

# City of Palo Alto Public Works Department

## Urban Forestry Section

### FY 2012-2013 Accomplishment Report

*The Urban Forestry Program strives to improve people's lives through wise management of a healthy, vibrant, and safe urban forest. This fiscal year encompassed notable accomplishments described in the following pages.*

## Capacity Building

**Partnerships** were enhanced with Canopy, established with Cal Poly and improved with professional organizations such as the Arbor Day Foundation. Canopy contributed more than \$260,000 of matching support with notable accomplishments such as completion of a survey for sudden oak death, joint pursuit of grants, and increased outreach.

**Public Tree Permits** allowed private property owners to perform specific work on public trees while saving the City over \$50,000 in work value.

**Internships** were offered

then employed to connect a Cal Poly Soil Science student to an applied research project about the effects of recycled water on soil characteristics and plant health. \$5,000 worth of time was donated to complete the project which included recommendations for management at the Palo Alto Golf Course and Greer Park. An intern from Cal Berkeley donated \$1,000 in time to create visual simulations for the Urban Forest Master Plan. Two interns from Cal Berkeley Extension donated landscape design services valued at more than \$5,000 for the historic Boy

Scout fire pit area at Lucie Stern as well as the Byxbee Park/landfill renovation.

**Grants** were submitted though not awarded funding. An application proposing to fund an open source tree inventory application will pursue alternate funding sources. An Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program grant supported by Council resolution may be revised. For re-submittal

**Forestry Fund** mitigation contributions of \$68,708 will enable planting of more public trees.

## Care

**Pruning** of 1,385 trees by City staff augmented contract capacity, to exceed the target to maintain a 7 year cycle. The street tree contractor pruned 4,704 trees. Consistent and sustained cycle maintenance in the past

has developed a resilient tree population which weathered storms with very few failures. Only 379 limb pick ups were requested for the year.

**Pest control** was provided to treat 6 stumps. The relatively

low number corresponds to a diverse tree species mix in generally fair to good health which has resisted prolific insect and disease threats. One public tree permit was approved for pest control.

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### Wow Facts!

- \$350,000 + leveraged funding (1)
- 10,000 + customer requests satisfied (2)
- 11,007 work orders processed
- 13,000 + trees pruned (public + utility)
- Art Center opens with urban forest exhibit
- Urban Forest Master Plan progress

## Customer Service



On average more than 900 customer requests per month are addressed about trees

**Professional decisions** are frequently needed. Certified arborists on staff performed 1,343 inspections on public trees.

**Demand requests** were answered by responding to more than 900 inquiries monthly which generated 11,007 work orders during the year

**Development Services** oversight included 191 tree protection fencing inspections and 61 re-

inspections. Review and comment was provided for dozens of entitlement applications, ordinance reviews, landscape reviews, and building permits. A fully electronic permit submittal and processing system was launched to improve responsiveness.

**CIP** and other City of Palo Alto managed projects were serviced by respon-

sive consulting and tree protection treatments. Projects of note include the wastewater main replacement project, the water main replacement project, San Antonio Road improvements Phase II, the Mitchell Park Library, the household hazardous waste station, El Camino Park, and the weir replacement within San Franciscito Creek as accessed through El Palo Alto Park.

“Canopy was instrumental this year in the hiring of Walter Passmore as the City of Palo Alto’s first Urban Forester”  
Canopy Annual Report FY 2012

## Outreach and Recognition

**Media coverage** was garnered in the Palo Alto online e-newspaper, San Jose Mercury News, and various TV stations. Stories were published about the new Urban Forester, Magnolia trees along University Avenue, and El Palo Alto tree assessments.

**Outreach** was jointly conducted with Canopy and other partners.

**Awards** are being pursued to recognize the City of Palo Alto as a Tree City USA with a Tree Line USA utility. A meeting with Stanford prompted the University to pursue status as a Tree Campus USA.

**Awareness** of the importance of urban forestry was highlighted with development of a video by

Mayor Yiaweh Yeh telling the history of Palo Alto through it’s trees. Yeh plans to describe the strong connection of trees to the unique and exemplary quality of life. Another project of note was the opening of the Palo Alto Art Museum with the showcase exhibit “Our Urban Forest”, a collection of submitted photos.

## Replenishment



**Tree Planting** installed 245 new trees into individual vacant tree lawn sites within the right-of-way or parks. The first partnership effort of the season with Canopy resulted in 7 new trees planted along Ferne Avenue. Significant tree planting projects were completed on Page Mill Road and in Rinconada

Park. The Mayor’s Tree Planting, Arbor Day, Arbor Week events highlighted the importance of replenishing the urban forest as well as caring for it.

