

June 18, 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 a completely unvetted *Draft Community Forest Management Plan* (CFMP) to the public in March 2021. It was quickly described by 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). The funder’s response indicated the \$750,000 project grant was at risk, yet these concerns were not revealed to top City officials.

A citywide plan should never be directed from a silo of a few City staff without a citywide steering group, yet that is what has unfolded. *This is contrary to all relevant City policies about transparency and community involvement.* Without your intervention, the City will lose this opportunity to develop a visionary, honest, accurate, and state-of-the-art plan under the guidance of an informed and diverse steering committee of legitimate stakeholders/investors.

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 our urban forest is managed and financed by *non-City* entities. Street trees and park trees comprise most of the smaller portion, and even then, San José’s street trees are not the responsibility of the City, but of adjacent property owners. It is not difficult to recognize why an invested stakeholder steering group is essential for developing a balanced, holistic plan that results in buy-in for implementation and further investment.

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 contributions of this nonprofit model that has added nearly 100,000 trees and shrubs throughout San José - not only along hundreds of streets, but also 100+ parks, 200+ schools, and other land use types. 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. These significant efforts, the value of their economic, social and environmental impacts, and the national recognition this model 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, over 100 service clubs, groups and associations, and CAL FIRE itself.

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According to the DOT-hired plan consultant (Dudek), it was DOT staff who managed the process in all regards, including the decision to initially give the public a mere 2 weeks to review in order to rush it to T&E in May for a Council vote in June. That window was ultimately extended due to community pressure, but unfortunately for the public, DOT opted to not make any corrections and to re-open the comment period with the same “woefully underperformed” draft.

The consultant has stated, “The Plan is done and out, and the analysis will not change”, *regardless of any forthcoming input from key stakeholders and community members*. We find this stance unacceptable, at best.

We implore the Mayor and Council to do better for San José’s community and the urban forest. Environmental leadership has made the difference for this valuable urban asset in the past, and you can do the same now by intervening to revamp and optimize this process to ensure a participatory, comprehensive, and visionary CFMP for our city. Done right, it is possible to make San José one of the nation’s top green cities.

We would like to discuss our proposed solutions and will be in touch to schedule a call. Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Linda J. LeZotte
Director, Valley Water
Former City of San José Council Member

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

Barbara Marshman
Former Mercury News Editorial Page Editor

Vicki Moore
Santa Clara County Planning Commission Vice-Chair

Michelle Yesney
Former City of San José Planning Commissioner
Former Greenbelt Alliance President
Former City of San José Director of the Office of Environmental Management

Fernando Zazueta
President, Rotary Club of San José