

May 5, 2017

Riverside Council Members and Members of the Budget Engagement Committee:

There are a variety of reasons that urban areas in Southern California have been rapidly losing tree canopy cover. The primary causes include lack of water due to extensive drought, secondary pest infestations in drought-stressed trees, and miss-communication to the public.

Initially, residents and municipalities were inundated with drought messages that instructed them to turn off irrigation water, without consideration of the resulting impacts to urban trees and the multitude of benefits they provide. (Trees take decades to mature and provide those benefits, while shrubs and lawns can be replaced quickly.)

Eventually State messaging shifted, from “Save our Water” to “Save our Water **and** our Trees”, but the correction came too late. Cities and residents are now be facing:

- greater expense to remove hazardous dead and dying trees
- greater energy demands due to loss of shade and the cooling benefits that trees provide
- reduction of carbon storage
- reduced flood water and erosion control, with greater amounts of dust and air pollutants
- loss of quality of life, property values, and wildlife habitat.

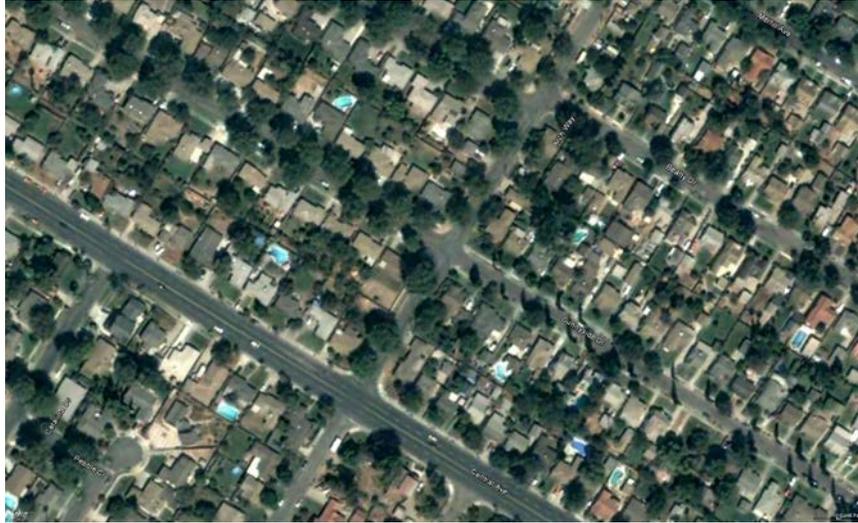
For more information about the devastating and rapid loss of trees in Southern California, please refer to the April 19, 2017 article in the LA Times:

[“The Trees that make Southern California shady and green are dying - Fast.”](http://lat.ms/2pRNILw) <http://lat.ms/2pRNILw>

Example of loss of tree canopy cover in Riverside, Ca.: 2004-2016.

Neighborhood in Magnolia Center

2004



2016



Map data: Google, DigitalGlobe

Secondly, the demise of urban tree canopy results from poor management and lack of awareness and community education. Although cities require developers to plant trees, there is no follow-up to ensure the trees are properly cared for and maintained for the reasons they were planted.

Businesses and individual property owners frequently miss or over-prune, which causes permanent damage to tree structure, leading to future hazards, and destroying the intended benefits.

Several steps could be taken to remedy this problem, including education, ordinances, code enforcement, requiring tree care worker certification and/or licensing certified arborists, re-establishing a city-wide tree committee, and coordination from a certified, city-wide urban forester who works with public utility and multiple city departments.

The following pictures demonstrate what frequently happens to trees in Riverside area parking lots; trees that were planted to provide shade to cars and to mitigate for heat absorbing asphalt and concrete.



Here is an example where the City of Riverside leases property for a Library, yet does not require the owner to provide proper tree care (and shade) in the parking lot. The picture (left) demonstrates the over-pruning that results in a “lollipop” tree (right).

