

June 24, 2025

6/24/25 City Council Meeting, Item # 15 Sacramento Urban Forest Plan File ID: 2025-01274

Dear Mayor McCarty and Members of the City Council,

Having lived and worked in Sacramento's urban forest for the past 34 years I understand its challenges and complexities. I was a Sacramento city arborist for almost 30 years, retiring in 2020. But since retiring I am constantly busy helping residents, and neighborhood associations preserve trees. You see back in 2008 there was a change in thinking that occurred in the Urban Forestry section. Per former City Manager Ray Kerridge's directive to city staff that he wanted project sites "shovel ready." This meant the site was cleared and ready to build. The second directive to city staff was "getting the customer to success.". I was directed to produce solutions on how to get trees removed for development projects. It went from the protection and preservation of on-site trees, as well as city street trees, to removal and replacement. Having worked on all development projects for 15 years this came as a shock to me. I had gained the public's trust and as city arborist believed it was my duty to protect the trees and the public interest. My refusal to violate public trust as well as compromise my professional standards caused me to be relocated to Street Maintenance. There I worked for eleven years root pruning for sidewalk, curb, and gutter repairs until retiring in 2020.

Thus began the undeclared war on Sacramento's trees. Urban Forestry developed a successful tree removal program. Healthy, structurally sound private protected trees were now being removed from development sites and residential properties. So many large trees were being removed that the Sacramento Tree Foundation initiated an urban wood rescue program. Downtown developers were able to remove all the city street trees. Almost every downtown site which was developed in the past ten years have no mature street trees around them. The public eventually became aware of all the tree removals that were occurring. When local government does not do what it is supposed to do then concerned citizens step up to fill the void. Trees4Sacramento formed and their mission is the preservation, protection, and enhancement of Sacramento's urban forest.

During this time, the tree ordinance was revised in 2016 which Urban Forestry touted as increasing tree protection when this was not true. One example is S.M.U.D. was given carte blanche to remove any city or privately protected tree without any public notification. Developers are routinely allowed to remove all the trees on site. Urban Forestry has taken it to the next level by approving the removal of offsite private protected trees so the developer can maximize their building square footage. Furthermore, above and below ground building setbacks are not required. This precludes the planting of large shade trees. Therefore, columnar trees commonly referred to as popsicle trees are being planted.

The current Urban Forest Plan does not address operational functions of maintaining public trees. This was a key component of the original Urban Forest Management Plan. This was done intentionally because of the current backlogs that exist on routine work like stump grinding and demand pruning requests like limbs rubbing on a roof or low limbs over the street. Elm leaf beetle infestations are at an all-time high.

After 8 years in development this Urban Forest Plan should be approved. I also urge you to include the Trees 4 Sacramento amendment proposal which will not cost the city any money and provide oversight on the implementation of this plan.

However, my recommendation is that the city needs a Tree Commission. I proposed this back in 1992, but quickly learned management was not interested. The 1994 Urban Forest Management Plan recommended a Tree Advisory Committee. The 2003 Best Management Practices Review and Report recommended a twelve member Citizen Advisory Group to review and aid in setting policy, provide program feedback, and protect the community's urban forest interests. Over the years management has vehemently opposed any oversight. Why? If a Tree Commission had been in place the 3 million dollars in general fund money annually going to Urban Forestry would not have been reallocated. The current Urban Forest Plan would have addressed the city's Urban Forestry operations. The change in thinking from protect and preserve to remove and replace would not have occurred. These are just a few of the benefits that a Tree Commission could bring to Sacramento's urban forest. Sacramento residents have been funding Urban Forestry for more than thirty years and deserve better care and service than they are currently receiving.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel Pskowski". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a prominent 'P' and 'K'.

Daniel Pskowski – Sacramento City Arborist (1990 – 2020)
B.Sc. Landscape Horticulture (Colorado State University)
ISA Certified Arborist (WE-0964A)

Curtis Park has what it takes

Does Sacramento still deserve its longtime logo City of Trees?

By Dan Pskowski
Viewpoint staff writer

A couple of months ago, when the visitors bureau replaced the "City of Trees" logo on the huge I-5 water tower with the words "America's Farm-to-Fork Capital," it generated some protests on social media. *The Sacramento Bee* and *Inside Publications* publisher, Cecily Hastings, supported this change.

As a degreed arborist who has lived and worked in Sacramento for the past 26 1/2 years, I would like to weigh in on this discussion. What does it mean to be a City of Trees? Is it how many trees you have and the number of trees planted annually, or that you have a nationally recognized non-profit like the Sacramento Tree Foundation?

No, being a "City of Trees" is an attitude backed up by action. It is an attitude that the trees are not just an amenity but are an important part of a livable city and aren't readily removed unless diseased, structurally unsound, or in severe declining health.

