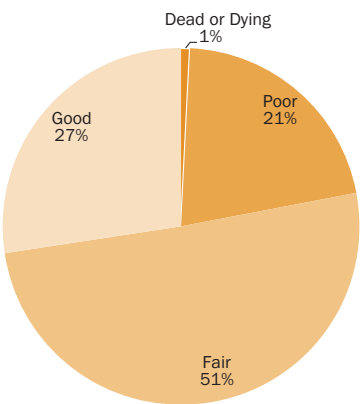
DBH Class	Recommended %	Austin %	% Difference	Estimated Difference in Trees
<8"	40%	45%	5%	17,788
8"-18"	30%	34%	4%	14,230
19"-23"	20%	14%	6%	21,345
24"+	10%	7%	3%	10,672

\*Based on 355,762 trees

# Chapter 2: State of Austin’s Urban Forest

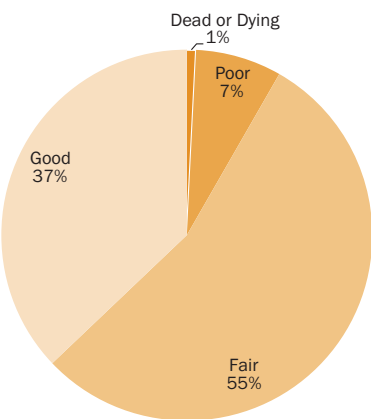
**Tree Condition |** Tree condition refers to the general health of a tree and provides insight into safety risks to the community and maintenance needs. By evaluating the condition of the urban forest we are then able to determine cost-effective methods for improving and enhancing overall forest health and risk. Determining overall condition of tree structure (wood), functional (leaf) health, and assigning risk factor ratings can be accomplished by ground-level sight inspections. Austin trees are assessed and grouped into the following four categories of condition: good, fair, poor, and dead or dying. The following figures show the majority of structural (wood) health of trees is fair to poor whereas the majority of functional (leaf) health is good to fair.

**Figure 2.10 | Structural (Wood) Condition by Percentage**



Source: City of Austin Urban Forestry Program, 2008

**Figure 2.11 | Functional (foliage) Condition by Percentage**



Source: City of Austin Urban Forestry Program, 2008

### **Benefit-Cost of Austin's Public Trees**

For every dollar spent on Austin's trees, the urban forest provides **\$9.87** in benefits back to the city (based on a 6,465 tree sample). As a tree grows larger, it provides more benefits. This means, as a whole, the urban forest is one of the few components of public infrastructure that increases in value over time. This infrastructure, like all other more well-known elements (e.g., water pipelines, roads, etc.) requires regular maintenance if it is expected to function at an acceptable level.

From this information it was determined in 2008 that many trees in poor health (Sugarberry, Chinaberry, Southern Live Oak, Pecans, and Cedar Elm) required priority removal in 2008. Southern Live Oaks and Cedar Elms, in the street rights-of-way, and Pecans, in parks, required high-priority trimming. Although the trends initially point to Cedar Elm and Southern Live Oak being categorized as troublesome, these species also represent 15% and 12% respectively of trees in the survey and therefore understandably exhibit these high numbers.

**Tree Values and Benefits |** Today, urban forests are increasingly considered an element of a much larger green infrastructure network providing benefits to people (Benepe, 2013, ImagineAustin, 2012; Young, 2011; American Planning Association [APA], 2009). Cities are increasingly suffering cutbacks in state and federal funding coupled with lack of political leverage to raise taxes. Simultaneously, cities face increased demands for more and more projects (e.g., roadway repair, affordable housing, and expansion of public safety facilities) to meet the demands of population growth. Consequently, urban green infrastructure projects must compete for funding. Thus, the case for tree planting, care, and preservation campaigns, for example, must be made through quantitative arguments assigning dollar values to the benefits and costs associated with trees as green infrastructure elements. This translates to the economic language to which citizens and policy makers most immediately relate.

### **Focus Point | Calculating the Worth of Our Public Street Trees**

Figure 2.12 displays the most recent cost-benefit analysis of Austin's public street trees. The financial values of these trees were calculated using i-Tree Street—a nationally recognized software developed by the U.S. Forest Service. The software calculates costs and benefits of trees in dollar values according to species type, condition, size, and benefit prices (e.g., cost of electricity per kWh) according to local market conditions. Public park trees were omitted in this analysis because i-Tree Street calculates cost-benefit statistics only for street trees.



Figure 2.12 | Cost-Benefit of Public Street Trees\*

Benefits	Total \$ Value	\$ value/tree	\$ value/capita
	10,251,979	65.82	13.87
Costs	Total \$ Value	\$ value/tree	\$ value/capita
	1,038,873	6.67	1.40
Net Benefits	9,213,106	59.15	12.46

Source: City of Austin Urban Forestry Program, 2008

*\*Based on a 6,465 street tree sample extrapolated to 155,762 street trees*

**Green Infrastructure**

ImagineAustin defines green infrastructure as “strategically planned and managed networks of natural lands, working landscapes and other open spaces that conserve ecosystem values and functions and provide associated benefits to human populations.”

Focus Point | Dead Wood

This refers to dead trees and limbs such as standing yet no longer living “snag” trees or downed logs. Although often regarded as an unattractive nuisance or threat to public health, dead wood serves an essential role in supporting wildlife and enhancing biologic processes. Birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, and various decomposers seek refuge in, on, or underneath dead wood. The presence of dead wood not only provides habitat but also facilitates the release of vital nutrients back into the urban forest ecosystem by increasing carbon in soils and capturing and retaining moisture. Dead wood is a prime example of an essential yet often overlooked benefit of the urban forest.

### Green Infrastructure Elements

- Urban forest
- Urban trails
- Parks
- Greenways
- Greenbelts
- Preserves
- Natural areas
- Rivers
- Creeks
- Lakes
- Gardens
- Urban agricultural land
- Open spaces
- Wildlife habitats
- Stormwater features

### Supporting Austin's Green Infrastructure

Snapshot of current planning efforts by the City of Austin to support green infrastructure.

**ImagineAustin - Green Infrastructure Priority Program** | To manage Austin's urban and natural ecosystems in a coordinated and sustainable manner.

**Invasive Species Management Plan** | A city-wide plan for the control and/or eradication of undesirable aquatic and terrestrial plant species.

**Community Fire Mitigation Plan** | This Plan will provide the framework for the County's efforts to become a Fire-Adapted Community, will aid regional communities in understanding wildfire risk, and will provide guidance for reducing that wildfire threat to avert potential catastrophic fires.

**Climate Protection Plan** | Established in 2007, it establishes five goals and associated objectives to achieve significant reductions in greenhouse gasses by 2020.

**Green Roof Advisory Plan** | A plan to support the growth of green roofs in Austin developed by the Council sponsored Green Roof Advisory Group.

**Watershed Protection Management Plan** | The Watershed Master Plan assesses erosion, flood, and water quality problems in Austin. It also prioritizes and implements effective solutions that address all three problems. Solutions include projects, programs, and regulations.

**Travis County Colorado River Corridor Plan** | The plan's goal is to provide orderly growth in the Corridor and help preserve and enhance the area's many valuable environmental, economic, recreational, and cultural resources.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

### **Focus Point | Cemetery Trees**

Austin's Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) owns and maintains public cemeteries within the city limits. As such, they plant and maintain trees located within its five municipal cemeteries.

At present, the majority of dead cemetery trees are being removed, other trees are being pruned, and many stumps will be ground out from Oakwood, Oakwood Annex, and Evergreen cemeteries. This should make a big difference in the current state of trees within these cemeteries; however PARD will soon address long-term planning of its cemeteries through a Cemetery Master Plan to begin in early 2014. Once completed, the plan will...

Preserve and replace existing vegetation and plant new vegetation in a way that complements the historic character of the cemeteries. The plan will also protect plantings in public spaces and will consider sustainability issues.





Credit: City of Austin, Parks and Recreation Department

DOWELL  
THY KINGDOM  
COME  
THY WILL BE  
DONE

MOTHER  
MINNIE E. DOWELL  
MARCH 18, 1882  
MAY 22, 1910

Dead trees at Oakwood Cemetery (2010)



## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

**Major Urban Forest Pests** | Tree and vegetation-related pests can cause detrimental damage to the urban forest as a whole if not addressed. As a result, the objective of monitoring pests is to lessen significant impacts on the long-term health of the urban forest. The following are a few of the most common pests found in Austin. More information can be found on the Watershed Protection Department's website.

### Fungal Pests:

**Oak Wilt** | Affects the red oak family rapidly, live oaks at intermediate speed, and white oaks less frequently and more slowly. Trees may contract oak wilt via nitidulid beetles or from another infected oak tree's subterranean roots if they graft together from close proximity. There is no treatment for oak wilt; it is a terminal condition.

