



# Tree Maintenance Transfer Plan Factsheet



## Overview

Most street trees in San Francisco are maintained by fronting property owners, who through their stewardship are doing their part to keep this critical aspect of the city's infrastructure maintained. There are, however, more than 40,000 street trees that are currently being maintained by the city.

In order to sustain a healthy Urban Forest, the Department of Public Works (DPW) is proposing to standardize maintenance responsibility such that, in general, fronting property owners will be responsible for the maintenance of street trees in the public right of way. DPW does not have the resources to prune and maintain trees at a frequency recommended by the tree care industry to sustain their health.

Lack of maintenance can cause tree limb failures that not only deprive the city of the benefits provided by trees (storm water filtration, decreased air pollution and greenhouse gases, energy savings, increased property values, wildlife habitat, etc.), but that also can result in property damage and risks to public safety.

## Background

DPW currently has maintenance responsibility for about 40,000 of the approximate 100,000 trees in the public right of way. Instead of pruning on a recommended three- to five-year cycle, DPW is pruning trees on a ten to 12-year cycle. Three successive years of budget cuts to DPW's Urban Forestry staff has exacerbated this problem. The proposed funding in the FY 11-12 budget for the maintenance and care of city maintained trees is \$1.6 million; which includes a staff of seven arborists responding to tree related calls and emergencies citywide. In FY 10-11, the budget for street tree care and maintenance is \$2.2 million.

## Outreach

When transferring maintenance responsibility of a tree or multiple trees, DPW will provide information packets to property owners with recommendations for tree care, tree protection, and a copy of the urban forestry ordinance. Additionally, DPW will work with nonprofit organizations and other city agencies to continue to provide information to property owners who already have responsibility for one or more street trees.

## Plan

DPW proposes transferring maintenance responsibility for approximately 24,000 trees to fronting property owners over a seven year period. Property owners will only assume responsibility for healthy trees that have been pruned within three years, most of which will have been pruned within one year. With DPW's assets more in line with its resources, the goal of DPW is to maintain the trees under its responsibility on a five-year schedule, meeting tree care industry standards.

Number of trees	Before Transfer	After Transfer (in 7 years)
Privately-maintained	65,000	88,700
DPW Maintained Street Trees	27,800	4,100
DPW Maintained Median Trees	7,500	7,500

### The purpose of relinquishment:

**Align DPW's assets with available resources** – Under the budget proposal, seven arborists will be maintaining and responding to all tree related calls and emergencies. This process will bring the numbers of trees DPW is responsible for in line with the people we have to properly maintain them.

**Provide a more equitable allocation of tree maintenance responsibility**—Two-thirds of property owners are already responsible for maintaining trees in front of their properties, while the maintenance of the remaining one-third is provided by city crews to private property owners.

**Protect San Francisco's Urban Forest**— DPW is already on a deferred maintenance schedule with no resources to improve frequency of maintenance. The health of a tree may decline and eventually fail as a result of improper maintenance.

### DPW will follow the procedures in the Urban Forestry Ordinance to:

- inspect all trees before relinquishment to ensure they are healthy and properly pruned
- post notices on trees being transferred and notify property owners by mail of the proposed change in maintenance responsibilities
- provide information about how to request a public hearing
- property owners can visit [www.sfdpw.org](http://www.sfdpw.org) or call (415) 554-7336