



SAN MATEO, SANTA CLARA & SAN BENITO COUNTIES

May 24, 2021

Kerrie Romanow, Director, Environmental Services Department
City of San Jose
200 East Santa Clara St.
10th Floor Tower
San José, CA 95113-1905

Dear ESD Director Romanow, Mayor Liccardo and City Council Members,

Thank you for your climate leadership with the development of the Climate Smart San Jose plan and other climate efforts. And thank you for your recent Semi-Annual Update presentation. We were pleased by the engagement of the Mayor and Council on climate and the issues related to trees and equity.

Ms. Romanow, we have advocated for the value of trees in the past but do recognize their relatively poor Return on Investment (ROI) in regard to *carbon sequestration* in an urban landscape. While we know that you too are well aware that trees provide value beyond climate issues, we agree with Council Members Arenas, Carrasco, and Peralez that trees are important for cooling and equity and we believe these are important values that should be included in the Climate Smart plan.

Those of us who have experienced summers in Sacramento, the “City of Trees”, and Central Valley neighborhoods built before the advent of air conditioning, can especially appreciate the climate adaptation ROI of trees. The goal of meeting the Paris Accord Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reduction targets is essential but not sufficient. Please consider the following when evaluating Climate Smart San Jose revisions:

- Climate adaptation, including addressing the issue of heat island effects and flooding.
- Equity, since improving the wellbeing of those most impacted by climate change will affect priorities and ROI.
- Leadership. A leadership mindset may affect the actions we take, developing experience and knowledge that can be shared widely. Doing our share of GHG reduction is the ethically required thing to do, even acknowledging that it will have a significant effect on the planetary climatic system only as part of cumulative, global efforts to address climate change. To further leverage this impact, we must stretch to find ways to overcome obstacles to high levels of GHG reductions that others could follow. Leadership in decarbonizing existing infrastructure, for example, will be necessary. And the study and implementation of sequestration techniques in

Coyote Valley might be incorporated into agricultural and land steward practices in other cities, states, and countries.

Further, with a broader scope, the Climate Smart San Jose may find more resources that might alter the ROI on various activities. *“Since trees can produce disservices, trees should be valued for what they holistically contribute to a community, rather than being valued for singular benefits.”* [1] Looking at the equity value and ozone and particulate pollution reductions, and cooling, much less the noise reduction, crime reduction, beautification, and health benefits of trees shows ROI to be very positive. This leads to greater priority for planting trees which in turn opens up the opportunity to make use of California Climate Action Corps resources which improves ROI, for example.

Moreover, a broader scope with natural and working lands also leads to an improved ROI for planting trees, in contrast to the relatively high costs of maintenance of urban street trees. There is opportunity to utilize cost effective volunteers and students to simply plant acorns and tend to the saplings with little maintenance over the life of the trees as with the Guadalupe Oak Grove Park and elsewhere. Restoration of oak savanna and woodlands in North Coyote Valley and in the PRNS vacant lands in South Coyote Valley provides high ROI opportunities for planting thousands of trees.

Enlarging the scope of Climate Smart San Jose must not detract from the goal of GHG reduction and may require the Council to provide greater resources to staff. But just as with an equity lens, all significant decisions should consider their climate effects. Evaluating and prioritizing GHG reduction efforts, adaptation, equity, and leadership in the long run will provide for better ROI throughout City budgets as well as a more resilient and healthier San Jose.

Sincerely,



Dave Poeschel, Open Space Committee Chair, Loma Prieta Chapter, Sierra Club



Kristel Wickham, Climate Action Leadership Team Chair, Loma Prieta Chapter, Sierra Club

Cc: James Eggers, Director, Loma Prieta Chapter, Sierra Club

[1] New Phytologist Foundation, “The benefits of trees for livable and sustainable communities”,

<https://nph.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ppp3.39>