

July 29, 2022



Climate Action and Adaptation Plan Preliminary Draft, Comments by Trees for Sacramento to the City of Sacramento Climate Action Team

Trees for Sacramento represents citizen activists concerned about the loss of trees and tree canopy in the City as it accommodates population growth within the built area, and the ongoing lack of resources and Council commitment for growing the urban forest. The health of the City and its residents is vitally dependent on the extent and health of its urban forest. This Plan must be more proactive in addressing the weaknesses and failures of the City's urban forest management.

In response, and to advise of future public hearings, please communicate via email to trees4sacto@sbcglobal.net; our postal address is 5601 Monalee Ave, Sacramento, CA 95819.

Trees should play more than a cameo role in the CAAP. As the Plan states on p. 25, "Inventories measure GHG emissions in units of metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MT CO₂e). One MT is equivalent to 2,205 pounds, roughly the same volume as a small two-story house and roughly the weight of a small sports car (Figure 2-1). The average car produces 5 MT of CO₂e in 1 year. Alternatively, planting 17 new trees removes about 1 MT CO₂e from the atmosphere over 10 years."

Removing trees likewise adds MT CO₂e, but this plan fails to account for ongoing loss of tree canopy, resulting increases in MT CO₂e, and the City's lack of commitment to prevent canopy loss. The CAAP sets very ambitious canopy cover goals without adequate measures to achieve the goals. Perhaps the most important tool to meet the CAAP goals for canopy cover is not mentioned: protecting the existing canopy. The large trees that we have now grew to their current size by accessing soil that will not be available to the trees that replace them. The current tree canopy in many parts of the City has decreased and will continue to decrease without significant changes to the design standards and much more aggressive public tree planting, green space planning and tree care.

The success of this effort depends on the strength and vitality of the City's Urban Forestry program. However, for reasons stated below and in attachments, success is unlikely without substantial reforms in how the City manages the urban forest and how it resolves conflicts between design standards and tree protection policies.

The Role of Urban Forestry in the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan

We have a fundamental disagreement with the Plan's unstated assumption that the canopy goals can be achieved absent a major reform of the way that the City does

Urban Forestry. We have elsewhere (see attachment) documented why we believe the City has lost at least a third of its tree canopy over the last 30 years despite lofty goals and policies to protect and plant trees. Given the key importance of tree canopy to the future health of the City and its residents, this function of municipal government must be elevated in the management structure of the City, and report regularly to the City Manager and the Council. At present, it is literally buried in the Public Works Department and its activities are not transparent and accountable to the public and Council. Urban Forestry should be removed from the Public Works Department and included in a new department committed to the implementation of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan. We also believe that a Citizen Advisory Committee on the Urban Forest is a necessary prerequisite for the City to stay on track with canopy expansion goals and to protect the public interest in maintaining canopy trees.

Reliance on Yet to Be Adopted Plans

In general, the Climate Action Plan relies on other as yet un-adopted plans to demonstrate compliance, and fails to disclose what mandatory features of those plans will produce the necessary climate protections.

Draft General Plan. The 2040 General Plan draft land use map is available and supports infill. However it can be changed before adoption, and lacks a key commitment to an urban limit line that would be an important underpinning for the Climate Action Plan. While the City takes actions to reduce GHG emissions, it must also protect against countervailing actions that would increase those emissions, such as permitting development outside the current City limit on agricultural land and ministerial approval of projects that will remove existing trees. We strongly recommend that the Climate Action Plan not simply reference the Business As Usual land use plan of the draft 2040 General Plan but require City to adhere to this land use plan, and include the existing city boundary as an urban limit line, as an implementation measure for Climate Action.

It is essential that infill does not destroy current and future urban canopy coverage. Systemic change is needed across plans, ordinances, regulatory frameworks, and design standards; without this, infill will lead to an unlivable City without the shade canopy that is absolutely essential to the residents' health and the City's future.

Urban Forest Master Plan. The UFMP was promised to be completed by 2018. A draft has not been circulated. Yet the Climate Action Plan Preliminary Draft identifies the UFMP as the implementation measure to achieve the tree canopy increases required by the CAAP. We cannot review and comment on measures that are unknown. The Climate Action Plan should spell out measurable, enforceable actions.

We have submitted comments to Urban Forestry on the UFMP which are attached and contain our recommendations.