**Hypoxylon** | Canker colonizes and decays sapwood in trees that are already experiencing stress. Oaks are usually targeted but other hardwoods are also susceptible. This fungus usually presents a terminal situation for the trees that it infects.

### Insect Pests:

**Emerald Ash Borer (EAB)** | This dime-sized insect is currently decimating ash tree populations across the United States. EAB will target stressed and weakened trees, laying eggs on the trunks. The hatched larvae will bore through the bark into the sapwood to feed until they reach adulthood and bore back through the bark and exit the tree. The larval feeding is what incurs the major damage and once a tree is infected it is usually too late to provide health care.

**Nitidulid Beetle** | One of the major vectors (transporters) of the oak wilt fungus. The beetle will travel from tree to tree, spreading the lethal spores.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

### Vegetative Pests:

**Chinaberry** | Invasive tree from Asia. Dark green double-compound leaves. Grows more rapidly than most native trees, outcompeting them for sunlight and eventually shading native trees out altogether.

**Glossy Japanese Privet, *Ligustrum lucidum*** | Invasive multi-stemmed evergreen tree/shrub native to southeast Asia. Leaves are glossy and waxy to the touch, 2-4 inches, and arranged in an opposite pattern. Grows more rapidly than most native trees and will outcompete them in most scenarios.

**Mistletoe** | Brittle evergreen plant that group colonizes on the exterior of tree bark. The plant will penetrate bark tissue and absorb water and nutrients in a parasitic fashion. Poisonous to humans.

### Bacterial Pests:

**Bacterial Leaf Scorch** | *Xylella fastidiosa* is a bacterium known to cause scorch in tree leaf margins. Transmitted by insects that feed on sapwood fluids. Can cause tree stunting, the dying back of branches and death. Not to be mistaken for oak wilt, since the margin scorch can look similar in red oaks.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

### COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK

In a truly sustainable urban forest, all members of a community must cooperate to share the responsibility for natural resource management. Community framework is the fabric for which interested citizens as well as public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders work toward sustainable objectives.

This section covers the following indicators:

- General urban forest awareness
- Neighborhood action

**General Urban Forest Awareness |** Awareness is the first step in community cooperation. Generally speaking, trees are seen as important to the Austin community and are acknowledged as beneficial providers of valuable services, but not without associated concerns. For instance, the 2012 Austin urban forest opinion poll, Tree Be-Leafs, found that participants valued trees most for their shade, environmental benefits, and aesthetics (City of Austin, Urban Forestry Program, 2012). On the other hand, citizens expressed concern about power line interference and roots cracking sidewalks. Citizen concerns have prioritized and will continue to prioritize planning, implementation, and education efforts regarding our urban forest.

**Neighborhood Action |** Neighborhood action requires that citizens understand and participate in public urban forest management. Neighborhood organizations that are led by neighborhood initiatives should inform neighborhood plans that work in partnership with urban forestry standards. Although most Austin neighborhood plans include open space goals, they often lack explicit urban forestry goals. Nevertheless, Austin has an active community involved in parks and natural areas throughout the city. The volunteer efforts of many community-based groups through tree planting initiatives and park cleanup or workdays show community commitment to Austin's natural landscapes. Listed here are just a few examples of community-based tree-related organizations:

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

### Community-Based Groups

- AmeriCorps
- American Youth Works - Texas Conservation Corps
- Austin Chapter of the National Wildlife Federation Habitat Stewards
- Austin Heritage Tree Foundation
- Austin Neighborhoods Council
- Austin Parks Foundation
- Austin Tree Task Force
- Austin-Bastrop River Corridor Partnership
- Barton Creek Greenbelt Guardians
- Capital Area Master Naturalists
- Hill Country Alliance
- Keep Austin Beautiful
- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
- Native Plant Society of Texas
- The Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend
- The Trail Foundation
- Travis County Master Gardeners
- TreeFolks

### Focus Point | TreeFolks

TreeFolks is a nonprofit organization established in 1989 that grows the urban forest through tree planting, education, and community partnerships. The organization invites businesses, schools, government, citizen groups, and individuals to join them in creating a healthier environment and enhancing the quality of urban life. As a volunteer green planting organization, TreeFolks provides a valuable service to the Central Texas community. TreeFolks works closely with other groups to educate and involve citizens in tree planting and care. Since its inception, TreeFolks has planted 250,000 trees in the Austin and Central Texas area.



## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

This section describes the internal administrative and management resources available for sustainable management of Austin's urban forest. This not only pertains to physical resource management but also to public and administrative perceptions of management itself. Resource management includes digital inventories, plans, funding, City staff, policies, etc.

This section covers the following indicators:

- Existing policies
- Urban forest establishment through tree planting programs
- Internal program resources

The creation and adoption of Austin's Urban Forest Plan seeks to guide overall citywide urban forest management such that policies and department operational plans conform to community visions. Ultimately, community visions inform local urban forestry policies that are embodied in our existing Imagine Austin comprehensive plan, City Code, and other policy documents.

**Existing Policies** | The following briefly details the major tree-related policies within the City of Austin to outline how urban forestry resources are managed.

Several City policy documents guide tree protection, preservation, and care within Austin. These include the Land Development Code (e.g., § 6-3-6 Standards of Care for Trees or Plant on Public Property) and the Environmental Criteria Manual.

The City's Land Development Code serves to regulate land development, both public and private, within the city limits and ETJ. Land Development Code 25-8 Subchapter B Article 1 addresses trees and natural area protection during the land development process. Tree regulations for site plans include protecting trees 8-18 inches in diameter at breast height to

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

the extent feasible. Trees 19 inches or greater are considered protected trees and certain species at 24 inches or greater are considered heritage trees. For single-family developments, the protected and heritage tree ordinances apply. For all development, protected and heritage trees must be preserved unless they meet criteria for removal as stated in the Land Development Code.

The Environmental Criteria Manual is the City's technical criteria for complying with the Land Development Code. Section 3 (Tree and Natural Area Preservation) defines design criteria to achieve tree preservation goals derived from the Land Development Code. The section details survey standards, critical root zone preservation standards, mitigation rates, and other details that are required for the development review process.

### **Focus Point | Development and Tree Preservation**

In 1983 the City Council adopted one of the most progressive tree ordinances in the country. The Tree and Natural Area Protection Code is based on the fundamental precepts of sound urban forest management; diversification, preservation, and replenishment. Also, in 2010 City Council unanimously adopted the Heritage Tree Ordinance. Proposed developments are reviewed to assure that a final product complies with the Land Development Code for tree preservation. Code requirements principally address preserving trees, and when trees cannot be preserved and meet code criteria for removal, only then is tree mitigation addressed via tree planting, care for existing trees, and other mitigative measures.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

**Tree and Natural Area Preservation Ordinance |** The Tree and Natural Area Preservation code is designed to assure that trees are an integral part of new development projects. Proposed development projects are evaluated on a case-by-case (and tree-by-tree) basis. The plan review process entails evaluating the existing tree resources on a site, understanding the dynamics of trees and development impacts, and negotiating a solution that results in a development with a balanced mixture of young and mature trees, and a good diversity of species. Trees 8 inches in diameter and larger on a commercial sites (19 inches in diameter on a single-family home sites) are evaluated for protection and replacement. The goal of each review is to assure that a final product is achieved that results in a diversified and sustainable urban forest. Existing trees are preserved when possible; additionally, high quality native and adapted trees are required to be planted on development sites. Environmental Inspectors regulate the site during construction. More specifics on the City of Austin tree ordinance can be obtained within the Land Development Code (LDC) 25-8, Subchapter B.

**Tree Planting Programs |** Several tree planting groups, both public and nonprofit-based, guide new tree plantings in Austin. Austin Community Trees serves as a public partnership to plant trees with the ultimate goal of increasing canopy cover to cool Austin neighborhoods. In addition to ACT, Austin's Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) plants trees during the planting season (October-March) in parks, medians, and the right-of-way. Funding comes from Planting for the Future Fund and planting locations are chosen based on neighborhood requests and a park planting prioritization analysis. Within PARC, the Urban Forestry Program plants approximately 500-1,000 trees annually. Areas that are planted are usually the result of a request from neighborhood associations. Plantings conducted on Saturdays with the help of volunteers. The nonprofit organization TreeFolks promotes reforestation in Central Texas through a tree planting program called NeighborWoods, which delivers street trees on private residential property free of charge. The advantage of NeighborWoods lies in its partnership and reach across both public

### **Decker Indiangrass Management Plan**

This management plan outlines a five-year strategy to initiate the long-term restoration of Blackland Prairie in Decker Tallgrass Prairie Preserve and Indiangrass Wildlife Sanctuary, located within Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park.