In 1940 Sacramento spent two percent of the city budget on tree care. Unfortunately, as Sacramento's urban forest grew, the general fund budget for trees decreased to .65 percent in 2000. Currently, the majority of the City's Urban Forestry section is funded directly by the property owners under a Landscape & Lighting Assessment district, which in 2013 was \$4,842,351. The city also relinquished the care and maintenance of approximately 50,000 street trees. What started out as a temporary moratorium in July 1990 became permanent when the City Council adopted the Urban Forest Management Plan in November 1993. The 50,000 trees were located in the front yards on residential streets without a City park strip between the curb and sidewalk. Thousands of these trees have been removed due to the lack of professional care and many have not been replaced.

The City of Trees attitude is that trees can co-exist with development/infrastructure improvements and they are incorporated into the project. It means protect and preserve, not remove and replace. The City, in 2007, removed its only heritage size Bunya-Bunya tree (*Araucaria bidwillii*) for the Crocker Art Museum expansion project. In 2011 when the K Street Mall was converted to allow motor vehicles, the City's Public Works Department proposal designated seven street trees for removal. These were permanent removals with no replacement trees planted back at that location. Fortunately, a concerned citizen filed a tree appeal. Public Works reconsidered and decided on the removal of only two trees. However, I looked at the site and determined the proposed passenger drop off zones could be installed without the two trees being removed. Tree preservation required the

relocation of a bench and street light. An appeal was made before City Council and these two trees were preserved.

The Sacramento Commons project, which was approved in July 2015, will remove 199 trees on the current Capitol Towers 10-acre downtown property. Trees4Sacramento, an advocacy group, fought to preserve the trees. Its consulting arborist determined it would take at least 25 years to replace the lost canopy with the proposed replacement tree planting plan. There are numerous downtown sites where all the trees, including City Street trees, were removed for a development project.

Puppy: Most important is socialization

(Continued from page one)

In spite of all the disciplined training, Lydia says the best part of raising Betty has been "feeling like you're helping."

Lydia was surprised how well behaved Betty is, but she's learned that Betty was bred to be that way. She is a labrador retriever and golden retriever mix.

Lydia first met companion dogs when, at age 8, she played with the puppies at the home of puppy raiser Jan Thornburg. Thornburg says, "The most important function of the puppy raiser is socialization, getting the puppy accustomed to anything and everything in the environment, so it will be essentially 'bomb-proof' when matched with a disabled person."

Lydia and Thornburg are volunteers for Canine Companions for Independence, which provides, free of charge, highly trained assistance dogs to people in wheelchairs, deaf people, children with a variety of disabilities, and to persons in facilities such as special education classes, hospitals, physical therapy and occupational therapy departments, nursing homes etc. More information is available at CCI.org.

For Lydia, the hardest part about raising Betty will be giving her up. Lydia knows Betty will go on to intense training before she's matched with a disabled person.

She has yet to decide whether she will raise another companion puppy. In the meantime, she and the family have another dog, a cat and fish.

So where is the "City of Trees" attitude? Sadly, it resides in only a few of the neighborhoods, with Curtis Park being at the forefront. Curtis Park residents know that trees are important not only for the shade, health benefits, and character it gives the neighborhood but also in combating climate change. Residents readily speak out when a tree is posted for removal or a construction project which will impact trees. SCNA spends approximately \$14,000 every three years to protect elms in the park from Dutch elm disease. Curtis Park is definitely the "Neighborhood of Trees." However, Sacramento can no longer boast that it is the "City of Trees."



Photo/Will Carlton

Dann and Phoebe De Mund with Betty, and daughters Lydia, 11, and Lila, 10, who are training Betty to be a Companion Canine.

Streets: Work will start when the rain stops


(Continued from page one)

of some streets and application of a cape seal to others. Work cannot be done until the rain stops.

The City of Sacramento does not have an exact date and schedule for the project work to resume. A city media person told the Viewpoint last fall that work might resume in mid-March but just provided an update and stated the city is anticipating a return to the project work and impacted Curtis Park streets in mid-May. The City's Public Works Website

currently lists no dates for any work.

Sixteen Curtis Park streets will receive re-work or new work in the permanent cape seal part of the project. Markers for stop signs, bike lines, etc. will be repainted. The impacted streets in Curtis Park are: 10th Avenue, 11th Avenue, 24th Street, 26th Street, 31st Street, Sixth Avenue, Seventh Avenue, Eighth Avenue, Ninth Avenue, Coleman Way, Curtis Way, Cutter Way, Donner Way, East Curtis Drive, Montgomery Way and West Curtis Drive.



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