

WORK SESSION AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



STAFF

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SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

Urban Forest Strategic Plan Findings and Proposed Direction.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to share the findings from the urban forest strategic planning effort and to seek feedback and support from Council.

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1. Do Councilmembers support the general direction of the Urban Forest Strategic Plan effort?
2. What feedback do Councilmembers have regarding the Urban Forest Strategic Plan?

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

Urban Forest Strategic Plan

Trees are an important part of the community infrastructure and provide many essential human health, social, environmental, and economic benefits to those who live, work, and play in Fort Collins. Tree-related policies have been strong in Fort Collins and that coupled with a supportive community created the urban tree canopy that exists today. Existing policies have helped to preserve the character of Fort Collins and have also helped increase canopy as the community grows, including adding an average of 1,500 to 2,000 new street trees annually through development. With the continued demands of development, redevelopment, and other pressures on the canopy, the City recognized the need to create a Strategic Plan to ensure the vibrancy of the urban forest long into the future, prioritizing social equity, extreme heat mitigation, and the Forestry Division as a valuable resource to the community.

Purpose

The Urban Forest Strategic Plan (UFSP) will serve as a guiding document to:

- Summarize the state of the urban forest
- Create a 20-year vision for Fort Collins' trees
- Set goals
- Recommend next steps

Timeline

The development of the UFSP began in the summer of 2023. Initial work included:

- Analysis of existing policies
- Analysis of industry standards, best practices, and policies from peer cities
- Work in the fall and winter of 2023 and 2024 included focus groups and community engagement
- With Council's feedback, the Forestry Division is seeking final plan adoption end of summer 2024.

Summary of Initial Findings

- Overall, canopy has grown in a positive direction over the last 10 years.
- An estimated seventy-five percent (75%) of the urban canopy is on private property.
- City Forestry provides a high level of service to the community.
- Sixty percent (60%) of the public tree inventory are less than 8-inches in diameter and will require additional resources to manage as trees continue to mature and thrive into the future.
- A review of tree policies within both Municipal and Land Use Code was conducted.
- An urban tree canopy (UTC) analysis was completed to intersect canopy disparities prioritizing the following variables:
 - Social variables (i.e., income, population density, BIPOC, renters),
 - Health variables (i.e., asthma, heart disease, mental health), and
 - Environmental variables (i.e., urban heat and stormwater).
 - Additional variables analyzed was canopy cover associated with bus stops and bike lanes.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are listed in more detail including supporting initiatives, in the "UFSP Draft Recommendations" document. The proposed recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1 - Strategically invest in growing tree canopy where it will promote resilience and quality of life in Fort Collins.

Recommendation 2 - Create a tree planting plan.

Recommendation 3 - Complete the shift to proactive management of Fort Collins's public trees.

Recommendation 4 - Strengthen city policies to protect trees.

Recommendation 5 - Collect data to track changes to tree canopy over time and to inform Forestry activities.

Recommendation 6 - Sustainably grow the Forestry Division to keep pace with growth of the urban forest.

Recommendation 7 - Deepen engagement with the community about tree stewardship.

Recommendation 8 - Expand the network of Forestry Division partners.

Considerations

Prior to the urban forest strategic plan effort, Forestry presented at a Council work session on October 10, 2023, with a handful of tree-related Land Use policy updates. It is important to keep in mind that that UFSP policy review makes recommendations based on what may be missing compared to other communities and may not align with the competing values and land use goals of Fort Collins. This work continues as Forestry aligns with the Planning Department and overall Land Use Code changes. Forestry staff will work closely with the Land Use Code project team to better understand potential trade-offs to other goals, such as the creation of affordable housing and small business preservation. This work is ongoing and more information on possible Land Use Code changes will be brought to a Council work session for discussion on June 11th.

NEXT STEPS

- Listen to and work in Council feedback
- Visit Boards and Commissions
- Finalize the plan document
- Seek Council adoption end of summer 2024

ATTACHMENTS

1. UFSP Draft Recommendations
2. UFSP Focus Group List
3. Presentation