### **NeighborWoods**

Through this program TreeFolks, a local nonprofit organization, plants 3,600 trees each year along residential streets and sidewalks.

and private realms. The program works closely with PARD staff and is sponsored by the City’s Climate Protection Program, Austin Energy, Apache, and Save Barton Creek Association. According to the TreeFolks website, they plant 10,000 trees annually with a total of 250,000 trees in the Austin region to date.

Figure 2.12 (next page) shows the collaborative efforts of tree-related programs and responsibilities across City departments.

**Parks and Recreation** | PARD primarily responds to tree issues in parks, preserves, and rights-of-way through the City’s 311 call service. The department is responsible for more than 2,000 miles of rights-of-way and more than 16,000 acres of park land, according to the City’s GIS datasets. The Urban Forestry Program exists within PARD as the primary entity for maintaining, preserving, removing, and planting trees growing on City parks and public property. Activities consist of removing low limbs over the rights-of-way, clearing blind corners, removing and planting trees, and hauling woody debris from streets and parks.

**Austin Energy** | Austin Energy primarily responds to trees located in power line easements and near street lamps. Activities include pruning trees for electric utility line clearance and partnering with local nonprofits (e.g., TreeFolks) to plant new trees according to goals set in the City’s Heat Island Initiative and Climate Protection Program. Austin Energy manages the vegetation under and around its 2,300 miles of overhead distribution and 500 miles of transmission lines. To accomplish this, Austin Energy has instituted a program for the maintenance and management of the vegetation along the lines. Austin Energy’s goal is to visit every mile of line once every four to five years to maintain the vegetation around the electric facilities.



## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

**Figure 2.13 | Tree-Related Responsibilities by City of Austin Departments**

Planning & Development Review	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Zoning	✓	✓			
2. Annexation	✓				
3. Environmental Inspection & Enforcement	✓	✓			
4. Landscape Inspection		✓	✓		
5. Comprehensive Planning		✓	✓		✓
6. GIS/Data Analysis	✓		✓		
7. City Arborist Program					
• Land Use & Environmental Review	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Heritage Tree Ordinance	✓	✓		✓	
• General Permits	✓	✓		✓	
• Tree Ordinance	✓	✓	✓	✓	
• Hill Country Roadway Ordinance	✓	✓			
• Oak Wilt Program				✓	✓
• Urban forest Grant Program			✓	✓	✓
8. Urban Design					
• Great Streets	✓	✓	✓		
• TODs	✓	✓	✓		✓
• Small-Area Plans	✓	✓	✓		✓
9. Neighborhood Planning					
• Austin Community Trees		✓	✓		✓

Parks & Recreation	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Memorial Dedication Tree Planting			✓		✓
2. Site Plan Review	✓	✓			
3. GIS/Data Analysis		✓	✓	✓	
4. Emergency response				✓	
5. Public Tree Care Permitting	✓			✓	
6. Tree City USA					✓
7. Adopt a Park Volunteer Agreements			✓	✓	
8. Community Gardens/Food Forests			✓		✓
9. Urban Forester					
• Preserves & Greenbelts		✓	✓	✓	✓
• Planting (Parks, ROW, and other public property)			✓		✓
• Maintenance (Parks, ROW, and other public property)				✓	
• Public & Private Partnerships		✓	✓	✓	✓
• Tree Inventory		✓	✓	✓	✓
• Park Planning		✓			
• Claims, Legal, & Appraisals	✓	✓			
• Urban Forestry Board Liaison	✓	✓			✓
10. Strategic & Operational Planning					
• Urban Forest Master Plan	✓	✓	✓		
• Site-specific Planning		✓	✓		
• Maintenance & Park And Trail Planning		✓	✓	✓	
11. Public Outreach & Education					
• Urban Forest Stewards					✓
• Leaf for a Leaf					✓
• Arbor Day					✓

Public Works	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Capital Improvement Projects		✓			
2. ROW Maintenance	✓			✓	
3. Subdivision Infrastructure Construction		✓			
4. Road Improvements				✓	
5. Inspection				✓	
6. Sidewalk Easements	✓	✓			
7. Row & Alley: Debris Removal				✓	
8. Traffic Signs/Signals Clearance	✓			✓	
9. Neighborhood Partnering Program		✓	✓		✓

Watershed Protection	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Stream Restoration					
2. Creek Maintenance (Field Operations)		✓	✓	✓	
3. Grow Green					✓
4. Flood Mitigation					
5. Watershed Protection Master Plan					
6. GIS/Data Analysis					
7. State of the Environment Report					
8. Riparian Zone Restoration Program					
9. Invasive Species Program		✓	✓	✓	
10. Integrated Pest Management (IPM)			✓	✓	

### Key

- Regulation:** Program helps establish policies regulating some aspect of trees, e.g., protection, mitigation, placement, etc.
- Planning:** Program establishes strategic, long term, or comprehensive plans related to trees.
- Planting:** Program supports planting of trees, including organization and tree-distribution, watering for 2 years.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

Austin Water	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Dillo Dirt					
2. Wildland Conservation		✓		✓	✓
3. Water Conservation & Enforcement					
4. Water Quality Land Acquisition		✓			
5. Water Quality Protection Lands		✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Balcones Canyonland Preserve		✓	✓	✓	✓
7. Wildland Outreach			✓		✓
8. Fire Management Program		✓		✓	✓
9. Reclaimed Water					

Office of Sustainability	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Sustainable Land Management					
2. Heat Island					
3. Neighborhoods					
4. Tree of the Year					
5. Green Alley (PW-CIP)					
6. Green Roofs Program					
7. Large Shade Tree Contract			✓		

Transportation	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Long-Range Transportation Planning					
2. Parking					
3. Signs & Signals					
4. Traffic Engineers					
5. License Agreement	✓		✓	✓	

Austin Resource Recovery	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Large Brush & Yard Trimmings Pick-Up					
2. Bulk Brush					
3. Christmas Tree Recycling					

Austin Energy	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Green Building	✓	✓			✓
2. Power Line Clearance (AE)			✓	✓	✓

Fire	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Wildland Fire Interface		✓		✓	✓
2. Development Review Support	✓	✓			

Corporate Purchasing	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Tree-related Contracts & Services					

Office of Emergency Management	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Ice Storms		✓			

Economic Growth & Redevelopment Services	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
· Downtown Redevelopment					

Law	Regulation	Planning	Planting	Maintenance	Education
1. Real Estate					

### Maintenance:

Program relates to City maintenance of trees, including inspection, pruning, removal, long-term irrigation, etc.

### Education:

Program provides tree-related education and/or outreach to public.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

**Public Works |** Responsibilities of the Public Works Department (Public Works) overlap PARD activities, as most of their efforts relate to trees on rights-of-way and transportation corridors. Public Works removes tree limbs that obstruct traffic signals, and removes debris from streets, alleys, and sidewalks.

**Planning and Development Review |** The Planning and Development Review Department (PDRD) integrates tree planting goals into the neighborhood planning process by providing free trees through the Austin Community Tree (ACT) program. In addition, PDRD houses the City Arborist's Office, which is responsible for issuing private tree permits on residential and commercial properties. The arborist's goals derive from the City's Land Development Code and Environmental Criteria Manual, which guide tree protection, preservation, and design criteria.

**Watershed Protection |** The Watershed Protection Department (WPD) manages the urban forest in riparian areas, with most efforts related to erosion problems on stream banks and trees growing on property overseen by the department. In conjunction with PDRD, the WPD works to improve riparian zones along creeks by establishing "no-mow/grow zones" along creek banks to improve erosion control, habitat, and water quality.

**Austin Community Trees (ACT)** serves to reduce the urban heat island effect by planting new trees on private property near streets and sidewalks. Eligible neighborhoods must have adopted a neighborhood plan, established a neighborhood contact team, and have low tree canopy cover (below 40%) as defined by GIS analysis of the neighborhood. The ACT program exists as a public partnership between the community and organizations that care for trees: PDRD, PARD, and AE.



Credit: City of Austin, Urban Forestry Program

Ditmar Park Planting (2013)



### URBAN FORESTRY ONGOING CHALLENGES

In 2012, the Urban Forestry Board compiled the top three to four ongoing challenges that prevent the City of Austin from achieving each vision component. Using the Urban Forestry Board's Retreat results as the groundwork for this collaborative process, the working group crafted priority challenges for each of the six vision categories. The following lists these challenges.

#### 1. CONTIGUOUS

- Lack of Integrated land classification and management of public lands
- Fragmented regional comprehensive planning/land classification
- Competing land use/urban development patterns

#### 1. PROTECTED

- Insufficient resources to promote and enforce tree regulations
- Misperception of what a sustainable site is
- Insufficient mechanism to update standards and specifications for tree protection and sustainable site design.

#### 2. HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM

- Lack of education and/or utilization of ecosystem-specific appropriate species
- Lack of comprehensive inventory
- Lack of coordinated effort to create a comprehensive locally and regional planting plan that supports diversity of age and species
- Lack of resources to accomplish the above things.

