



## City Council

### Street Tree Maintenance Manual Level of Service Update

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#### **Title**

Street Tree Maintenance Manual Level of Service Update

#### **Recommended Action**

##### **Committee Recommendation:**

Not referred to a committee.

##### **City Manager Recommendation:**

Receive the information. Briefing only. No action requested.

#### **Report**

##### **Issue:**

Whether to receive briefing on draft Street Tree Maintenance Manual. The Manual describes management of the street tree population downtown and on ten designated major arterials, and identifies resources needed to begin to proactively insure the long term health and viability of this \$6.1 million asset. Discuss next steps for the City's Urban Forestry program.

##### **Staff Contact:**

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##### **Presenter(s):**

Shelly Bentley, Urban Forestry Program Manager, Community Planning and Development  
Kate Hartman, Water Resources Habitat Biologist, Public Works  
Gary Franks, Parks Maintenance Manager, Parks, Art and Recreation  
Kevin McFarland, Sound Urban Forestry

##### **Background and Analysis:**

###### *Street Tree Maintenance Manual*

The Street Tree Maintenance Manual (STMM) has been developed during 2017 to address the current health and required maintenance of our trees downtown and along ten major arterial streets (see attached map). It has been guided by the City of Olympia Comprehensive Plan (2014), Urban Forestry Strategic Plan (2015), Street Tree Inventory Recommendations (2016) and community interests. The STMM (an update to the previous Master Street Tree Plan) is intended to provide City staff with the data and guidance needed to perform consistent and predictable street tree

management and maintenance for a resource worth over \$6 million. The guidance in this document will help staff to:

- Prune and maintain street trees to protect their health, safety, and value;
- Maximize the benefits and reduce the cost of street trees by using resources efficiently; and
- Communicate with business owners, property owners, and community members about street tree management.

It shall also be periodically reviewed and updated to respond to changes in the tree population and industry best management practices.

### *Urban Forest Strategic Plan Implementation*

How the City manages the urban forest, including street trees, has evolved since the completion of an Urban Forest Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) in 2015 (See attachment). City staff having formed an interdepartmental policy and technical team to clarify roles and coordinate responsibilities, improving efficiency and consistency. The team works together to implement the recommendations outlined in the Strategic Plan.

In 2016, the City applied for and received a \$15,000 grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service and Washington State Department of Natural Resources Urban and Community Forestry Program to inventory all 2,500 street trees the City currently manages. The inventory data made clear the current condition of the City's managed street trees, and led to the policy team dedicating staff time and resources to develop the STMM.

### *Street Tree Current Conditions*

In the 1990's and early 2000's, the Urban Forestry Program led to the planting of thousands of new trees citywide. The strong emphasis on planting trees significantly increased Olympia's street tree population; however, the City has struggled to provide consistent and thorough maintenance. Practicing mostly reactive management for over 15 years has resulted in a street tree population that needs significant attention.

Current conditions identified in the inventory confirm that our street trees are far below basic industry standards for tree maintenance. Continued growth without pruning will make maintenance more difficult and expensive, as tree conditions will deteriorate with longer lengths of time between pruning cycles. Not only does this current maintenance level reduce the realized benefits of street trees, but potentially raises the City's level of risk.

### *Street Tree Maintenance Level of Service Recommendation*

Based on what was learned from the inventory, and an in-depth analysis of our street tree population and urban forestry program current conditions, the STMM outlines a recommended level of service which meets basic industry standards for tree maintenance, and how to go about achieving it.

The desired level of service includes a dedicated, permanent crew that practices safe and efficient

tree work. Shorter, more frequent pruning cycles would keep trees pruned away from street lights, traffic signs and buildings, which improves safety and reduces citizen complaints. Pruning trees when they are young also results in less work later, saving money and maximizing a street trees' benefits. Attached is a comparison of today's level of service and what's needed to reach the desired level of service identified in the draft STMM.

### *Next Steps*

The City departments represented on the Urban Forestry Policy Team are already moving towards implementing the guidance in the STMM. For example, Parks, Arts, and Recreation has developed an annual plan for street tree inspection and maintenance in 2018 to be carried out by the department's full-time arborist. The Policy Team will also continue looking into possible funding options to reach the desired level of service identified in the STMM.

In addition to implementing the maintenance level of service recommended in the STMM, the next step recommended in the 2015 Strategic Plan is a comprehensive Urban Forest Management Plan to address the other aspects of the City's urban forest - street trees in the remaining portions of the City, trees in unopened City rights of way, habitat and open space lands, park properties, and trees on private property. Some of these aspects, such as habitat and park lands, are being addressed through up-to-date management programs and policies. However, other aspects are in need of significant work to update policies and resources to adequately support the urban forest.

The Urban Forestry Policy Team continues to explore options for starting work on at least the most urgent aspects of an Urban Forest Management Plan. Several options for how to complete a Management Plan were put forward for consideration during the 2018 budget process; however, no funding has been identified to date for this effort.

### **Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):**

Residents and businesses downtown and adjacent to major corridors for which the City maintains the street trees (Attachment 1) are very interested in the City's maintenance of those trees.

Staff convened a meeting of community stakeholders to develop the STMM. Several overarching themes emerged from the group's discussions:

- The acknowledgement that trees contribute greatly to the streetscape;
- The importance of maintenance, and particularly protecting sidewalks; and
- Urban forest planning is but one element of urban design along a streetscape

### **Options:**

N/A

### **Financial Impact:**

Street tree maintenance activities for 2018 have already been identified based on current levels of funding and staff capacity within the Parks, Arts, and Recreation Department. This maintenance level addresses street trees downtown and on ten major arterials. In addition, resources within the Water Resources and Parks Maintenance programs provide a current level of service within city-owned habitat and parks properties.

Implementing the STMM-recommended level of service would require an estimate \$135,000 annually

beginning in 2019 to provide a basic industry standard for street tree maintenance downtown and on ten major arterials. This amount would create a dedicated, permanent crew to prune trees more often which keeps trees pruned back away from street lights, traffic signs, and buildings, improving safety and reducing citizen complaints. Also, trees pruned when they are young makes the work easier, cheaper, and better for tree health and infrastructure.

Beginning work on aspects of an Urban Forestry Management Plan would also require additional resources.

**Attachments:**

Map: Street Trees Maintained by the City

Urban Forest Strategic Plan

Street Tree Maintenance Manual Fact Sheet

Draft Street Tree Maintenance Manual

Street Tree Maintenance Levels of Service Comparison