The Climate Action Plan states on page 122 "Additional funding, land use regulations, and new incentive programs will be needed to reach these targets." Where in the CAAP are these measures described and committed to?

The Plan acknowledges that "Tree planting on private property will need to double. New funding sources for urban forestry expansion and management are TBD, including but not limited to grants funding." Appendix D, CS1-1, describes funding need for only management of City trees (\$6- 8 million) but lacks the detail and commitment to carry out the canopy expansion goals of the CAAP. Funding for management of existing city trees is now included in the City Budget, so why is additional funding for this purpose included in the plan but no fund estimate is provided for the canopy expansion called for in the Plan?

Likewise on p. 53, "Funding and financing strategies are needed to help protect low-income and disadvantaged communities from increased tree maintenance costs...." Where in the CAAP is the funding strategy for necessary maintenance for new trees in low income areas?

Accountability and Enforceability?

"As a qualified GHG reduction plan (explained in **Chapter 1**), Sacramento's CAAP is required to specify performance standards for measures and actions, establish a mechanism to monitor the plan's progress towards achieving its climate action targets, and include the requirement for amendment if the plan does not demonstrate achievement of its climate action targets. (p. 131)

"[Chapter 8 details] Sacramento's approach to implementing and monitoring the CAAP to ensure actual GHG reductions are achieved in line with the City's climate action targets and demonstrates alignment with the CAAP for CEQA streamlining of future development projects." (p. 132)

We are concerned that the citywide plan to claim GHG reductions without project level CEQA review and mitigation will result in further reductions in livability and environmental quality of the City through reduction in tree canopy and permeable surface without equivalent expansion of tree canopy and green space.

The Plan lacks the funding and resource capability to offset the canopy losses it will generate through CEQA streamlining in addition to canopy expansion. How does the plan account for unmitigated loss of canopy and permeable surface due to CEQA streamlining and other City policies allowing canopy trees to be removed?

The City to date has failed to develop any accountability measures for Urban Forestry despite repeated citizen requests for annual reporting of tree removal permits granted, mitigation fees collected, and trees planted. Without reporting to the Council and public what tree resources have been removed and what tree resources have been added to the urban forest, how can the CAAP monitor compliance? There is no accountability for

the Tree Replacement Fund (fees for tree removal that are intended to plant trees to mitigate for impacts) and no way to determine if it is achieving its goal.

The CAAP CS1-1 (Appendix D) lists "Continue to enforce zoning standards for shading in private parking lots to protect trees in existing parking lots" as a measure. This means that when a parking lot is built, it must show a plan for canopy coverage of 50 percent of the surface. Yet there is no evidence that there is any enforcement of these standards once the parking lot is completed. To meet the canopy goals, the City must adopt and enforce an aggressive parking lot **maintenance** of shade requirements ordinance with funding for real enforcement and real tree planting to achieve the standard.

The City budget is not a guide to Urban Forestry's performance. The CAAP should be supported by a budget document that explains how in the City annual budget the canopy protection and expansion measures are funded, what past performance has achieved and what is to be achieved in the budget year. Without annual reporting and transparency, how can this effort be more than a paper plan without measureable results?

Please see the attached March 2021 letter detailing our recent concerns about lack of accountability in the Urban Forestry program.

Conflicts Between City Codes and Departments Threaten Canopy and "City of Trees" Reputation

"Sacramento is well known as the City of Trees, with more than 19% of the city covered by tree canopy. These trees provide numerous benefits to Sacramento by cleaning the air, sequestering carbon, **reducing water runoff**, and keeping temperatures manageable during extreme heat events. By expanding the canopy, especially in neighborhoods with low tree coverage, the City can increase carbon sequestration, address climate injustice, and build resilience to a changing climate." (p. 6)

Our concern with the above description is that the CAAP fails to protect the maintenance of green space and tree canopy where it currently is performing all these functions, does not account for the removal of canopy and permeable surface, and falsely relies on new tree plantings in other areas to compensate for the losses. The City must account for anticipated losses in canopy and open ground (permeable surface) and compensate for those before it can claim that tree planting will expand canopy, "increase carbon sequestration, address climate injustice and build resilience to a changing climate." It must acknowledge that old canopy trees provide much greater canopy benefits than young trees. And that it takes many years for canopy to grow.

We see two City policies that threaten the existing tree canopy.