## Chapter 2: State of Austin's Urban Forest

---

### 3. VALUED

- Lack of local government and public awareness and education of the benefits and value of the urban forest
- Inadequate methods for quantifying the ecosystem services and the financial benefits of the urban forest
- City government does not value trees as a public utility deserving of associated funds and regulations

### 4. THRIVING

- Biotic and abiotic stressors, i.e. invasive species, urban soil, and climate change
- Lack of financial resources for expanding the urban forest to optimal capacity
- Attrition of urban forest due to competing land uses and site design
- Lack of quantitative and qualitative information about the urban forest resource

### 5. CARED FOR

- Lack of resources prevents proactive urban forest maintenance
- Large size and complexity of City of Austin and ecosystem
- Lack of coordinated urban forest planning and management effort on a citywide scale
- Lack of education

# Implementation



— Leaf the Tree participant

3



SpeakUp Austin participant

**Chapter 3 outlines implementation—the process of fulfilling goals and visions of the community. It involves policy measures to effect positive change within our urban forest. Our policies parallel the broad scope of this plan, as they are general and strategic, intending to change departmental urban forestry management.**

### **IMPLEMENTATION GOALS & ACTIONS**

### **POLICY ELEMENTS**



### IMPLEMENTATION GOALS & ACTIONS

**B**ecause implementation is the first step in a transformation of public urban forest management, in order for a plan to be effective, and produce change, implementation of the plan must spell out clear, measurable objectives. These objectives must be broad to accommodate the scope of the plan, and must address the strategic purpose (as opposed to a tactical purpose) of the plan. The success of the plan will be measured in terms of the City's response to addressing the items laid out in the form of the Departmental Operational Plans and in making strides in advancing the Urban Forester functions. If implementation goals are met, there should be a marked change in the performance measures, which, as a whole, can be considered a report card on the City's urban forest resource management.



### GUIDELINES

**Time Frame:** The time frame for the Austin Urban Forest Plan is twenty years. Every five years following its adoption, the Urban Forest Plan shall be reviewed by the Urban Forestry Board with assistance from Urban Forester and will be evaluated to determine its efficacy in achieving the Plan vision. If the Urban Forestry Board determines that adjustments to the Austin Urban Forest Plan are needed, the Urban Forestry Board may initiate a Plan revision. Any revision will require the Urban Forestry Board to solicit recommendations from the Parks and Recreation Board and

## Chapter 3: Implementation

---

the Environmental Board and will require City Council approval prior to implementation.

In addition, Departmental Operational Plans shall be reviewed by the Urban Forestry Board as they are developed and prior to their implementation.

After twenty years following Austin Urban Forest Plan adoption, a required revision of the Austin Urban Forest Plan shall be initiated by the Urban Forestry Board with assistance from the City of Austin Urban Forester. This revision should take into consideration broad changes in the community, changes and predictions in regional climate, and new or anticipated threats to the urban forest.

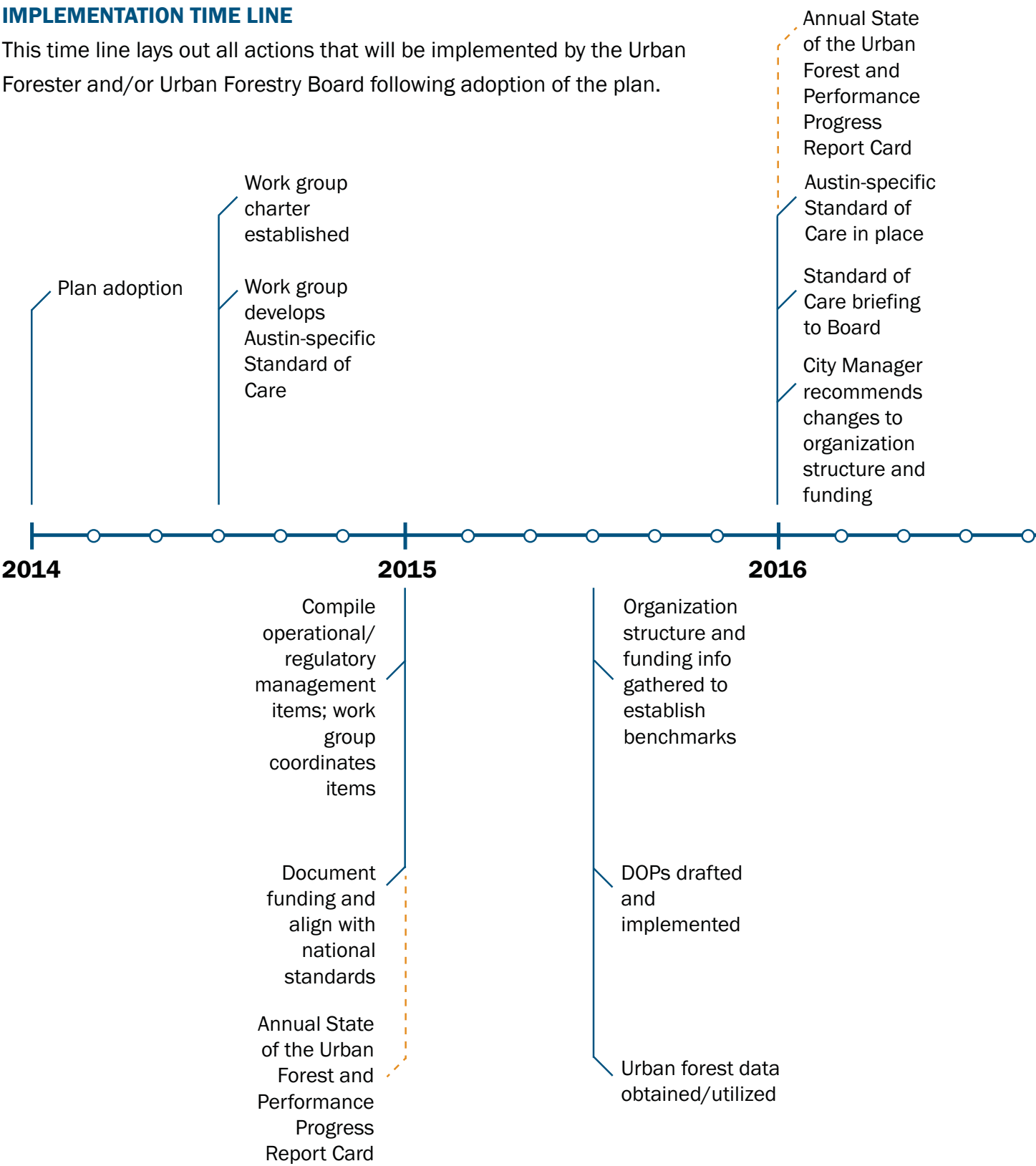
**Reporting:** The Urban Forester will develop an annual State of the Urban Forest Report to update the status and trend of the Performance Report Card as well as Departmental progress on developing Departmental Operational Plans to address the Policy Elements.

**Public Input:** Much of the public input received for Austin's Urban Forest Plan is tactical in nature. In many instances, specific geographic areas or management practices are mentioned. Because the Austin Urban Forest Plan is a broad, strategic document that is not intended to spell out specific changes to operations performed by City Departments, much of the public input received for the Plan will be shared with City Departments and will be used to guide the development of Departmental Operational Plans. The Departmental Operational Plans shall be developed and reviewed by the Urban Forest Board as they become available. The Board will provide input and at those meetings the public will have the opportunity to provide citizen comment.

