

WORK SESSION AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



STAFF

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SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

Rooted in Community, Urban Forest Strategic Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to provide an overview and to seek Council feedback on the draft, Rooted in Community, Urban Forest Strategic Plan.

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1. Do Councilmembers have feedback regarding the Urban Forest Strategic Plan and the Future Growth Strategies?
2. How can Growth Strategy 3 further support Council Priorities?

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

Rooted in Community, the Fort Collins Urban Forest Strategic Plan provides seven recommended growth strategies to support and maximize the community benefits that arise from fostering a healthy, urban tree canopy. The plan outlines the current state of the urban forest, emphasizes why trees are an important component of our community's infrastructure, and identifies key opportunities to continue improving the urban tree canopy for generations to come.

Summary of Preliminary Findings:

- Overall, the urban tree canopy has grown/expanded in most land use types over the last 10 years.
- Several commercial zoning types as well as "Institutional" (e.g. CSU Jurisdiction) are the areas that have lost canopy during this period of time.
- Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the urban canopy is on private property and the remaining twelve percent (12%) is on public property.
- City Forestry Division provides a high level of service to the community with a budget comparable to peer cities.

- 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.
- An urban tree canopy analysis was completed to intersect canopy disparities, prioritizing future planting efforts around the following variables:
 - Social, e.g. income, population density, BIPOC, renters
 - Health, e.g. asthma, heart disease, mental health
 - Environmental, e.g. urban heat and stormwater
 - Canopy cover over bus stops and bike lanes
 - The analysis identified 2,250 acres of High or Very High priority where additional tree canopy can capture stormwater, reduce urban heat, improve health outcomes, and benefit vulnerable communities.

Community Engagement

The Urban Forest Strategic Plan conducted numerous community-wide and focus group activities. The information gleaned from these engagement opportunities informed the development of the draft plan. The following list comprises the communication tools, channels, and events the project team employed to garner public input:

‘Our City’ webpage:

- Including preview of the first plan draft

Social media:

- Ongoing posts and interactions regarding plan status and opportunities for engagement

In-person Public Meetings:

- October 2023 (2 meetings) and March 2024 (1 meeting)
 - North & south Fort Collins meeting locations
 - 160 Participants
 - Spanish translation for all materials
 - Spanish interpretation provided at all meetings

Community Survey:

- September - December 2023
- 971 respondents
- 657 write-in comments
- In partnership with Our Climate Future Community Consultants and Urban Forest Ambassador volunteers

Diverse Focus Groups:

- 9 focus group meetings were held between October - December 2023
- 49 representatives from local organizations, institutions, businesses, developers, affordable housing representatives, landscape and tree contractors, and government entities

Boards and Commissions and Climate Equity Committee:

- Land Conservation and Stewardship Board – May 8, 2024
- Natural Resource Advisory Board – May 15, 2024
- Air Quality Advisory Board – May 20, 2024

- Parks and Recreation Advisory Board – May 22, 2024
- Transportation Board – June 12, 2024

Public Preview of 90% draft plan:

- 54 document downloads
- 210 page visits
- 74 newsfeed visits (format compliant per PDF Accessibility Law HB21-110)
- Sent to 124 emails with a 75% open rate and 22 clicks

Future Growth Strategies

The following strategies are listed in more detail with supporting initiatives (Foundational and Transformational Initiatives) in the draft plan. The supporting initiatives serve as a menu of options that were identified as opportunities through our community and focus group engagement. These options create pathways for the community and the Forestry Division to focus on and refine over the next twenty years as the urban forest and community evolves, as Council Priorities change, and as other technologies or advancements become available.

The proposed **Growth Strategies**, starting on page 60, are as follows:

1. Strategically invest in growing tree canopy where it will promote resilience and quality of life in Fort Collins. (p.62)
2. Complete the shift to proactive management of Fort Collin’s public trees. (p.64)
3. Strengthen city policies to protect trees. (p.66)
4. Collect data to track changes to tree canopy over time and to inform Forestry activities. (p. 68)
5. Sustainably resource the Forestry Division to keep pace with growth of the urban forest. (p. 70)
6. Deepen engagement with the community about tree stewardship. (p.72)
7. Expand the network of Forestry Division partners. (p. 74)

For a quick view of **Implementation and Metrics** of the seven Growth Strategies, see page 78.

Addressing March 2024 Council Work Session themes

Staff heard various feedback and suggestions from Council which are summarized below:

- **Council:** Provide more emphasis on the broad benefits of the urban forest in Fort Collins, including and especially bird and wildlife habitat.
 - **Staff Response:** The plan addresses the broader benefits of trees throughout the plan but more specifically is identified in Section 2: *Trees Enhance Neighborhood & Community Vitality* (p. 36). An additional section was added: “Trees and Environmental Health” to provide more emphasis on trees providing food and habitat for wildlife (p. 39).
- **Council:** Provide more connection of the urban forest to the seven City Strategic Outcomes Areas, i.e. How does the urban forest support Economic Health?
 - **Staff Response:** The plan provides connection and alignment with the 2024 Citywide Strategic Plan and 2019 City Plan. Each future growth strategy (p. 60) lists each Outcome Area and how the plan supports it. Additionally, a section at the beginning of the plan highlights how trees support each of the 7 outcome areas (p. 18). In addition, edits to

language for Growth Strategy 3 aim to acknowledge how plans, strategies, and policies must work in harmony to achieve desired outcomes.

- **Council:** Clarify how trees fit in as we move toward a more water-wise landscape and how trees can support multiple objectives in a changing climate.
 - **Staff Response:** The plan offers a section on water conservation, drought and climate adaptation (p. 30-33) and includes initiatives to adapt to a changing climate; and to support and align with the Water Efficiency Plan (WEP).
- **Council:** Clarify and educate responsibilities for private trees between neighbors as well as other education and outreach opportunities to help support both community members and tree canopy.
 - **Staff Response:** Several plan initiatives support these efforts listed in both Growth Strategy 3 (p. 66-67) and Growth Strategy 6 (p. 72-73).

Addressing Land Use Code (LUC) and Tree Policies:

An interdisciplinary team from Planning, City Manager's Office and Forestry will work with a consultant to analyze the impact of proposed tree policies on future development in Fort Collins related to potential changes in the Land Use Code. A separate Council Work Session will be scheduled in 2025 to discuss findings and identify next steps.

Growth Strategy 3: Strengthen City Policies to Protect Trees (p. 66) takes into consideration and operationalizes input garnered from community engagement events, focus groups, council feedback, review of the existing City ordinance, and best practice tree protection policies from peer communities. Proposed edits to this strategy seek to add nuance to potential future policy within this Growth Strategy. These edits and proposed future work strive to balance Council priorities regarding 15-Minute Cities and articulate potential trade-offs in policy decisions.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will incorporate feedback from this Council Work Session and finalize the draft Urban Forest Strategic Plan for Council's consideration to adopt the Urban Forest Strategic Plan, Rooted in Community in Q1 2025.

Staff will continue to incorporate Council Priorities to balance the needs of the community while exploring tree canopy policy updates in 2025, including a future work session in alignment with future Land Use Code work.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Urban Forest Strategic Plan (draft)
2. Urban Forest Strategic Plan Technical Appendix
3. Urban Forest Strategic Plan Focus Group Participants
4. Staff Presentation