**Arbor Day** activities at El Palo Alto Park included kids tree climbing, educational stations, storytelling, proclamation, and

assessment of the El Palo Alto redwood. A series of advanced assessments will provide the most comprehensive analysis of the tree’s health ever conducted.

## Risk Management and Emergency Response

**Emergency response** training was provided to crews. Advanced preparation aided during responses to the first significant storms of the season. Tree Section staff provided assistance during flooding events to deliver sandbags, inspect drainages, and remove obstructions.

**Utility vegetation management** continues to be

an important service. During the year 6,949 trees were cleared away from power lines thus protecting public safety and preventing outages. Eleven trees were removed under the Right Tree, Right Place Program and seven trees were pruned to a safe clearance distance to enable their removal and protect the power lines. Also significant is the compilation of the first

application to the Arbor Day Foundation for designation as a Tree Line USA Utility recognizing the joint efforts between departments.

**Tree Removals** are always a difficult decision that signals the last available action to protect public safety or essential infrastructure. 212 removals prevented undesirable outcomes.



No outages were caused by trees that could have been prevented by line clearance pruning

## Collaboration

**Sustainability** is a major topic of interest for the City. Urban Forestry will provide foundational elements to craft environmental management goals which meet the City Manager's goal of being "the greenest City in America". Urban Forester input to the redesign of the Palo Alto Golf Course resulted in environmentally sustainable enhancements. Practices in-

stalled as recommended are anticipated to reduce potable water use by thousands of gallons while enhancing wetlands, wildlife habitat, and native plants. In addition ecosystem services calculations recognizing holistic environmental improvements are estimated to save the project \$300,000 or more over traditional mitigation approaches.

**The City of Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan** is being revised. Urban Forestry Section staff have contributed and will continue to be involved.

**The Foothills Fire Management Plan** was advanced by staff contributions while participating on an inter-departmental team as well as implementing a prescribed burn.

**"Our goal is for Palo Alto to be the greenest City in America"**  
**Jim Keene, City Manager**

## Staff Development

**A Business Plan** was developed prior to July 1 which established direction and priorities. Staff input then edited text to arrive at a shared vision.

**Training and shadowing** opportunities have been employed to advance skills, build capacity, and improve responsiveness. Internal, local, and low

cost options have been used. All Tree Section staff have benefitted from training with Tree Trimmers attending a young tree care workshop in East Palo Alto hosted by Canopy, and Certified Arborists attending a Tree Failure data base seminar in Woodside.

**A vacancy** for Project

Manager resulted in promotion of Derek Sproat



following a nationwide search and multi-step selection process. Bill Croft obtained status as a certified arborist and was promoted to Lead Tree Trimmer to replace Derek. Joe Rapanut obtained status as a certified tree worker. Derek Sproat became a qualified tree risk assessor.

**THE MISSION OF THE URBAN FORESTRY SECTION IS TO CONNECT PEOPLE TO TREES**

The tree El Palo Alto is the namesake for the City, the logo, and a symbol representing the importance of the urban forest to all Palo Altans. El Palo Alto guided bold pioneers to discover a special place long ago and also represents our goal for a greener future.



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The Urban Forestry Program strives to be an innovative leader in Municipal Forestry. The organizational structure which is comprehensive and unified provides a strong base to integrate practices into many aspects of both planning and operations of multiple departments. Primary service responsibilities include Public Works, Parks, Development, Planning, Utilities, and Sustainability. The goal for the future is to grow a good program into a nationally recognized model.

**Urban Forest Master Plan**

The Urban Forest Master Plan creation process has been reinvigorated following recent organizational changes. Priority action items were addressed this year including the following:

- Operational relationships between City departments were analyzed resulting in the creation and selection of a staff position for an Urban Forester in order to improve collaboration and lead implementation of the plan
- Process analysis is underway which will identify potential revisions to policies and procedures with the intent of improving customer service, enhancing development services, protecting quality of life, and elevating Palo

**Alto as a model**

Links have been established to important initiatives including sustainability and the City of Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan. Urban Forest management principles will be weaved through both initiatives to provide essential green infrastructure components.

Sewing together all the completed components into one cohesive document is underway. Input, feedback, and comment will be solicited from outreach efforts as well as formal venues such as Board and Commission meetings and briefings to Council. Editing to incorporate public input is planned to occur from

January through May 2013. A final draft of the urban forest master plan is anticipated to be submitted to Council in June 2013.

An intern project occurring from December 2012-January 2013 was completed by UC Berkeley student and Palo Alto resident, Chloe Lischinsky, to describe vision components through iconic graphic images and future simulations.

**The Mission of the Urban Forest Master Plan is to create greater harmony between people and nature.**