



ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20241204-004

Date: December 4, 2024

Subject: City of Austin Tree Canopy

Motion by: Melinda Schiera

Seconded by: Perry Bedford

WHEREAS, the Environmental Commission 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% citywide tree canopy by 2050; 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; and

WHEREAS, Council approved, on November 21, 2024, a resolution directing the City Manager to develop an incentive program to [encourage the preservation of trees](#) that have a diameter between 8 and 18 inches on residential lots through the provision of a credit toward development fees and directing funding and elements of the program; and

WHEREAS, current data shows [41% canopy](#) cover city wide based on satellite imagery captured in the summer of 2022. Thereafter in February 2023, [30% of the tree canopy](#) was impacted by winter storm Mara, highlighting the need for updated satellite imagery; and

WHEREAS, the tree canopy in the Blackland prairie ecoregion of Austin is less than Edwards Uplift ecoregion of Austin; and

WHEREAS, an expansive Tree Canopy in balance with understory plants and prairie ecosystems mitigates heat island effects, sequesters carbon, improves community health, and improves biodiversity; and

WHEREAS, feedback from Urban Landscape Architects to Environmental Commissioners at the City of Austin Functional Green Workshop 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; and

THEREFORE, the Environmental Commission recommends Council adopt the following actions to expand, protect, and enhance the City’s Tree Canopy by:

1. Recommend reviewing the Climate Equity Plan of reaching 50% canopy by 2025 to find ways to reach that goal by 2040.
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 gain 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 with native prairie grasses and understory woody plants in utility easements.
4. Require the City Arborist and the Development Services Department document the number and scope of unpermitted removal of protected and heritage trees removed each year by address and actions taken. Provide a report of these activities to the Environmental Commission, Urban Forestry Committee, and Council annually.
5. Improve incentive plans for developers to encourage retention of existing trees using non-financial incentives, development considerations, density, increased FAR, etc.
6. Require the Community Tree and Preservation Division develop a plan to increase and preserve the tree canopy in East Austin (east of Interstate I-35) that will take into consideration the need to preserve and restore the blackland prairie ecosystem. This plan shall be presented to the Urban Forestry Committee, Environmental Commission, and Council in FY2025.
7. Require the Community Tree and Preservation Division develop a plan to increase and preserve the tree canopy in historically underserved communities. This plan shall be presented to the Urban Forestry Committee, Environmental Commission, and Council in FY2025.
8. 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.
9. 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 the goal year – taking into account growth rates, standard mortality rates, and other related factors. This calculation will be shared with the Urban Forestry Committee, Environmental Commission, and Council bi-annually.
10. Increase oversight of site plan mitigation tree plantings by requiring site inspections until 2 years after replanting.
11. 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.

12. Require the Community Tree and Preservation Division to work with City funded non-profits to more aggressively meet the goal year.
13. Require the Community Tree and Preservation Division to identify additional vendors, including non-profits, for native trees to expand local tree nurseries to ensure a sufficient number of preferred trees, including native fruit and nut bearing trees and shrubs.
14. Require Community Tree and Preservation Division to conduct a survey and identify any city owned property .25 acres or greater, including right-of-way, setbacks and easements, that are suitable for planting “tiny forests” or “micro habitats” that are appropriate for their soil type, plant community and use.
15. Review all city park and cemetery masterplans to ensure they are advancing the climate goals by replacing dead trees.
16. Develop an Oak Wilt annual communication system to citizens like that utilized in Lakeway, Texas to prevent further loss of oaks.
17. Offer Oak Wilt abatements or rebates to homeowners with limited means to remove infected trees to ensure the safety of neighboring trees.
18. Increase communication with property owners, both residential and commercial, about maintaining healthy trees and how to prevent tree killing fungi or insects.
19. Increase Development Services Department/ Urban Forestry budgets to meet these goals.
20. An annual report on all of these efforts will be delivered to the Environmental Commission and Council each fall around Arbor Day.

Vote: 7-0

For: Haris Qureshi, Mariana Krueger, Hanna Cofer, Perry Bedford, Jennifer Bristol, Melinda Schiera, David Sullivan

Against: None

Recuse: None

Absent: Richard Brimer and Colin Nickells

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Perry Bedford". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and "B".

Perry Bedford, Environmental Commission Chair