

June 21, 2020

San José Mayor & City Council
City of San José
200 E. Santa Clara Street
San José, CA 95113

Dear Honorable Mayor and City Council:

The City of San José released its *Draft Community Forest Management Plan* (CFMP) to the public in March 2021. It was described by the project funder, CAL FIRE, as “*woefully underperformed*”. CAL FIRE pointed out many omissions and deficiencies, including failure to meaningfully engage key stakeholders and unfairness towards San José’s key urban forest partner Our City Forest (OCF), yet these concerns were not revealed to top City officials.

This citywide plan should never have been directed from a silo of a few City staff without a citywide stakeholder group, yet it was. *This is contrary to all relevant City policies about transparency and community involvement. We therefore respectfully request that you intervene to: 1) immediately halt this process and 2) form a stakeholder steering committee that will revamp the process, guarantee a robust community engagement process, engage experts across the county, and develop a visionary, state-of-the-art CFMP for all sectors.*

Ownership and management of San José’s urban forest is the responsibility of many entities, and a solid plan for its future depends on engagement of these stakeholders. *The vast majority of any urban forest - as much as 85% - is managed and financed by non-City entities.* Street trees and park trees comprise the smaller portion, and *in San José, even street trees are not the responsibility of the City, but of adjacent property owners.* The cross-jurisdictional nature of urban forest management makes it imperative to have a stakeholder group representing many jurisdictions. In turn, this ensures buy-in for plan implementation and future investing.

Tens of thousands of trees grace the streets, parks, schools, and homes in your districts through the efforts of OCF and its many partners, yet the current Draft CFMP minimizes and inaccurately describes the work of this nonprofit model that has added nearly 100,000 trees and shrubs across jurisdictions throughout San José - not only along hundreds of city and county streets, but also 100+ parks, 200+ schools, and many other sites. Related achievements include obtaining \$15+ million in state and federal funds, providing hundreds of green jobs, battling local environmental injustice for decades, and engaging some 200,000 volunteers and residents, with the value of volunteer time alone estimated at \$30+ million. This work, including the value of their environmental, economic, health and social impacts, and even the national recognition this has brought to San José, are mostly absent in this CFMP.

Our City Forest’s many key partners were also ignored during the process, including Santa Clara County, Valley Water, California Volunteers/AmeriCorps, Caltrans, San José’s 24 school districts, 200+ service clubs and associations, and CAL FIRE itself.

According to the project consultant (Dudek), it was DOT staff who managed the process, including the decision to initially give the public a mere 2 weeks to review and comment in order to rush it to T&E in May for approval prior to a June Council vote. The public comment window was ultimately extended due to community pressure, but unfortunately for the public, they are reading a deficient draft along with a message that keeps them in the dark as to the errors, the omissions, and the lack of any true stakeholder engagement and review.

Perhaps most telling that intervention is needed immediately is this public statement made by the consultant in early June, "The Plan is done and out, and the analysis will not change". *This stance was expressed well before the end of the comment period, and completely disregards any forthcoming input from community members or even elected officials.* This is reason enough to halt the current process immediately, return to the batter's box, and start again with a revamped process that is respectful, respectable, and puts San José's tree-loving community first.

So again, we implore you to please address this urgent matter by directing DOT to halt this process and to ensure the formation of an independent and diverse group of citywide stakeholders to drive robust community engagement, bring in urban forest experts, and steer the development of a significantly improved CFMP. The rushed patch-up job unfolding now to "just get it done" is an unnecessary compromise and hits far below any standard we believe San José should be willing to accept.

City leaders have made all the difference for this valuable urban asset in the past, and we are asking the same from you now. San José deserves an inspiring, cutting-edge plan that can be a model for cities across the nation. By pulling together, we can make San José one of the nation's *top green cities* and address the many serious impacts of climate change.

We will be in touch to schedule a call. If you'd like to reach out to us in the meantime, please email Vicki Moore at vickimoore1345@gmail.com

Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Linda J. LeZotte
*Director, Valley Water
Former City of San José Councilmember*

Vicki Moore
Vice Chair, Santa Clara County Planning Commission

Bob Levy
*Santa Clara County Planning Commissioner
Former City of San José Planning Commissioner*

Michelle Yesney
*Former City of San José Planning Commissioner
Former City of S.J. Director of the Office of Environmental Management
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Barbara Marshman
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