CITY OF SALINAS
COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

DATE: **SEPTEMBER 10, 2024**

DEPARTMENT: **PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

FROM: **DAVID JACOBS, P.E., L.S., PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR**

BY: **VICTOR SANCHEZ, ASSISTANT ENGINEER**
ADRIANA ROBLES P.E., C.F.M., CITY ENGINEER

TITLE: **CITY OF SALINAS URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN**

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

A motion to approve a resolution adopting the City of Salinas Urban Forest Management Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In 2020 the City of Salinas was awarded a grant from the CAL FIRE Community Forestry Program to develop an Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP), which serves as a long-term road map for future planning, planting, maintenance, and tree equity of the City's urban forest. The UMP was developed with the input from community members, stakeholders, and staff from various departments and released for public review in fall of 2023, and the resulting UFMP is brought to the City Council for adoption.

BACKGROUND:

Climate change is predicted to cause substantial negative impacts to commonly planted tree species in California. Developing a sustainable urban forest can provide direct benefits to creating resilient communities by providing cooler temperatures during extreme heat, intercepting and storing stormwater, and offering cleaner air to those who live beneath the tree canopy. Growing and maintaining a sustainable urban forest will help ensure trees continue to deliver maximum levels of these vital services when adverse conditions arise.

In February 2021, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) awarded the City of Salinas grant funding to develop the UFMP and plant 300 trees on City properties. The City's Forestry, Engineering and Waste, Water, and Energy divisions (within the Public Works department) are the main City entities that were responsible for overseeing the UFMP's development and implementation. The divisions provided key insights into City practices, coordinated with internal and external interested parties, and participated in community engagement events.

The following steps were conducted to develop the UFMP:

Analysis of current practices.
The analysis of current practices was initially informed by reviewing City planning documents including the General Plan, Alisal Vibrancy Plan, Urban Greening Plan, Parks, Rec and Libraries Master Plan, and the most recent Urban Forest Assessment. This review also included extensive analysis of urban forest policies, funding mechanisms, tree management practices, ordinances, and procedures. A comprehensive review of the status of Salinas' urban forestry program provides a baseline for understanding the effectiveness of City tree management.

Urban forest inventory and analysis.
An inventory of all City-managed trees was conducted in 2014, and the inventory data was used to analyze the City-managed trees based on sustainability metrics and to estimate the environmental services and economic benefits provided by these public trees. The sustainability metrics analyzed include species diversity, age distribution based on diameter at standard height (DSH), tree condition distribution, water use rating, and climate preparedness. These metrics determine the condition of the City-managed urban forest and help identify what management practices will need to be improved to have the most meaningful impact on tree health and safety.

Departmental interviews.
A series of nine interviews with various City staff and elected officials were conducted to understand how their role affects tree management, tree planting, protection, internal City procedures, and maintenance efforts. Interviewed parties include individuals from Public Works, Community Development, a Councilmember, Fire, and Library and Community Services. Gathering input from City staff and elected officials illuminated reoccurring themes of the urban forest program and areas of greatest needs and concerns.

Community engagement.
Input from the community helped to inform the analysis of City management practices and the development of guiding principles, goals, and objectives of the UFMP. A series of in-person and virtual outreach events helped identify the core values of community members in Salinas, such as their love for the City's parks and the need for public educational resources about trees. The engagement strategy included an online survey (145 responses), tabling events at farmers markets, social media outreach, four working group meetings, and a community event in collaboration with Amor Salinas (70 participants).

Canopy cover assessment.
The City's entire urban forest (public and private property) was analyzed to determine the canopy cover extent, and the condition of trees using sustainability metrics. The City canopy cover and land use was derived from US Forest Service light detection and ranging (LiDAR) and other satellite spatial imagery by using an artificial intelligence learning model to classify what is a tree, shrub, grass, building, and other infrastructure, and then determine the differences in height between each classification. The UFMP's canopy cover assessment revealed that Salinas currently has 11.5% canopy cover.

Public review.
The draft UFMP and Technical Assessment documents were released for public review on October 10, 2023 and November 10, 2023. Notice of the availability of the draft UFMP was posted on the City website. A hard copy of the draft UFMP was made available for public review at the Salinas Community Development Department, Salinas Public Works Department, Salinas Steinbeck Library, and via email request to ufmp@dudek.com.

Extended review and input.
On February 6, 2024, the UFMP was agendized for adoption by City Council. The item was pulled from the agenda following concerns of inaccuracies in the reporting. The updated UFMP has been revised to correct or remove any inaccuracies. Concerns raised regarding the accuracy of the tree data was reviewed as outlined in the "Canopy cover assessment" section and is accurate. The UFMP was also shared with CalFIRE. No official review has been completed by CalFIRE in over 180 days since the document was provided.

