

Recommendation to the Austin City Council Regarding the Green Infrastructure Initiative

WHEREAS, the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan outlines a vision for a complete community where development occurs in connected and pedestrian friendly patterns supporting transit and identifying green infrastructure as a key strategy to achieve these goals; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Climate Equity Plan and the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan call for a 50/50 mode share whereby 50 percent of commutes are made in ways other than driving alone and envision completing the Bicycle, Sidewalk, and Urban Trails Plans by 2039; and

WHEREAS, in 2013, Council approved Resolution No. 20131212-080 that directed the City Manager to create and implement the Complete Streets Policy which encouraged city streets to integrate nature and green practices into our city including trees, landscaping, and rain gardens, also known as Green Infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, street trees are critical infrastructure, providing shade, mitigating urban heat, managing stormwater, improving air quality, and enhancing the safety, comfort, and quality of the public realm; and

WHEREAS, on March 21, 2024, the Austin City Council adopted Resolution No. 20240321-039, directing the City Manager to resolve existing barriers to implementing street trees and advance their integration into public rights-of-way; and

WHEREAS, the *Austin Roadmap for Advancing Green Infrastructure in the Right-of-Way* identifies regulatory, technical, procedural, and institutional barriers and recommends actions to prioritize street trees in the planning, design, construction, and maintenance of Austin's streets; and

WHEREAS, tax payers are making substantial, once-in-a-generation investments to make our streets safe, comfortable, and support sustainable mobility options including, Project Connect, East Avenue Trail and I-35 cap and stitch parks, Congress Avenue Urban Design Initiative, Corridor Mobility Bond projects, to which tree-lined streets are essential to the function, return on public investment, and long-term legacy of these projects; and

WHEREAS, Incorporating tree-lined streets into these improvements relies on the implementation of the *Austin Roadmap for Advancing Green Infrastructure in the Right-of-Way*, making timely and effective resolution imperative; and

WHEREAS, implementing these recommendations in Austin's constrained rights-of-way requires reconciling legitimate and sometimes competing infrastructure objectives, including preserving sufficient planting sites between the sidewalk and the roadbed to provide a continuous canopy of street trees, providing enough soil volume to support tree health, minimizing the risk that tree root growth will damage utilities, and ensuring fast and cost-effective utility serviceability in the event of emergencies; and

WHEREAS, successful implementation requires sustained City leadership, clearly defined responsibilities, coordinated decision-making, and transparent measures of progress to ensure that Council's adopted policy objectives are achieved;

WHEREAS, the code identifies Public Works as the administrator of activities within the right-of-way and there is an opportunity to bring City departments with an interest in the design and management of infrastructure in the right-of-way together to resolve differences in alignment with Council's mobility priority to implement tree-lined streets;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE AUSTIN DESIGN COMMISSION:

1. Affirms Support. Affirms its support for City Council Resolution No. 20240321-039 and the integration of street trees and other green infrastructure as essential elements of Austin's public rights-of-way.

2. Recommends Council Leadership. Recommends that City Council reaffirm its commitment to the Green Infrastructure Initiative and direct the City Manager to provide the leadership, resources, and interdepartmental support necessary to advance implementation of the *Austin Roadmap for Advancing Green Infrastructure in the Right-of-Way*.

3. Recommends Clarification of Authority. Recommends that City Council clarify the authority of the Director of Austin Transportation and Public Works to resolve conflicting department priorities and criteria that affect right-of-way design in order to implement Council priorities.

4. Recommends Clarification of Responsibility. Recommends that City Council clarify the responsibility of the Director of Austin Transportation and Public Works to remove barriers to effectively promote tree-lined streets while maintaining public safety, and infrastructure functionality.

5. Recommends Quarterly Reporting. Recommends that City Council direct the City Manager to provide quarterly progress reports to Council or the appropriate Council committee addressing:

- Progress toward implementation milestones and Roadmap recommendations;
- Proposed, pending, and completed regulatory and procedural changes;
- Significant implementation barriers and actions taken to resolve them;
- Material departures from Roadmap recommendations and the reasons for alternative approaches; and
- Anticipated next steps, schedules, and any additional Council action or resources needed.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Austin Design Commission respectfully requests that the Austin City Council take appropriate action to ensure the timely and effective implementation of the Green Infrastructure Initiative.