Notice how the tree is actually holding up the stake that should have been removed after the first year of growth. The tree ties have begun to “girdle” the tree, cutting off growth.



Ironically, in the Galleria at Tyler parking lot, the energy plug-in sign says “Respecting Nature is in our Nature”, yet their shade trees have been mutilated!

Tree topping is commonly found in Riverside. Topping damages the structure and function of a tree, resulting in future hazards and expense.



Topped and over pruned pines at a business on Hole Ave.



A windbreak row that for decades protected the football field at Ca School for the Deaf, yet was topped in 2017. In this situation, a shorter tree should have been initially planted.

Standard practice: “Plant the right tree in the right place”.

We urge you to support funding for the development of an Urban Forest Management Plan. An Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP or Plan) would provide a shared vision for the future of our urban forest. The long term Plan is a tool to identify priority issues, management alternatives, and future funding needs. Management decisions of today will influence the amount and types of benefits derived from the urban forest for future generations.

An effective urban forest management plan will include:

- **Vision** for the urban forest
- **Assessments** of the current status of the urban forest
- **Strategic Plan** with *goals, objectives, and actions* based on the information analyzed and identified needs
- **Implementation plan** with specific dates and assigned responsibilities
- **Monitoring plan** with a system or matrix to measure progress toward the Strategic Plan’s goals, in order to check effectiveness and revise the urban forest management plan as needed.

The planning process itself educates and engages city departments, elected officials, and members of the community to answer the questions:

- ***What do you have?*** (Assessments and tree survey consolidation, past and current canopy cover digital analysis, management approaches, community values and needs)
- ***What do you want?*** (Vision, Goals, Objectives)
- ***How do you get what you want?*** (Action/Implementation with assigned responsibilities and due dates)
- ***Are you getting what you want?*** (Monitoring to adapt to change.)

The planning process starts by developing a **work plan** to identify who needs to be coordinating its development, stakeholders that need to be involved, when the planning steps will be completed, what areas will be included, etc. To learn more about the planning process itself, please visit the free online toolkit's "Step 1, Work Plan" at <http://ufmptoolkit.net/>.

Each management plan is unique and assesses the current status of the urban forest, including:

- canopy cover, heritage trees, and inventories of tree species, size, health, and site conflicts
- tree management programs, multiple department and RPU responsibilities, practices, policies
- environmental considerations
- land use/community history
- community values and issues.

Extensive community involvement through meetings, surveys and focus groups ensures that the community is engaged in identifying needs and helping with stewardship.

During the planning process, additional documents, such as budgets, policy and procedure manuals, standards and specifications, and public education programs would be reviewed and targeted for updates.

Annual work plans and budgets are developed based on the long-term planning horizon of the plan.

In addition, I highly suggest that a comprehensive public education component be added, as approximately 50% of the urban forest falls on private property, and residents lack awareness and tools to carefully manage their trees.

COST ESTIMATE for plan development (for consultant fees or for adding additional certified urban forester and digital analysis staff during the duration.) \$85,000-110,000.

As a result of the Plan, the City would expand the urban forest and recoup costs, improving efficiencies for educating about, and caring for, both City and privately owned trees. UC researchers have quantified the average value of a mature tree in Riverside to be \$3,880. At that value, an expanded urban tree canopy will rapidly recoup costs of developing an Urban Forest Management Plan.

For additional information, please see the Urban Forest Management Plan free online toolkit <http://ufmptoolkit.net/> .

Many residents have identified a need for greater planning and urban forest management.

This letter and request for funding has been endorsed by numerous neighborhood groups and is continues to be circulated and discussed at neighborhood meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

Neighbors Better Together, Lincoln Park group, Northside Improvement Association,
Downtown Area Neighborhood Alliance (DANA)

**How many years will it take to replace this urban canopy
and its many benefits of reducing
pollution, noise and aesthetic quality?**

**91 Freeway at 14th St.
2005**



2016