Missing Middle Housing Policy. The City should amend its Missing Middle Housing policy which allows MMH in residential R-1 neighborhoods that contain most of the city's tree canopy because it is counterproductive to this strategy. It is a zero-sum

game to reduce tree canopy in some parts of the city (through building in spaces where trees and buildings cannot occupy the same limited space) and “growing” it in another.

The City should seek to counter the effects of creating urban heat islands by avoiding “clustering” MMH on adjacent lots without an overall strategy for limiting tree loss (such as overlays and objective design standards). The problem inherent in objective design standards as a solution is that once a property owner has a right to build MMH, it will be difficult to impossible - even with objective design standards - to tell a property owner they cannot cut down a tree to build. The property owner can also request variances from design standards such as lot coverage and setbacks, which the city will likely grant, resulting in less green space. SB 8 (successor to SB 330) will not allow the city to put the density genie back in the bottle. (Reference: Measure E-5.2 -E-5.4, pp. 95-97.)

How will the CAAP anticipate and mitigate losses to the tree canopy from City housing policies? Will the CAAP require new mitigations, limits to canopy removal by neighborhood, or planning tools such overlays?

Ministerial Approval of Development Projects and Utility and State Exemptions from Tree Ordinance Preclude Proper Review of Tree Removals

In 2016 when the tree protection ordinance was revised, we were assured that new development tree removal permits would be subject to public hearing review in the planning process. We were told that the new ordinance would give better protection for public trees.

Now, however, Under Title 17, most projects are accorded a ministerial review and no public hearing is provided; developers then apply to Urban Forestry to obtain discretionary tree removal permits for their already approved project. By the time the tree removal permit is up for appeal, the project has been approved by the Planning Department. This process should be reversed, with tree removal permits required **before** the project is processed for ministerial review. Alternatively, the City should require discretionary review of projects that include significant tree removal, which would include any large canopy trees and any public trees. We are currently witnessing a ministerial project approval with 44 trees to be removed, including public trees and native oaks.

All building design standards and ministerial processes need to include objective requirements for tree protection – both of current canopy trees and maintaining space for future canopy trees. Without this objective requirement, infill and other ministerial development processes will result in rampant deforestation of Sacramento.

In the years since the 2016 tree protection ordinance was revised, we have witnessed the loss of many public street trees to make way for new buildings, including state buildings exempt from City regulation. We've witnessed clearcutting of canopy trees at public housing redevelopment sites. We've witnessed public utilities remove countless trees on public land under an exemption from local ordinance. Our experience tells us

that canopy loss since 2016 has been very significant and our local law and practice is not protecting the canopy that we have.

Urban Form and Climate Action Planning

We think the CAAP should take a more strategic approach to overall urban form and find a way to quantify, evaluate, monitor and expand greenspace and permeable surface as the City grows. The Plan also needs to find a way to address citywide drought management for the urban forest to be able to adapt to climate change. The Plan refers to the need for ways to help low income neighborhoods expand tree canopy, but offers no real solution. Here are some other areas in the Plan where the issue is touched on but in no way resolved.

Groundwater Supply and Protection

“These changes could lead to drought, **groundwater depletion**, increased wildfire risk, changes in streamflow, decreased drinking water supply and availability, and strain to health, energy, and infrastructure systems.” (P. 15). See also pp 16-17

“Streamflow declines and changes in precipitation patterns anticipated under continued global climate change will likely increase demand for groundwater. Groundwater currently comprises about one-third of the Sacramento region’s water use, and studies have shown that regional rates of groundwater extraction increase under drought conditions. While the City’s groundwater supplies are currently being managed sustainably, too much stress on the groundwater supply can lead to higher groundwater pumping costs, decreased streamflow, land surface subsidence, and loss of wetland ecosystems.” (p. 18)

The Plan largely overlooks the benefit of green space for water conservation. Water runoff on hardscape, including storm water runoff, exacerbates groundwater depletion, as the water could be filtered by trees and green spaces into the aquifer. More density = more hardscape = less groundwater. It is essential that the city plan wisely, for drought protection and to avoid groundwater depletion.

Street Tree Planters

“MUNICIPAL MEASURE 6: Improve carbon sequestration potential of municipal parks, greenspace at City properties, **and street tree planters in the public right-of-way**” (p. 184-185).

There is no discussion on using “street tree planters in the public right-of-way” to further climate action goals. How or who would implement this strategy?

