



## URBAN FORESTRY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION 2024XXXX-00X

**Date:**

**Subject:** City of Austin Tree Canopy Ordinance

**Motion by:** Melinda Schiera **Seconded by:**

**WHEREAS**, the Urban Forestry Committee recognizes Council approved, on August 8, 2019, a [Resolution declaring a climate emergency](#) in the City, and

**WHEREAS**, the Council approved, on September 30, 2021, the [Austin Climate Equity Plan](#) setting a goal of 50% Tree Canopy by 2050, and

**WHEREAS**, Council [re-affirmed](#) its target of net-zeros community-wide emissions by 2040 on February 15, 2024, and

**WHEREAS**, Council approved, on March 21, 2024, a resolution directing the City Manager to explore a right-of-way design and management plan to promote green infrastructure including [street trees in the right-of-way](#) while ensuring the safety and reliability of utility infrastructure.

**WHEREAS**, current data shows [41% canopy](#) cover city wide based on satellite imagery captured in the summer of 2022, and

**WHEREAS**, the tree canopy over East Austin is less than West Austin, and there is a specific need to [increase tree canopy on private land in East Austin](#), and

**WHEREAS**, an expansive Tree Canopy mitigates the heat island effect, removes carbon from the air, improves community health by removing pollutants from the air, and improves biodiversity, and

**WHEREAS**, feedback from Urban Landscape Architects to the Environmental Commission is that trees planted from site plan requirements are not surviving, and

**WHEREAS**, the mitigation payment rates to the Urban Forest Replenishment Fund (UFRF) defined in the [Environmental Criteria Manual 3.5.4](#), in lieu of replacement or preservation, have not been updated since 2010.

**THEREFORE**, the Urban Forestry Committee recommends the Environmental Commission advise Council adopt the following actions to more aggressively expand, protect, and enhance the City's Tree Canopy:

1. Set a goal of 50% city-wide canopy cover by 2040 instead of 2050.

2. Augment the current [inventory plans](#) to capture satellite imagery to calculate the city-wide canopy cover biennially instead of every four years in order to evaluate the tree canopy percentage in a more cost-effective manner, and gaining the ability to track progress towards tree canopy goal. This also captures tree canopy on private property, whereas manual tree inventory does not.
3. In addition to the promotion of green infrastructure in the right-of-way, promote green infrastructure in challenging placements such as easements.
4. Require the City Arborist and the Development Services Department to document the number and scope of unpermitted removal of protected and heritage trees removed each year by address and actions taken. A report of these activities shall be presented to the Environmental Commission, Urban Forestry Committee, and Council annually.
5. Add fruit and nut bearing trees to the list of preferred trees that are appropriate for the Central Texas climate. Biennially update the list of preferred trees to adjust for changing climate.
6. Define a new category of protected trees, based on the breadth of the canopy in addition to the diameter as measured four and one-half feet above natural grade.
7. Improve incentive plans for developers to encourage retention of existing trees using non-financial incentives, development considerations, density, increased FAR, etc.
8. Require the Urban Forestry Department develop a plan to double the existing canopy coverage in East Austin (east of Interstate I-35) by 2040. This plan shall be presented to the Urban Forestry Committee, Environmental Commission, and Council in FY2025.
9. Adjust the mitigation payment rate to the Urban Forest Replenishment Fund biennially based on inflation over the previous two-years as calculated by the US Governments CPI.
10. Require the City Arborist and Development Services Department to calculate the number of trees which need to be planted annually to reach the 50% canopy growth target by 2040 – taking into account growth rates, standard mortality rates, and other related factors. These figures shall be presented to the Urban Forestry Committee, Environmental Commission, and City Council annually.
11. Incorporate the tree canopy goal into site plan mitigation requirements by implementing a requirement of meeting the 50% canopy, or at minimum current canopy. Increase oversight of site plan mitigation tree plantings by requiring site inspections until 2 years after replanting.
12. Require Austin Energy and the Water/Wastewater departments include in billing statements, no less than quarterly, information (in Spanish and English at a minimum) about the availability of free tree planting programs supported by non-profits and/or the City and how to access them. For those receiving bills via email, the same information shall be included at the same frequency.
13. Require the Urban Forestry Department to work with City funded non-profits to more aggressively to meet the 2040 goal. Source other non-profits if necessary. Develop a plan to support this goal and present to the Urban Forestry Committee, Environmental Commission, and Council annually.
14. Require the Urban Forestry Department to identify additional vendors for trees if none are available from local/regional sources and work with non-profits to expand local tree

nurseries to ensure a sufficient number of preferred trees, including fruit and nut bearing trees.

15. Require Urban Forestry Department to conduct an aerial survey and identify any unused City property greater than .5 acres and not planned to be developed in the next five years. Plant native trees (micro forests on smaller lots). This would include street right-of-ways, riparian habitats, along hike/bike trails. Report the status of all unused property and if it is cannot be used for planting, the reasons why it cannot be used to the Urban Forestry Committee, Environmental Commission, and Council. Exempted would Watershed Protection Lands and other property required to be kept “open” for environmental or similar purposes.
16. Increase Development Services Department/Urban Forestry budgets to meet these goals.

**Vote:**

For:

Against:

Abstain:

Absent:

Attest:

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