# Chapter 3: Implementation

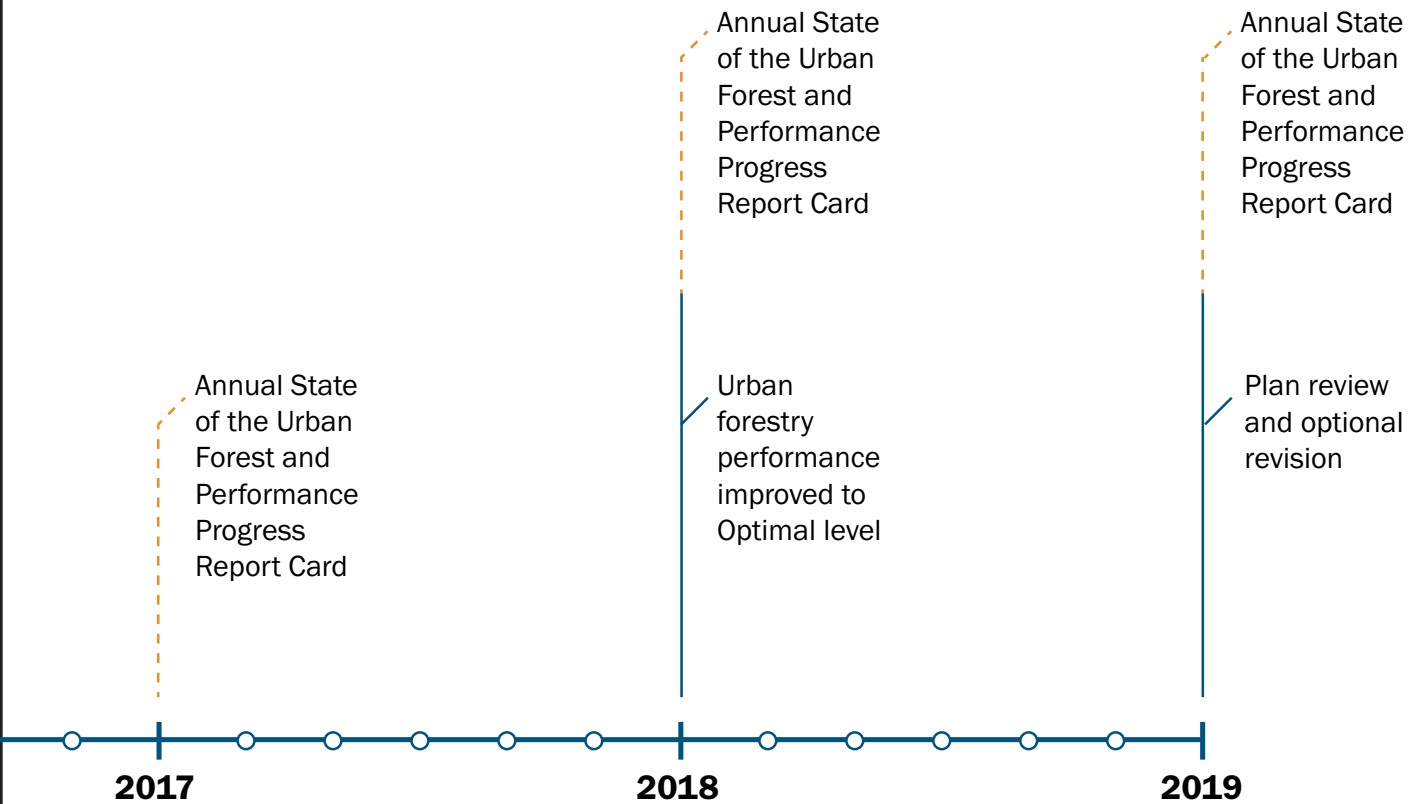
## IMPLEMENTATION TIME LINE

This time line lays out all actions that will be implemented by the Urban Forester and/or Urban Forestry Board following adoption of the plan.



## Chapter 3: Implementation

---



### IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

#### Overall strategies:

- Improvement of performance measures in the Annual Performance Report Card
- City departments to develop tactical Departmental Operational Plans based on the Austin Urban Forest Plan
- Citywide follow-up items are implemented by the Urban Forester
- Mechanism established for interdepartmental coordination on urban forest decision-making
- City of Austin alignment with national standards or benchmarks for urban forest management, especially related to management structure and funding



### IMPLEMENTATION GOALS & ACTIONS

#### **1) Urban Forest Annual Performance Report Card**

Overall, by 2018, the City of Austin improves its management of the urban forest to an overall level of optimal based on performance measures in the Urban Forest Annual Performance Report Card; examples include canopy cover, species, class and age distribution.

**1.1** By 18 months following adoption of the Austin Urban Forest Plan, the Urban Forester shall obtain and utilize additional comprehensive public urban forest data collection and analysis, especially where known gaps exist, to improve data reliability and inform future updates to Performance Report Card's performance measures. Data collection methods shall follow nationally-recognized best management practices in acquiring tree and vegetation information for purposes of maintenance, planning, canopy goal establishment, and other comprehensive urban forest management efforts. Data shall include tree inventories and GIS data and shall be collected and stored in standard formats easily shared between departments and stakeholders. For example, see the International Society of Arboriculture's (2013) Best Management Practices: Tree Inventories, 2nd Edition. Recognizing that data collection methods vary according to intended purposes and that all urban forests are unique, inventory options should adjust to achieve desired goals and purposes.

**1.2** The Urban Forester, with Urban Forestry Board review, shall provide urban forest data to departments to guide the Departmental Operational Plans and to the Urban Forestry Board to guide review of the Austin Urban Forest Plan.

**1.3** The Urban Forester will report annually, starting 18 months following the adoption of the Austin Urban Forest Plan, on the status of the performance measures and will include additional information on trends or current urban forest issues. The information will be provided in the State of the Urban Forest Report.

**1.4** The Urban Forester, with Urban Forestry Board review, shall coordinate with other departments to establish standardized data collection and formats to improve citywide urban forest data management and analysis.

## Chapter 3: Implementation

---

### **2) Departmental Operational Plans**

Every land-managing or land-regulating department has a draft Departmental Operational Plan based on the Austin Urban Forest Plan and Action Matrix and is actively implementing within 18 months following adoption of the Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan.

**2.1** The Urban Forester, with Urban Forestry Board review, shall oversee and provide staff support to Departments in their development of Departmental Operational Plans for urban forest management.

**2.2** The Urban Forester, with Urban Forestry Board review, shall utilize the Departmental Operational Plan Action Matrix to facilitate the progress of Departmental implementation of the Austin Urban Forest Plan.

**2.3** The Urban Forestry Board shall review and provide recommendations on the Departmental Operational Plans in public meetings on an annual basis.

**2.4** The Urban Forester and Urban Forestry Board shall establish a process to assure that the public comments in the Appendices of this plan are reviewed and considered for action by the departments when writing their Departmental Operational Plans.

**2.3** The Urban Forester will report once per year to the Urban Forestry Board regarding Departmental progress toward implementing the Austin Urban Forest Plan.

### **3) Austin Standard of Care**

Austin-specific Standard of Care for Trees and Vegetation in place by 24 months following adoption of the Austin Urban Forest Plan and provides common guidance and best-management practices to all Departments.

**3.1** By 12 months following adoption of the Austin Urban Forest Plan, the Urban Forester will identify and compile all existing operational or regulatory items regarding urban forest management that guide or direct Departments. This information will identify areas for improvement as well as inconsistencies.

## Chapter 3: Implementation

---

**3.2** By 24 6 months following the adoption of the Austin Urban Forest Plan, the Urban Forester will facilitate an interdepartmental working group to develop an Austin-specific Standard of Care for Trees and Plants on Public Property, adapted from the current Standard of Care, to provide locally relevant direction regarding public urban forest management.

**3.3** The Urban Forester will brief the Urban Forestry Board regarding the updated Standard of Care by 24 months following adoption of the Austin Urban Forest Plan.

**3.4** The Urban Forester will facilitate the incorporation of the Standard of Care into City rules and ordinances utilizing City role/ordinance change processes and rule/ordinance update projects.

**3.5** The Urban Forester will educate citizens, developers, and community groups regarding the Standard of Care to encourage its utilization on private property.

### **4) Coordination**

Within 12 months an interdepartmental tree work group coordinates all operational and regulatory functions related to urban forest management and is overseen and coordinated by a single governing authority.

**4.1** Within 6 months after adoption of the Austin Urban Forest Plan, the Urban Forester will facilitate an interdepartmental, multi-disciplinary work group comprised of City land management and land regulatory departments and establish a charter for the group. This group will coordinate urban forest policy changes and establish and update citywide Best Management Practices (BMP's) for urban forest management.

**4.2** By 24 months following the adoption of the Austin Urban Forest Plan and with information gathered by the Urban Forester and interdepartmental work teams, the City Manager will recommend changes based on recommendations from the interdepartmental group.

### **5) Benchmarks**

Within 12 months following adoption of the Austin Urban Forest Plan the City of Austin management structure and funding for urban forestry is

## Chapter 3: Implementation

---

well-documented and aligned with national standards and benchmarks. Develop a process for departments to develop and review public comments.

**5.1** By 18 months following the adoption of the Austin Urban Forest Plan, the Urban Forester will compile detailed organizational structure and funding information from all City entities that manage the urban forest as well as from other municipalities comparable to Austin to establish and compare urban forest benchmarks. The Urban Forester will present this information to the Urban Forestry Board and the City Manager.

**5.2** By 24 months following the adoption of the Austin Urban Forest Plan, the City Manager will review benchmark data regarding municipal urban forest management and recommend changes to organization structure and/or funding of urban forest management in Austin.

### **6) Private Trees**

While this plan only addresses trees on public property it is recommended that a strategy be developed by appropriate designees to address the urban forest on private property.



POLICY ELEMENTS

The Policy Elements are the guiding framework of Austin’s Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan. Individual Policy Elements are seeds of change, which, collectively, provide an overall strategy for achieving the vision for Austin’s urban forest. 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. However, since the municipal functions that affect the urban forest, both directly and indirectly, are so varied and widespread across numerous City departments, each single Policy Element must be broad enough to encompass all of those functions. Accordingly, the tactical approach to addressing each Policy Element will be the responsibility of each City department, documented in a Departmental Operational Plan (DOP) developed in consideration of their mission(s), limitations and constraints, and opportunities.

