

Planning Commission Joint Session

The UFS appreciates the opportunity to have dialogue with the Planning Commission and hopes this will be an ongoing regular communications vehicle.

The UFS recognizes the connection its work has with the Planning Commission in terms of decisions affecting tree canopy related to development in the city. Without a city arborist we believe UFS can and should advise on issues related to development and planning that pertain to trees in our city.

Our interest in trees is also related to the impact tree canopy has had on mitigating climate change. This elevated concern warrants us relating to other city departments that have hegemony in environmental policy and operations. We'd like to explore the departmental connections that rightfully serve this area of interest and responsibility. Our Neighborhood Tree Plan, for example, deals more with existing housing and commercial areas, not with new development. The ties to natural resources and environmental services seem more apparent in this area of our focus.

The UFS believes that we need to revise our street tree list to make it more prescriptive given changing practices in storm water retention basins and the need to plant where possible canopy sized trees. We'd like the Planning Commission to endorse the concept of such revisions early on so we have the understanding that outcomes from this investment of time and resources will be supported.

We recognize also that the tree code requires regular updating and want the Planning Commission to advocate for the staff time this requires. The city code remains woefully inadequate at preserving canopy trees at a time we need them most given climate change. Some of our code provisions in hillside conservation areas deals with tree replacement by formulaic approaches that are detrimental to tree health. These needed changes are simply taking too long to implement. Some of this goes back to the need for a certified arborist on staff.

Last year the UFS was told to reduce our meetings by 50% to conserve staff time given the staffing reductions that were occurring. This was communicated without the Planning Commission even being aware of it. We report to you, the PC, and take at least some of our charge from you. For you not to have any role in this decision raises a profound question about lines of communication and lines of authority.

We want to be effective in our role and we trust this dialogue will help further that outcome.