



Information Item

Date: July 26, 2010

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Joan L. Akins, Community Maintenance Director
Subject: Summary of Urban Forest Master Plan Activities and Future

Introduction

This report provides an update on the progress of the Urban Forest Master Plan under the direction of the Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force.

Background

[On April 7, 2009](#), Council approved the establishment of an Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force to advise staff on the development of a long-range urban forest master plan, review specific urban forest issues and serve in an advisory capacity to City Council on the master plan.

[On May 12, 2009](#), Council authorized the execution of a contract in the amount of \$203,791 with Artecho Landscape Architecture to develop the Urban Forest Master Plan.

[On September 22, 2009](#), Council appointed seven members to the Task Force: Judy Abdo, Tom Cleys, Peter Jensen, Susan McCarthy, Grace Phillips, Linda Piera-Avila and Doris Sosin.

Discussion

The Urban Forest Master Plan will include a tree inventory that identifies the GIS coordinates, the canopy size, the estimated lifespan, and the overall health of each tree. Replacement tree species will be selected for individual streets throughout the city. Strategic goals and objectives will be identified and set for the management of the forest. The environmental benefits of the forest, as well as the policies and procedures in the Community Forest Management Plan, will be evaluated and updated.

The initial contract with Artecho contains five elements which form the basis of work necessary for plan completion. Those elements are:

1. The inventory of the trees of the urban forest
2. Species designations
3. Public workshops
4. Presentations to commissions and Council
5. Master Plan production

Creation of the Master Plan has been delayed by the very process that will ensure its long-term success – community involvement. Coordination with the Task Force was not included in the contract because the Task Force was not in place when the contract was written. Selection of Task Force members and development of the Task Force to oversee the Master Plan and act as liaison between staff, consultants, and Council, prolonged the beginning phases of the work.

The Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force meets monthly on the last Wednesday of the month. The Public Landscape Division has provided detailed educational presentations on urban forestry and the history of our urban forest in Santa Monica. Topics have included selecting the right tree for the right place, environmental benefits of the local forest, species designation criteria, urban forestry guidelines, and goals and objectives of the plan.

An extensive community outreach program was initiated by the Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force and Public Landscape Division staff. The Public Landscape Division, under the guidance of the Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force, developed and hand distributed 30,000 door hangers with attached mail-in urban forest surveys. The Task Force also authored an online survey of residents, at no cost, utilizing a web-based program. The survey was promoted at the Santa Monica Festival, on the City website, via the tree distribution list, in the *Santa Monica Daily Press* and in *The Argonaut*.

To date, the Public Landscape Division has received over 500 responses to the survey, by far the best results Santa Monica has had in community forest survey history. The Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force conducted community meetings to solicit community opinion about the urban forest on April 28, 2010 with 17 residents in attendance; on May 15, 2010 with 20 residents in attendance; and June 6, 2010 with 27 residents in attendance. Council members as well as Planning Commission members were also in attendance. Community involvement will lead to positive stewardship of the trees within the urban forest. As a result of community outreach efforts, it has become apparent that more time is needed to listen to and gather opinions from residents. On July 7, 2010, the Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force held a special meeting to summarize the information gathered to date from the community meetings.

The information collected from the community meetings has given the task force, consultants, and staff a better idea about the extent of work needed to prepare the master plan. To assure that the document accurately reflects the input collected from the community, a more extensive process than originally projected will be required.

Next Steps

At its July 7, 2010 meeting, the Urban Forest Master Plan Task Force appointed a sub-committee to research and recommend a set of overarching principles for the plan.

The Task Force will hold another series of community meetings to capture more public opinion regarding the future management of the City's forest and offer a holistic view of the citywide canopy. The community will be offered educational information about the many environmental and social benefits of the forest.

The Task Force will establish the criteria for tree species designation for public trees on individual streets. These criteria will include ensuring the planting of the right tree for the right place based on parkway width, tree species growth patterns, planting palette design patterns designated by residents, and climatic area.

The Task Force will identify locations for the planting of 1,000 native trees funded by a Southern California Air Quality Management District grant for the City's greenhouse gas reduction project in conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service.

The proposed plan will be presented to and reviewed by the Environmental Task Force, Recreation and Parks Commission, Landmarks Commission and Planning Commission before presentation to Council for approval in late fall of 2011.

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