6 POLICY ELEMENT CATEGORIES

\*Categories are ordered according to community prioritization.

PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION

- PR-1 Comprehensive Regulatory Approaches
- PR-2 Protection of Trees and Root Zones During and After Development
- PR-3 Protect Steep Slopes
- PR-4 Partnerships
- PR-5 View Obstructions
- PR-6 Vegetation Valuation
- PR-7 Recovering Vegetation Value
- PR-8 Prominent Rare Urban Forest Elements

SUSTAINABLE URBAN FOREST

- S-1 Species, Age, and Geographic Diversity
- S-2 Urban Wood Utilization
- S-3 Integrated Pest Management
- S-4 Urban Wildlife Habitat
- S-5 Wildfire Risk
- S-6 Invasive Species Management

**Policy Element**  
categories were prioritized through the public participation process outlined in Appendix \_\_. While the community felt that each category was important some issues needed a higher priority than others.

When it comes to urban forest management, citizen responses are mixed in regards to policy element prioritization versus funding as shown in the figures above. Preservation and protection is clearly a priority.

“Preserve trees from development. Consider them green infrastructure.”  
— *Leaf the Tree* participant



- S-7 Water Conservation and Design and Maintenance Planning
- S-8 Urban Forest Pests
- S-9 Partnership

### **PLANTING, CARE, AND MAINTENANCE**

- PCM-1 Planting Priorities
- PCM-2 Species Selection
- PCM-3 Urban Forest Planting and Maintenance Plan and Program
- PCM-4 Planting Stock
- PCM-5 Tree Canopy Cover
- PCM-6 Landscape Maintenance Management Plans
- PCM-7 Partnerships
- PCM-8 Public Safety
- PCM-9 Prominent Trees

### **URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

- UF-1 Management Priorities
- UF-2 Resource Needs
- UF-3 Urban Forestry Funding Allocation
- UF-4 Funding Sources for Maintenance
- UF-5 Departmental Urban Forest Management Plan
- UF-6 Standards of Care for Trees and Plants
- UF-7 Coordination of Efforts and Partnerships
- UF-8 Staff Qualifications and Training
- UF-9 Contracts
- UF-10 Urban Forester Support
- UF-11 Data Collection and Management
- UF-12 Urban Forest Risk Management
- UF-13 Land Classification
- UF-14: Regulatory Review

### **PLANNING AND DESIGN**

- PD-1 City Design Coordination
- PD-2 Infrastructure Design
- PD-3 Soil Quality
- PD-4 Soil Volume

## Chapter 3: Implementation

---

- PD-5 Reduce Soil Compaction
- PD-6 Landscaping and Storm Water Management
- PD-7 Partnerships
- PD-8 Planning Infrastructure Maintenance
- PD-9 Tailored Incentives
- PD-10 Urban Forest and Transportation
- PD-11 Designing for Human Health
- PD-12 Design with Maintenance in Mind

### **EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

- EO-1 Education
- EO-2 Promote Stewardship
- EO-3 Incentives
- EO-4 Partnerships
- EO-5 Records and Information
- EO-6 Education of Urban Forest Service Providers
- EO-7 Public Demonstration Projects

### **CITY STAFF INPUT**

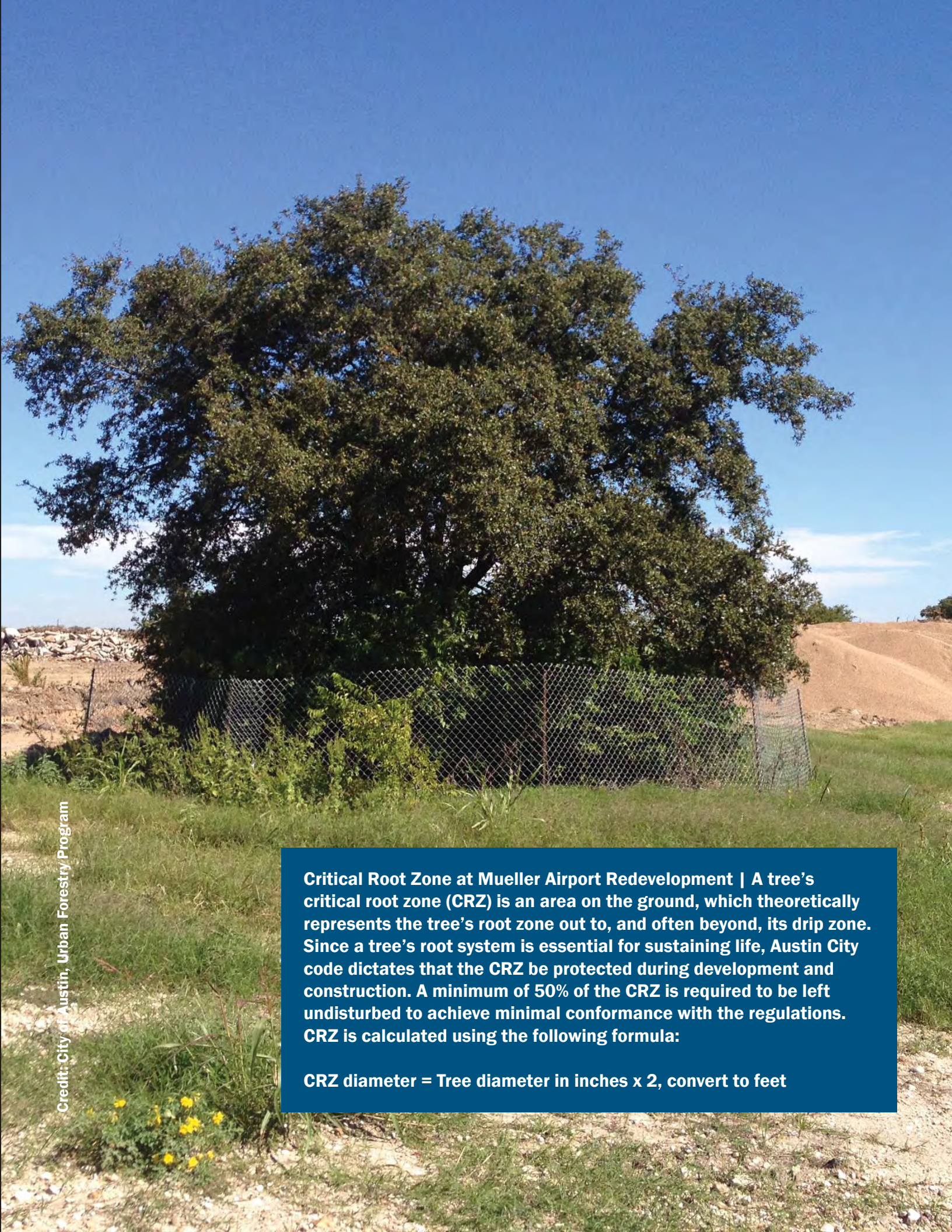
Interdepartmental staff provided feedback and edits to the Policy Elements prior to final editing by the Urban Forestry Board. The following departments provided feedback:

- Parks and Recreation Department
- Planning and Development Review Department
- Austin Fire Department
- Austin Water Utility
- Watershed Protection Department
- Austin Bergstrom International Airport
- Office of Sustainability
- Public Works Department
- Austin Transportation Department

### **PUBLIC INPUT**

Public input was sought in determining which topical categories are most important for the Austin community. The order in which the Policy Element





Credit: City of Austin, Urban Forestry Program

**Critical Root Zone at Mueller Airport Redevelopment | A tree's critical root zone (CRZ) is an area on the ground, which theoretically represents the tree's root zone out to, and often beyond, its drip zone. Since a tree's root system is essential for sustaining life, Austin City code dictates that the CRZ be protected during development and construction. A minimum of 50% of the CRZ is required to be left undisturbed to achieve minimal conformance with the regulations. CRZ is calculated using the following formula:**

**CRZ diameter = Tree diameter in inches x 2, convert to feet**



Categories will appear indicates 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 the interfaces with the urban forest will be required to report on their annual progress in addressing each Policy Element.

