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City of Sacramento  
Mayor Kevin Johnson  
Council Member Steve Cohn  
Council Member Rob Fong  
Council Member Ray Tretheway  
City Manager Ray Kerridge  
Jerry Way, Director, Department of Transportation  
Joe Benassinni Urban Forest Manager and Sacramento Tree Foundation Technical Advisory Committee

Cc: CADA Director Paul Schmiodt  
Senator Darrell Steinberg  
Assembly Member Dave Jones

**RE: THE CONDITION AND SURVIVAL OF SACRAMENTO'S URBAN FOREST**

Sacramento's urban forest (street trees) is both beautiful and a character defining feature of the Central City grid and of older urban neighborhoods that surround the Central City. It helps reduce greenhouse gases and provides shade that helps reduce energy costs on hot summer days. Its survival is critical to livability, walk-ability and sustainability. The 'Environmental Resource' section of the draft 2030 General Plan describes the urban forest as "the dense canopy of trees that distinguishes Sacramento" and "serves to reduce heat gain along sidewalks and other public places making them pleasant places to walk at recreate . . . trees absorb carbon dioxide and pollution and produce oxygen, improving air quality and human health." The section on neighborhoods says "every neighborhood will be a desirable place to live because of walkable streets, extensive tree canopy . . ."

The vision statement of the Sacramento Tree Foundation states ". . . the Greenprint initiative is a multi-decade regional framework created to meet Sacramento's sustainability and livability goals by expanding urban forests and optimizing the benefits of tree canopies". A major focal point of the Greenprint initiative is to *double the regions urban tree canopy – a planting of up to 5 million new trees that will dramatically enhance the landscape and canopy cover*. Twenty-six SACOG jurisdictions, including the City of Sacramento, signed onto this plan.

We were very pleased that the City Council approved \$650,000 for the inventory of the urban forest. We are also pleased to see that some new trees have recently been planted in the Central City. However, we want the Council to know that the urban forest in the Central City grid is in serious jeopardy and, if the problems listed below continue, large portions of it could disappear.

1. When old and sick trees are removed, they are often not replaced. Portions of blocks where trees were removed two or three years ago still have not been provided with replacement trees.
2. When replacement trees are provided, they are often not canopy trees and will never provide significant shade (e.g. many "lollipop trees are being planted such as crepe myrtles). This is the case in locations that could easily accommodate canopy trees.
3. When replacement trees are provided, there is often a failure to provide the water that new young trees need to survive during the hot summer months so they die. Ideally, property owners should assume responsibility for watering new trees, but a very large percentage of owners in the Central City are absentee and cannot be counted on to care for any of their landscaping, much less new trees. Generally, renters (also) do not provide necessary maintenance.
4. Large trees that appear to be healthy are being removed with no explanation. A recent example of this was the (July 08) removal of two large Liquidambar

trees in the 1900 block of P Street. Reliable sources have told concerned urban forest activists that the City plans to remove all Modesto Ash and Liquidambar trees whether or not they are healthy. Frequently, as was in this case, no explanation is provided as to why apparently healthy trees are removed.

5. Notice of tree removal used to be posted for thirty (30) days. Such notice is now only ten (10) days, leaving residents with inadequate time to discover the notices, much less find out why a tree is being removed or appeal the removal.

6. Property owners have cut down street trees without consequence. It appears the current tree ordinance does not provide adequate protections for street trees and does not include sanctions for their removal.

7. Heritage trees on private property have been cut down and, as with the removal of street trees, there have been no consequences. No provision was made for the heritage at the Crocker Museum site so it was cut down.

8. A row of newly planted London Plane trees in the 2600 block of R Street were all cut down in July 08. (They were recently replaced by new, presumably smaller trees). The explanation given was that the London Planes were removed due to a federal rule banning trees from within thirty (30) feet of high voltage power lines. There are many above ground power lines in the Central City. Despite inquiries made to Urban Forest Services, no information has been forthcoming as to which other trees may be affected by this rule or whether all or some of these power lines could be placed underground (as is the case in newer neighborhoods) or insulated (as has been done on the East Coast) and the trees saved. The developer who planted the London Planes presumably submitted a landscaping plan to the City for approval. No explanation has been forthcoming as to how he was given approval to plant them if they were inappropriate for the site.

9. Most new construction projects have not been required to include set backs to accommodate either existing or new canopy trees. It appears to have become very easy for developers to get permits to remove healthy street trees.

10. Pruning of large street trees of all species has become extreme, sometimes with so many limbs removed that shade is reduced and appearance is permanently altered.

Sacramento's recent policy toward the Central City's urban forest has been destructive and unacceptable. The state of our urban forest and its treatment per the above list of observations is clearly not in line with the City's stated goals of being "America's Most Livable City" and as a "City of Trees". The Legacy of beautiful trees and our Urban Forest left by our forebears must be continued. The current policy must change and we, the undersigned organizations and individuals demand to be part of the change process. To that end, we ask the Sacramento City Council to take the following steps now.

1) Instruct Urban Forest staff to make public a detailed budget showing how much property tax money is allocated for tree maintenance and exactly how that money is being spent.

2) Instruct Urban Forest staff to make public a map of the Central City showing (street by street and alley by alley) where power lines run, which ones are considered "high voltage" and exactly how far trees must be from them (or how they must be pruned) in order to meet federal and local regulations. This map is urgently needed both to see how many trees are potentially affected and to develop mitigations including insulation or placing some power lines underground.

- 3) Instruct Urban Forest staff to provide a full explanation of how the developer of the project at 26<sup>th</sup> and R came to put in large, beautiful London Plane trees only to have them cut down less than a year later, forcing the developer to put in new, smaller trees.
- 4) Instruct Urban Forest staff to immediately change the tree removal posting/appeal period back to thirty (30) days from the current ten (10) days so that the community has the opportunity to know which trees are slated for removal and why and to appeal. A formal thirty day appeal period should be part of the revised Tree Ordinance that Urban Forest staff is working on. Trees slated for removal should also be listed on the Urban Forest Services web site and e-mails sent to the affected neighborhood association. Also tree signage to be placed on both the street and sidewalk sides of the tree so that pedestrians, as well as drivers, can see it. When trees are slated for removal as part of projects that require an EIR, the trees should be posted during, not after the EIR period.
- 5) As part of the inventory, instruct Urban Forest staff to develop a block by block, parcel by parcel map that shows which parcels are currently missing street trees so that new trees can be planted and to develop policy that assures that they are watered during their first years of life. Provide neighborhood associations and interested citizens with an opportunity to review this information for completeness.
- 6) Instruct urban forest staff to keep records of the number and location of trees which are permanently removed due to such things as underground utility vaults, driveways, passenger drop off zones, etc.
- 7) Instruct Urban Forest staff that they are to plant large canopy, not small ornamental, trees in parkway strips wherever there is room for such trees and that canopy trees that are removed must be replaced by other canopy trees. New trees should be species that do well in Sacramento's climate, native species should be planted wherever possible and the California Native Plant Society should be consulted when questions about native species arise.
- 8) Actively discourage developers from pursuing projects that require the removal of street trees and/or create the kinds of conditions that make it impossible to ever put in replacement trees other than tiny ornamentals.
- 9) Establish a temporary ad hoc committee including representatives of Central City neighborhood associations to immediately investigate the problems listed above and report back to the Sacramento City Council and the public about them and about potential ways of resolving these problems.
- 10) Establish a permanent Tree Commission with regularly scheduled meetings to review existing tree ordinances, develop policies that protect and enhance the Urban Forest, hear appeals as needed and provide a public forum for the ongoing discussion of Sacramento's trees.