

Transportation Department

Urban Forestry Program Update

City Forester, Brian Widener

Parks and Recreation Board

March 19, 2026

Information Item 203



Program Overview

MISSION:

Plant, protect, promote, and maintain trees for livable and sustainable communities.



Tree Stewardship:

Grow a Green San Diego!



Urban Forestry Program 5-Year-Plan:

- Increase tree canopy cover
- Maximize the efficiencies in maintaining the urban forest
- Minimize the risk of trees in an urban environment

Program Overview

- City Forester - Transportation Department
 - Manage the Transportation Forestry Operations
 - All City trees under his jurisdiction
- 33 staff in Parks & Transportation
 - Over half maintain tree infrastructure for tree health and public safety
- 600K+ trees in parks, 250K+ street trees
- Dedicated planting programs
- Arborist, Get It Done
- [SanDiego.gov/trees](https://www.sandiego.gov/trees)

*San Diego street trees valued at \$595 million providing \$24 million of ecosystem benefits in a year



Program Overview

San Diego's Tree Canopy Cover

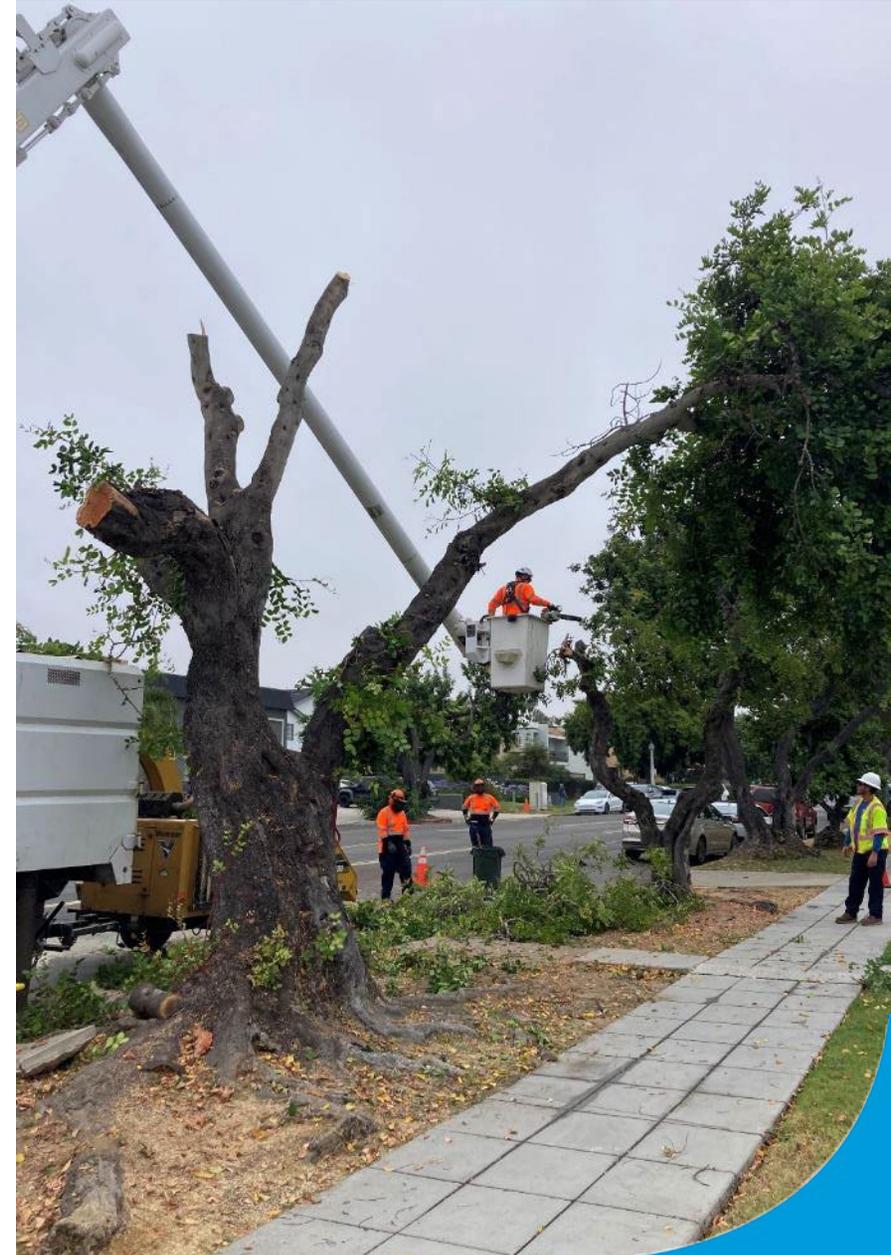
- Measure 5.2 of the Climate Action Plan calls for increasing the tree canopy cover
- City performed a flyover in 2021
- Through remote sensing imagery analysis, measurements yielded nearly **15% tree canopy cover** for San Diego
- An increase in 2% change from 2014