Key Findings. The UFMP identifies seven key findings that summarize the sections of the report:

The City needs an updated tree inventory.
An inventory of City managed trees was last completed in 2014 and should be updated so City leadership can base decisions on current and accurate data. The City should complete a new inventory and establish a mechanism to ensure data for each tree is no more than 3–5 years old at any given time. Maintaining the inventory can be accomplished if the City can achieve a consistent and optimal maintenance cycle of all trees in its inventory.

Improvements to the City's urban forest record keeping system are essential.
The City uses the Q-Alert system, an internal database managed by the GIS department; Maintenance uses Q-Alert to manage its tree work requests. The City also uses TreeKeeper, an online tree management software, which is useful for grant reporting. The two systems are managed separately and cannot be updated concurrently, leading to inaccurate tree inventory information, annual service data, and management information. The City will need to improve its record-keeping strategies and merge the two systems to ensure funding and management decisions are made using the most current data.

The urban forest is not prepared for threats from pests, diseases, or climate change.
Cities with tree inventories that have low species diversity may be more susceptible to invasive pests, pathogens, or significant weather events. The City's current street tree palette contains a list of seven predominantly small-stature trees that has resulted in an overrepresentation of species in the inventory, including sweet gums, London planes, pears, plums, and magnolias. Many of these species are simultaneously not prepared for the impacts of climate change. The City can prepare for these expected changes by selecting and planting species that are predicted to perform well in future climate conditions, thereby increasing species diversity in the City. This UFMP includes a recommended species palette to implement upon adoption.

The City's canopy cover is low and not equitably distributed.
The UFMP's canopy cover assessment revealed that Salinas currently has an 11.5% canopy cover. However, spatial analysis of the canopy cover throughout the City showed that it is not equally

distributed. Within the analysis area, canopy cover by council districts ranges from 6.6% to 17.4% and canopy cover by census tracts range from 1% to 23.3%. Roughly 50% of all parks and bus stops and roughly 80% of all bikeways have less than 10% canopy cover. Areas with higher pollution burden and vulnerability have lower tree canopy cover and proportionally more low-income and marginalized community members. The City will need to strengthen its tree planting and preservation strategies and ensure focus is put on low canopied areas first to increase the overall canopy cover equitably throughout the City.

Community members value trees as a vibrant resource.
Open discussions with City staff and community members show that the Salinas community believes trees are a valuable City asset. Community members expressed the desire and need for more trees and public education about the benefits of the urban forest. Overall, community members would like to become more involved in the City's efforts to increase tree canopy; however, the gap between what the community wants and the City's capacity to fulfill them is wide. Investments in the Urban Forest program will need to occur for City staff to create a balance of allocated resources towards a sustainable maintenance and tree planting program, and to update community outreach and education campaigns.

The City's long-range planning efforts should prioritize the urban forest.
Updates are needed to the City's long-range planning efforts, municipal code, and comprehensive planning efforts, as there are currently some inconsistencies regarding planning for trees. More recent planning efforts, such as the Neighborhood Vibrancy – Urban Greening Plan, recognize the importance of trees and provide guidance for prioritizing tree planting. However, the General Plan has very little guidance, policies, or goals regarding trees. As the overall blueprint for the City, prioritizing trees in the General Plan update will help to achieve the goals of this UFMP.

Policies and ordinances that protect trees on private property should be enhanced.
The City's Municipal Code Chapter 35: Trees and Shrubs protects street trees and other trees grown on City-managed property. However, the chapter could be significantly strengthened to improve tree protection policies during construction, to identify stricter penalties for violation of the ordinance, and to add specificity for the types of trees that are protected. Additionally, other sections in the municipal code do not protect trees planted on private property. One of the strongest ways to ensure the City does not experience a net loss of canopy cover is to improve and enforce tree protection ordinances and policies on private property. The City will need to improve its tree protection policies and partner with community members to plant and protect more trees, in order to meet canopy cover goals.

CEQA CONSIDERATION:

The City of Salinas has determined that the project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Section 15061(b)(3) as CEQA applies only to projects that have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment, and it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the proposed Salinas Urban Forest Management Plan may have a significant effect on the environment, since the proposed plan does not create changes in the physical environment, does not result in any changes to the General Plan or Implementing Zoning

Ordinance land use policies, and any development that occurs in the future subject to such standards will undergo an independent analysis pursuant to the requirements of CEQA.

STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVE:

This action supports the Council's Strategic Goal of Infrastructure and Environmental Sustainability by providing a plan to improve urban canopy, the condition of local streets, and suggests modern techniques to build climate resiliency. It supports the Council's Strategic Goal of Youth and Seniors by suggesting expanding community engagement programs for youth and strengthening relationships with local school districts. It supports the Council's Strategic Goal of Effective and Culturally Responsive Government by including several equity analyses that could support a City-wide Equity Plan.

DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION:

The Public Works Department coordinated with the Community Development Department, Fire Department, and Library and Community Services Department to support the development of this UFMP.

FISCAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:

There are no direct funding impacts associated with the adoption of the Salinas UFMP.

ATTACHMENTS:

Resolution
City of Salinas Urban Forest Management Plan