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Urban Forestry Council
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Attn: Grace Ma (please distribute)

To: Members of the Urban Forestry Council

RE: Planning Process for Urban Forestry Plan

Regarding item #6 on Friday's agenda, I would like to submit the following comments and clarifications on behalf of the San Francisco Group of the Sierra Club:

- 1. Street Trees.** We are very enthusiastic about the Council's work on street trees, and applaud efforts to include an urban forest component in all street and public works projects.
- 2. Integration into General Plan.** We are in general supportive of efforts to include an urban forest element within the city's Sustainability Plan, and will comment on the planning documents as the process unfolds.
- 3. Plan needs to be informed by an understanding of San Francisco's ecological history.** Among the problems with the current draft is a lack of understanding of the ecological history of San Francisco. In particular, there is a lot of verbiage which assumes San Francisco was a "vast wasteland" before the "heroic" efforts of Sutro and others. Thus the current draft fails to recognize the diversity of the native flora (including many species of trees and arborescent shrubs); nor does it include any assessment of the environmental impacts of those early plantings. A more balanced approach informed by an understanding of the area's natural and cultural history would be advisable.
- 4. Plan needs to take into account the native forest component.** Related to the above, the current plan is deficient because it fails to take into account the existing remnant native forested areas--primarily oak woodlands and along riparian corridors--and instead treats the urban forest as a completely man-made fabrication. Ecologically speaking, the urban forest is an interconnected ensemble of both native and introduced species. In addition to street trees and the historical planted forest, the plan needs to account for and incorporate recommendations regarding management and enhancement of existing native forest ecosystems in a way which is consistent with the Natural Areas Management Plan and the Open Space element of the General Plan.

5. Look at the Forest, not the Trees. The science of forestry and the understanding of what constitutes a "healthy forest" have changed a lot since the first Arbor Day. The most accepted approach today is what is generally termed an "ecosystems" approach, which focuses on the total health of the forest ecosystem rather than on individual trees. In contrast, the current plan places too much emphasis on the size and number of planted trees, and on canopy cover. Thus the plan fails to recognize that in certain instances, it may be desirable to thin forests rather than plant more trees. The plan also fails to recognize the detrimental impacts of invasive species such as bluegum eucalyptus and acacia. Any consultants brought on board should have demonstrable knowledge of the best available scientific approaches to urban forest management, and the plan itself needs to incorporate best urban forestry practices rather than try to emulate the tree-planting "vision" of Sutro and others.

6. Carbon Sequestration and Global Warming. There is a lot of language in the current draft which suggests that a planted forest is more desirable than other types of plant communities because they are more effective at carbon sequestration. Council members should be aware that the science behind these assumptions is currently in a state of flux, with many studies showing that healthy diverse ecosystems such as wetlands and grasslands have at least an equal if not a greater carbon-reduction value than a planted monoculture forest. The final version of the plan needs to be informed by the latest peer-reviewed science on this matter.

7. Biodiversity and Habitat. The current plan does not sufficiently emphasize the value of the urban forest for habitat and biodiversity. The revised plan should include language in support of diversity, a list of recommended tree species which can provide habitat for wildlife, integration of wildlife corridors, and recommendations to enhance the understory diversity in planted areas.

8. Coordinate Planning with Funding Strategy. As planning proceeds, it would be helpful for Council members to consider at the same time funding needs and possibilities. A plan without funding doesn't mean much. The planning process is an opportunity to bring together many stakeholders, including advocates for livable streets, for school gardens, and environmental advocates. With broad political and community backing, some sort of urban forest or "Green City" bond measure has a good chance of successful passage. Assuming the environmental concerns noted above are addressed, the Sierra Club would be fully supportive of efforts to secure the funding needed to carry out the plan.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Chapman
Chair, Conservation Committee

