



Urban Forestry Board Responses to Environmental Board Recommendations
on Austin's Urban Forest Plan, A Master Plan for Public Property

Date: December 6th, 2013

Subject: Response to the recommendations from the Environmental Board on the Austin Urban Forest Plan

Dear Chair Maxwell and Environmental Board Members,

The Urban Forestry Board (UFB) values all the time and energy the Environmental Board gave to provide feedback and recommendations on the Austin Urban Forest Plan, and recognizes the benefit their perspective has brought to the Plan. Each new set of eyes and discussion that occurs around this Master Plan for Public Property increases its value and potential impact on our urban forest resource. Since the UFB received recommendations from the Environmental Board on October 16th, 2013, the Austin Urban Forest Plan has seen a number of changes, particularly to the Executive Summary and Implementation sections. These changes were based on recommendations from the Environmental Board, the Texas A&M Forest Service, and community input. Due to conflicting Board schedules, the UFB would like to use this memo to respond to each bullet point recommendation provided by the Environmental Board. In addition, based on comments made by Dr. Maxwell, it is important to note that new graphic elements have been added to the Plan to assist with communicating information and navigation. The most recent version of the Plan and its associated appendices can be found online at www.austinurbanforestry.org.

The following is a response to each bullet point recommendation (emphasized in bold font) submitted by the Environmental Board on October 16th, 2013:

Environmental Board: **First, the focus of the Plan has been defined to be publicly owned parklands of the City of Austin. Our comments regarding that are as follows:**

Our preference is for the Plan to clearly state in the title that it is a Plan that includes the part of the urban forest that is on public parkland and publicly owned lands of the City of Austin. This Plan is not for the entire urban forest of Austin.

- UFB Response: The Plan name has been changed to address this recommendation. The full title of the Plan, referenced on the cover and within the document, is *Austin's Urban Forest Plan, A Master Plan for Public Property*. The exclusion of trees on private property is also emphasized within the introductory letter on page iii, and within the

discussion of Plan scope on page 4. Additionally, the word public was added to the Plan wherever there is a reference to public trees and vegetation.

Environmental Board: Since this plan is not written to address the entire urban forest, then, it should at least include a strategy/proposal for getting the process started to develop a “comprehensive” urban forest plan.

- **UFB Response:** 1) The UFB feels that the Plan is comprehensive in that it addresses multiple components that make up a healthy and robust public urban forest. These components are reflected in the six categories that make up the Policy Elements, namely 1) Protection & Preservation, 2) Sustainable Urban Forest, 3) Planting, Care & Maintenance, 4) Urban Forest Management Framework, 5) Planning & Design, and 6) Education & Outreach.

The UFB also feels that while private trees, which make up a majority of the urban forest, cannot be addressed within the scope of this Plan, they are very important and should be addressed by the appropriate Council appointed designees (Implementation Action 6, Private Trees, page 70).

Environmental Board: The document on page 8 refers to the need for a comprehensive plan, and the Committee agrees with that statement. A comprehensive Plan for the entire urban forest of Austin is a serious need given that the drought has impacted the forest greatly and that increasing development of the city is also impacting it.

- **UFB Response:** The UFB agrees that additional measures are needed to address private trees in Austin. While the Board cannot address private trees directly in this Plan due both to the current scope of the Board and the City Code mandate for the Plan, there is a strong desire by the UFB to assist in the development of a strategy addressing private trees in the future.

Environmental Board: The Environmental Board can recommend to City Council that there be a comprehensive plan as a subsequent action to adoption of the current Plan by the City Council. A more comprehensive plan would involve active participation by the City Arborist and others involved in the management of the entire urban forest of Austin.

- **UFB Response:** The UFB supports this idea and would like to give assistance to this effort in the future.

Environmental Board: Second, regarding the text of the draft Plan, our suggestions are as follows:

We acknowledge the benefit in having a broad plan with general language that everyone can agree with, as long as it is concise and clear as to the vision, goals and objectives of the plan.

- **UFB Response:** The UFB agrees and spent many months in regular meetings, working groups, and public input sessions on developing and approving the Plan’s vision and vision components (pages 10-11), goals, and Plan objectives (pages 8, 63-70).

Environmental Board: **In addition, there is a need for good, clear direction in place regarding maintenance for staff to adhere to. The plan should serve as a blueprint for city staff and departments and include specific language that directs staff and others on how to protect and maintain the urban forest. The changes suggested by Dr. Tom Hayes, Peggy Maceo, Zoila Vega and Robert Deegan seem well thought out, reasonable, and useful and should be incorporated into the plan. In particular, language related to: data collection, proactive and reactive tree maintenance as a priority, need for watering (with special attention during drought periods), protection of root zones, and strict adherence with the Heritage Tree Ordinance should be incorporated into the plan.**

- UFB Response: The Austin Urban Forest Plan is a Master Plan that directs the overall long-term direction of Austin's urban forest and management of that resource. The Implementation section contains Goals and their associated Actions, and Policy Elements. The Goals and Actions outline the steps to be taken and a timeline for associated actions, and the Policy Elements collectively provide the strategy for achieving the Plan's vision. Policy Elements make up the Departmental Operational Plan templates which will be developed by appropriate departments identified by their involvement with the urban forest.