Figure 3.1 | Citizen Prioritization of Urban Forestry Policy Elements

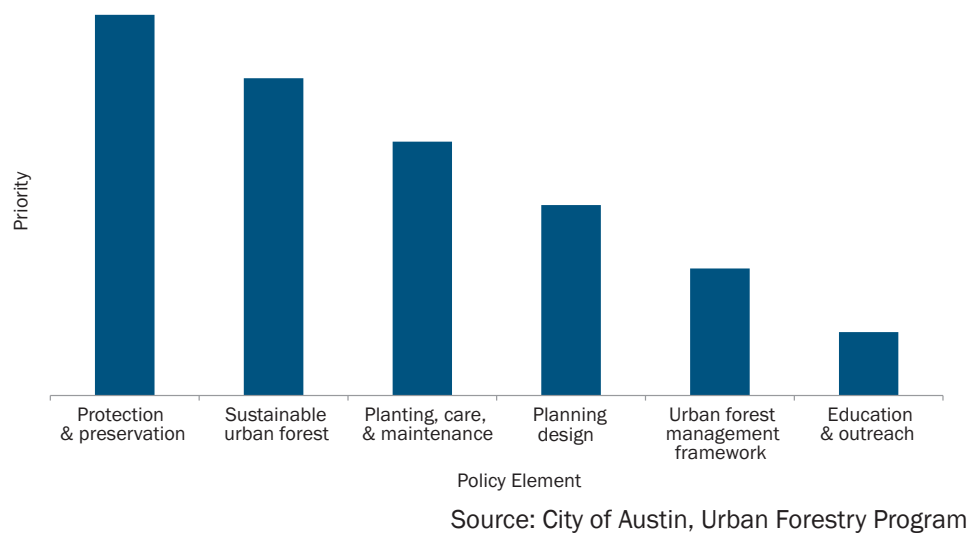
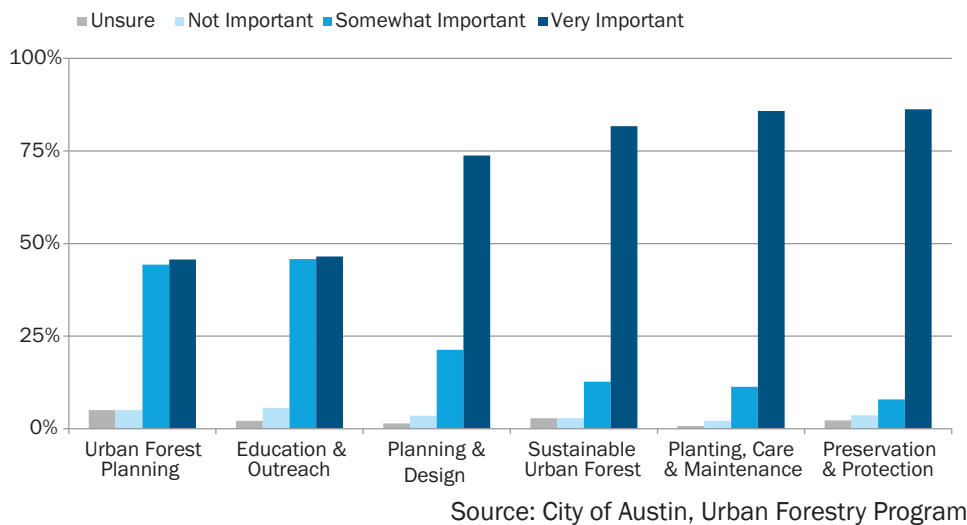


Figure 3.2 | What Urban Forest Management Items are Important to Fund?



Community Voices



“Manage fire risk... create a defensible space.”

Plant adequate tree species for areas and obtain trees from local nurseries.”

“Protect trees, wildlife, vegetation and creeks in riparian areas.”

**Light Pollution & Wildlife Habitat |** Street and park lighting contributes to the artificial glow in our night sky. This creates light pollution that is detrimental to both human health and flora/fauna health. For instance, the use of nighttime light has shown to disrupt natural biological rhythms, to create potentially adverse health effects in humans, and to threaten public safety (American Medical Association, 2012). Artificial light can change the way trees adjust to seasonal variations which has implications for wildlife who rely on trees for shelter and habitat (Briggs, 2006). This is one example of how urban wildlife habitat can be affected by our design decisions. In addition to minimizing nighttime lighting, habitats can be enhanced through sustainable strategies such as leaving dead wood where possible, allowing for snags in natural areas, introducing butterfly gardens, and regenerating continuous understory and tree canopy cover particularly along riparian corridors. Policy elements S-4 and PD-11 address health and habitat considerations.

Dallas/  
Fort Worth

Austin

San Antonio

Houston

Credit: NASA

The Texas Triangle at Night

**The Policy Element “Test”** | Policy Elements are grouped into categories based on their urban forest topical category. The following questions were considered in determining the relevance and appropriateness of including each Policy Element:

- Does this policy element support the CUPF 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?

### The Policy Elements

#### PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION

**Policies related to preservation of public urban forest resources through regulation and other approaches that enhance preservation.**

##### PR-1 Comprehensive Regulatory Approaches

Examine existing regulations to ensure the most comprehensive protection and preservation of the natural diversity of the Urban Forest; if needed, develop and implement improved regulatory approaches. Require strict adherence to city tree and vegetation regulations such as the Heritage Tree Ordinance.

##### PR-2 Protection of Trees and Root Zones During and After Development

Evaluate and enhance current policies for public urban forest protection during and after development to promote the long-term health and survival of trees and vegetation retained during development. Evaluate and modify protection and mitigation practices for long-term tree survival.

##### 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

#### Community Voices



“Manage fire risk with a complete fire wise program that starts with education then hardens the home and finally, creates a defensible space - don’t remove trees for fire risk.”

“Plant trees by bicycle paths.”

“Help preserve trees through oak wilt prevention.”

“Create a comprehensive watering and drought management plan to keep trees healthy.”

“Plant adequate tree species for areas.”



### Community Voices



“Provide a canopy goal for different areas (residential, commercial, preserves) and a plan and timeline on how to obtain that.”

“Plant shade trees in public cemeteries, including large species and throughout the cemetery, not just crepe myrtles around the perimeter.”

“Preserve trees from development. Consider them green infrastructure - do not remove street trees so easily for developers to install a driveway.”

natural character.

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

Partner with federal, state, regional, and local governmental jurisdictions, community nonprofit organizations, other City departments, the private sector and others to increase preservation and protection of the urban forest such as mulching, and watering mature tree during periods of insufficient rainfall.

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

Establish incentives, regulations and education efforts to reduce conflicts between public and private interests, 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 trees and vegetation is not feasible, require the complete replacement of the functional value of the removed resource, and mitigate as close in proximity to the loss and as soon as possible. Evaluate and modify protection and ineffective mitigation practices and policies as necessary.

#### **PR-8 Prominent 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.



### **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, a regionally appropriate mix of vegetation, mixed-age populations and a varied distribution of species throughout the City to protect and improve the vigor and the resilience of our urban forests. Align urban forest composition with consideration of predicted climate patterns. Plant appropriate native species in appropriate habitats.

#### **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 Urban Wildlife Habitat**

Enhance urban 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 according to the Invasive Species Management Plan. Provide public education about the detriment of non-native invasive species to the urban forest, particularly when related to other management policies.

### **Community Voices**



“Invest in maintenance of public trees.”

“Develop standards for snags.”

“Establish standards for tree care that are based on scientific principles and applied uniformly.”

“Develop standards for soil aeration.”

### Community Voices



“Safety, reclaimed water, and planting.”

“Safety is most important, then keeping trees.”

#### **S-7 Water Conservation and Design and Maintenance Planning**

Maximize the use of non-potable sources (e.g., storm water, reclaimed water) and adopt practices that conserve potable sources. During design and maintenance planning evaluate the need for supplemental irrigation of public trees and vegetation to reduce water waste. Minimize the use of potable water on turf.

#### **S-8 Urban Forest Pests**

Using the principles and practices of Integrated Pest Management, 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 nonprofit organizations, the private sector and others to accomplish the sustainability goals of Austin’s urban forest ecosystem.

### **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, while understanding the inherent conflict between active site use and healthy forests.**

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

Prioritize tree planting and landscaping on public property particularly in parks and along sidewalks and transit corridors, planting long lived native trees where possible to maximize environmental, social, and economic benefits and the longevity of the urban forest.

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

Encourage the selection of appropriate native species based on project, location, site conditions, and potential future changes in climate patterns.

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

Establish and maintain a strategic planting and maintenance program (including pruning, mulching, and watering of mature trees during

insufficient rainfall) based on national standards and best management practices. Ensure the long-term survival of the urban forest by prioritizing proactive maintenance to reduce resources expended on reactive or emergency response. Maximize urban forest benefits, and reduce urban forest mortality .

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

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

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

Identify canopy goals according to site, land use designation and ecosystem capacity, and develop a plan to achieve them. Include canopy cover goals in Departmental Operational Plans.

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

Ensure that trees and vegetation are properly cared for and survive, both during the time the plant is becoming established and in perpetuity. Means for doing this include landscape management plans, maintenance agreements, Standards of Care, and/or monitoring, especially during periods of insufficient rainfall.

### **PCM-7 Partnerships**

Partner with federal, state, regional, and local governmental jurisdictions, community nonprofit organizations, 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 risks of urban forest elements that impact public health and safety.