Water Related Emissions

“Water-related emissions are generated by the electricity used to transport water for residential, commercial, and agricultural use, as well as emissions from wastewater treatment processes.” (p. 8)

Water runoff, including some storm water runoff in the City, goes into the sewers and ultimately to the river and carries pollutants. Water captured by the city's storm drainage system and sewer system is subject to wastewater treatment processes. Trees and green spaces filter the water and allow it to drain into our aquifer rather than into drainage and treatment systems that use electricity to function.

(<https://www.cityofsacramento.org/utilities/drainage/stormwater/About-Us/Program-Information>). The CAAP does not adequately credit trees and green space for avoidance of water-related emissions, and does not recognize how this avoidance can be increased in the future. It thus lacks adequate measures to protect such areas from loss of permeability.

Urban Heat Islands

“The effects of temperature increase are likely to be felt throughout Sacramento –**especially in more densely developed areas with less green space** – between May and October each year, with temperatures peaking in July and August. Therefore, these impacts are felt more acutely by under-resourced and lower income communities. Overall temperature increase can also lead to more frequent extreme heat days and heatwaves; the intensification of the urban heat island effect; greater heat-related illnesses such as heat stroke and heat exhaustion; and stress to infrastructure, as discussed below.” (p. 10)

Won't cutting down trees, including private protected trees, to build ADUs, duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes create and expand urban heat islands - “holes” in the city's rich, mature tree canopy? Creating a right to these permitted uses in R-1 zones of the city with no limit on the effects of “clustering” of structures will further exacerbate this effect. Areas of the city that are desirable for the foregoing types of development will suffer loss of tree canopy. How will the CAAP anticipate and mitigate losses to the canopy from City housing policies? Will the CAAP require new mitigations, limits to canopy removal by neighborhood, or planning tools such overlays? What policies and measures can protect city residents against expansion and creation of urban heat islands as the City grows?

Climate Plan Should Account for City's Permanent Protection of Open Space and Agriculture

The City has permanently protected from development thousands of acres of agricultural lands and open space through regulation of new development. The primary example is the Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan. Though the protected lands are not in the City of Sacramento, the City should claim emission reductions from the permanent designation of these lands for habitat.

We Support Mow Better.

The CAAP should include Mow Better's goal is to eliminate the use of gas powered lawn equipment (leaf blowers, lawn mowers etc.) as climate actions. This includes:

1) The City of Sacramento should commit to converting its own lawn care tools as well as tools used in the City's 17 Property and Business Improvement Districts (PBIDs) from gas-powered to clean electric- and people-powered tools and set an example for residents to follow.

2) The City of Sacramento should work to create a friendlier environment for clean modes of transit such as biking and walking through more robust enforcement of existing lawn care equipment restrictions, especially restrictions on times of use for gas-powered leaf blowers in residential areas (not permitted before 9 am or after 6 pm Mon-Sat or before 10 or after 4 on Sunday), and prohibitions on the use of any blowers on days when the AQI is above 100.

3) The City of Sacramento should incentivize more lawn removal to reduce water use and noise and air pollution caused by the use of lawn care equipment. Property owners should be able to receive incentives for **any amount** of lawn replacement, even just "mow strips", to set an example for moving toward drought-tolerant landscaping. The City should devote more resources to publicizing this program.

As part of this effort, we recommend also that:

City specifications for designs for "complete streets" and other multi-modal transportation options must include planning, space and irrigation requirements for tree canopy coverage of these pedestrian and bike friendly transportation routes. Otherwise, the routes will be unusable during heat events.

The City should incorporate canopy tree requirements in its lawn removal program. This should include requiring set-aside space for low-water need canopy trees and requirement that drip irrigation include dedicated stations for tree watering. Canopy trees can and should be preserved in xeriscapes wherever possible. Saving trees and setting aside space for trees in xeriscapes should be incentivized by additional awards. All training and information materials should emphasize the importance of saving existing canopy trees in yards and providing space for future canopy trees in new low-water landscapes.

Inaccurate Photos in Plan

Finally, we'd like to point out that the photos on pages 165, 308 and 410 do not accurately portray trees at those locations today. The photos thus give an impression about our urban forest that is misleading. Please pair these photos with current day photos to illustrate how tree loss is affecting our city.

Please review our attachments for more detailed explanation of the comments made here.