Individual comments made by Dr. Tom Hayes, Peggy Maceo, Zoila Vega and Robert Deegan were addressed line by line during working group sessions and/or by the full UFB. Not all comments and suggested edits were incorporated, but each was reviewed and addressed. Upon request, we can provide specific before/after drafts of the Plan from each working group session or UFB meeting where these individual comments were discussed. There have been multiple meetings to review public comments, and there is a corresponding Word document for each review session.

In particular, language related to: data collection, proactive and reactive tree maintenance as a priority, need for watering (with special attention during drought periods), protection of root zones, and strict adherence with the Heritage Tree Ordinance should be incorporated into the plan. The Environmental Board specifically requested the following items be addressed:

- **Data collection:** Data collection standardization and prioritization was addressed in Implementation Goal & Action 1, Urban Forest Annual Performance Report Card, on page 67. Additional references to data collection include Policy Element UF-11 on page 83.
- **Proactive and reactive tree maintenance as a priority:** Maintenance of both young and mature trees is of the utmost importance to the health of the urban forest and is recognized in numerous places throughout the Plan. Specifically the Plan directs maintenance to be based on the official Standards of Care and Best Management Practices. Current Standards of Care are nationally based ANSI A300, Z133, and Z60.1. Implementation Goal & Action 3, Austin Standard of Care, lays out the actions and timeline to

create an Austin specific Standard of Care (page 69). Additionally, maintenance as a priority is specifically mentioned in 16 Policy Elements: S-2 on page 79, S-7 on page 79, PCM-3 on page 80, PCM-6 on page 81, PCM-7 on page 81, PCM-9 on page 81, UF-4 on page 82, UF-5 on page 82, UF-6 on page 83, UF-8 on page 83, UF-11 on page 83, PD-1 on page 85, PD-4 on page 86, PD-8 on page 86, PD-12 on page 87, and EO-6 on page 88.

Need for watering (with special attention during drought periods):

Watering during periods of insufficient rainfall is specifically addressed in three Policy Elements: PR-4 on page 78, PCM-3 on page 80, and PCM-6 on page 81.

- **Protection of root zones, and strict adherence with the Heritage Tree Ordinance should be incorporated into the plan:** Policy Element PR-1 Comprehensive Regulatory Approaches (page 77) directs departments to examine existing regulations to ensure the most comprehensive protection, and preservation of the urban forest. This Policy Element also explicitly directs strict adherence to City tree and vegetation regulations, and uses the Heritage Tree Ordinance as an example.

Environmental Board: Adjust or clarify the Departmental Operational Plan Review process to require Departments to address applicable public comments documented in the Plan's Appendices to ensure that public comments gathered at the multiple engagement events help inform operational plans.

- **UFB Response:** Much of the public input received for Austin's Urban Forest Plan is tactical in nature and will be shared with City Departments as a resource during the development of their Departmental Operational Plans. Public input was formatted into a sortable spreadsheet for easy referencing that is available at www.austinurbanforestry.org under the Community Voices link. There are separate sections that include public comments from the Leaf-the-Tree Pop-Up Activities, E-mail Submissions, Workshop and Open House sessions, and the SpeakUp Austin Forum. These comments will remain available on this web page for future reference by City staff, UFB appointees, and members of the public.

Environmental Board: It should be acknowledged clearly in the Plan that there is a lack of essential data and make collection of data a priority of the Plan. This is an essential and urgent first step. In our judgment, it is imperative that data collection begin with the implementation of the Plan, and that the Plan then be re-visited soon after data collection is complete.

- **UFB Response:** The UFB and staff recognize that the data sets currently available provide only a snapshot of the public urban forest, and we have proposed data collection as a priority Implementation Goal & Action. This is addressed in

Implementation Goal & Action 1, Urban Forest Annual Performance Report Card (page 67) and in Policy Element UF-11, Data Collection and Management (page 83).

Environmental Board: A review of the Plan implementation should occur much sooner than is indicated in the current draft. The input of the stakeholders and some Board members is very clear about the recommended time frame for review. This is quite urgent because of the drought impacts on many trees in the Urban Forest of Austin.

- **UFB Response:** A maximum of ten years was the time frame initially proposed for review of the master Plan by the UFB. Based on recommendations from the Environmental Board, the Texas A&M Forest Service, and others, this time frame has been revised to five-year increments over a full twenty-year span. It should be noted that the Plan allows the UFB to initiate a review process at any time prior to one of these five-year milestones. Any of these reviews will require the UFB to solicit recommendations from both the Environmental Board and Parks and Recreation Board prior to seeking City Council approval. A more complete description of this process can be found on pages 63 and 64.