### **PCM-9 Prominent Trees**

Due to the community value of prominent trees, additional watering, care and maintenance, and protection shall be provided according to the Standards of Care and Best Management Practices.

## **Community Voices**



“Don’t allow cars, etc... to park under trees in parks, green belt entrances, etc...”

### Community Voices



“Preserve trees  
along right of ways.”

#### **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**

Evaluate and document the ecosystem services and benefits of the urban forest. Consider the value of those services and benefits when seeking a balance between multiple and potentially competing needs of the environment, utilities and infrastructure, safety, the rights of property owners, budget priorities, 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 functions to support the City’s vision for its urban forest. Identify and quantify gaps in urban forest management funding compared with national benchmarks and incorporate those needs in the Departmental budgeting process.

##### **UF-3 Urban Forestry Funding Allocation**

Allocate an appropriate proportion of funding for urban forest management.

##### **UF-4 Funding Sources for Maintenance**

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

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

Create a Departmental Operational Plan 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 Departmental Operational Plans Action Matrix. Update the Departmental Operational Plans to reflect changing policies and regulations, standards of care, 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 Operational Plans. 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 Departmental Operational Plans.

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

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

### **UF-8 Staff Qualifications and Training**

Employ qualified individuals for all staff engaged in urban forest management, care, and maintenance, and provide regular training to maintain qualifications up to and above recognized standards and best practices. Ensure that decisions are being made and maintenance is being performed according to City of Austin Standards of Care and industry best practices.

### **UF-9 Contracts**

When outsourcing urban forest management on public property, include contract provisions requiring demonstrated experience and qualifications. Ensure that contracts include specifications that align with the City of Austin Standards of Care and urban forest best practices.

### **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**

Collect data regarding Austin's urban forest to support the creation of Departmental Operational Plans and inform urban forest management decisions. Data collection methods should follow nationally-recognized best management practices in acquiring vegetation information for purposes of maintenance, planning, canopy goal establishment, and

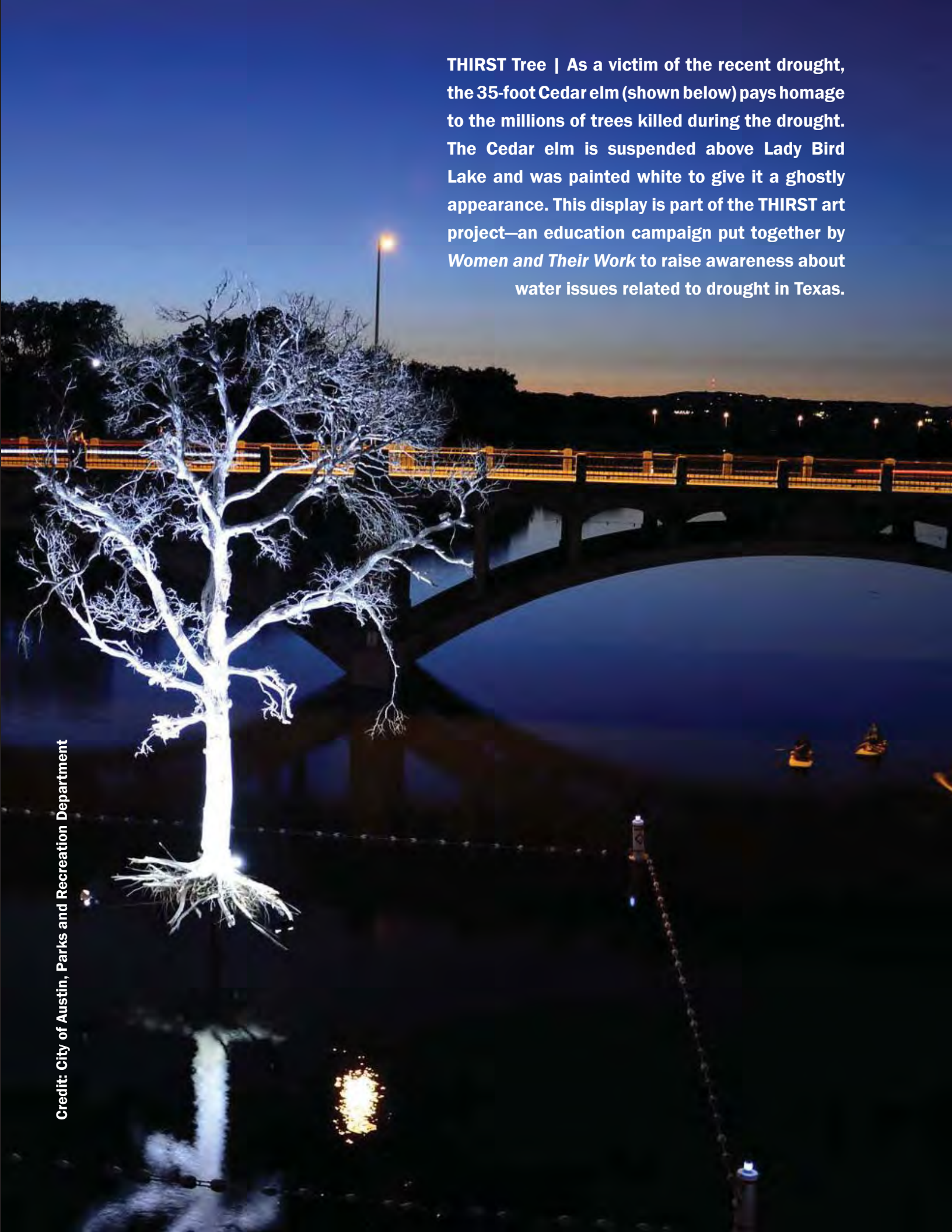
## **Community Voices**



“Treat all non-profits that are PARD partners equally to get more community support.”

**THIRST Tree |** As a victim of the recent drought, the 35-foot Cedar elm (shown below) pays homage to the millions of trees killed during the drought. The Cedar elm is suspended above Lady Bird Lake and was painted white to give it a ghostly appearance. This display is part of the THIRST art project—an education campaign put together by *Women and Their Work* to raise awareness about water issues related to drought in Texas.

Credit: City of Austin, Parks and Recreation Department



## Chapter 3: Implementation

---

other comprehensive urban forest management efforts. Data should be collected and stored in formats easily shared between departments and stakeholders. Collaborate with federal, state, regional, and local governmental jurisdictions, community nonprofits, 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**

Develop and adopt a common land classification system for properties owned/managed by the City. The classification system will provide the framework for development of class-specific Standards of Care for Trees and Vegetation.

### **UF-14 Regulatory Review**

Identify and modify City regulations that conflict with or otherwise hinder achievement of the vision for the urban forest. Where possible, work with intra- and inter-departmental partners and external stakeholders to better align the City regulations with the City's urban forest vision.

## **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, supplemental irrigation, 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

## **Community Voices**



“Treat all non-profits that are PARD partners equally to get more community support.”

### Community Voices



“Preserve trees  
along right of ways.”

processes.

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

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 that also provide a sustainable growing environment for the urban forest.

#### **PD-4 Soil Volume**

Increase the dedicated airspace and soil volume available for trees and vegetation 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 storm water on-site and reduce run-off. Design for site uses that minimize soil compaction in critical areas.

#### **PD-6 Landscaping and Storm Water Management**

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

#### **PD-7 Partnerships**

Partner with federal, state, regional, and local governmental jurisdictions, community nonprofit organizations, 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



## Chapter 3: Implementation

---

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 traffic safety 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.

## **EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

**Policies related to public education, outreach, stewardship, and training of citizens, private entities, and nonprofit organizations for urban forest promotion to achieve the vision for the urban forest.**

### **EO-1 Education**

Provide appropriate resources (e.g., staff, technical, and educational materials) to communicate with the public about the vision, goals, objectives, policies, incentives, standards, and regulations related 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**

## **Community Voices**



“Treat all non-profits that are PARD partners equally to get more community support.”

### Community Voices



“Preserve trees  
along right-of-ways.”

Develop programming that utilizes the commitment of citizen volunteers to engage in stewardship of Austin’s urban forest. Promote events for mulching and watering for young and mature trees.

#### **E0-3 Incentives**

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

#### **E0-4 Partnerships**

Partner with federal, state, regional, and local governmental jurisdictions, community nonprofit organizations, the private sector and others in education and outreach efforts to improve collaboration, leverage resources, and ensure consistent messaging.

#### **E0-5 Records and Information**

Collect and make available urban forestry information to the public.

#### **E0-6 Education of Urban Forest Service Providers**

Ensure that private urban forest service providers, individuals who 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 of Care.

#### **E0-7 Public Demonstration Projects**

Develop and support publicly accessible pilot projects that demonstrate sound urban forest management, examples include innovative design, mulching, watering and pruning of young and mature trees. Document and implement effective strategies.