Program Overview

Tree Maintenance Team

- Tree maintenance - routine & by requests
- First responders for emergency response
 - Storm response - both rain and wind
 - Normal hours, after hours, weekends
 - Get it Done or Ask Parks requests
- Equipment & staffing levels for tree maintenance
- Contractual work
 - Street pruning cycle: palms = 2 years
 - Street pruning cycle: shade = greater than 20 years
 - Emergency backup





Program Overview

Arborists

PARKS

- Tree maintenance & management of crews
- Management of irrigation and pests
- Tree evaluations
- Tree planting
- Trees and infrastructure



RIGHT OF WAY

- Tree evaluations through Get it Done
- Management of contracts: tree maintenance/planting
- Tree and sidewalk consultations
- Tree permitting and protection



OTHER

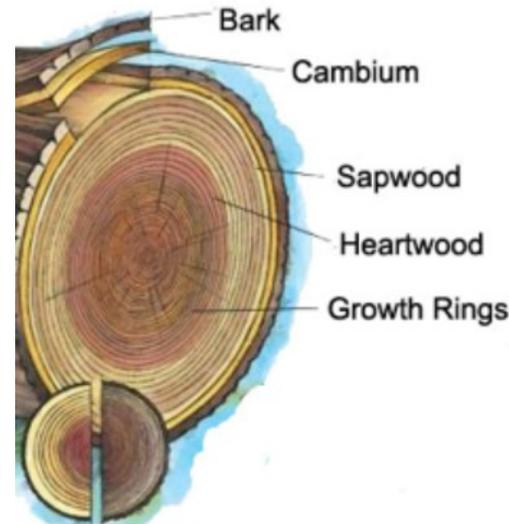
- Response to litigation, PRAs, cost recoveries
- Code/policy enforcement
- Conserve-a-Tree applications
- Customer service and public engagement



How Do Trees Function?

Pruning

- Proper pruning is important
- It creates a wound
- We structure trees for ROW clearance
- End weight/Lions tailing - Arm extension
- Topping and tipping

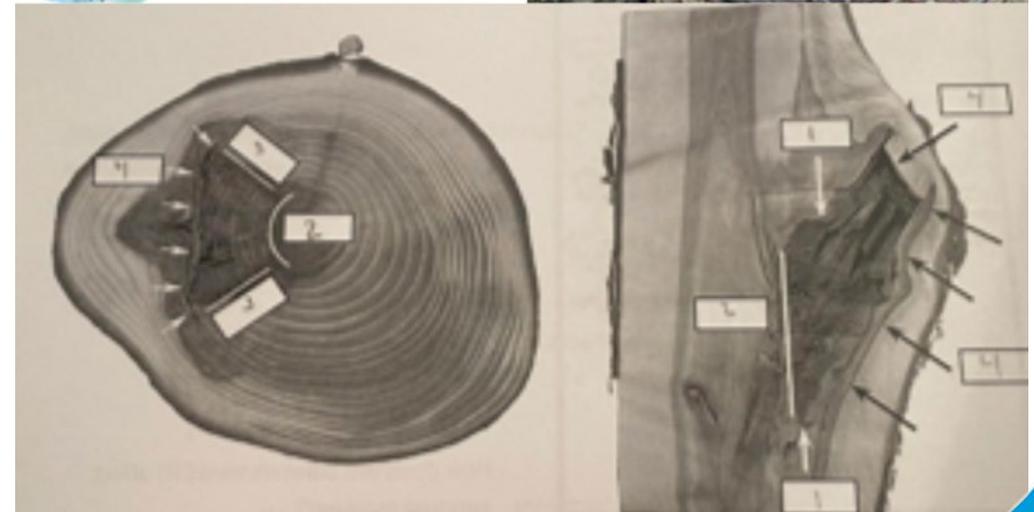


Trees Have Layers

- Compartmentalization

Roots

- Roots in urban areas: ~3 ft deep, tunneling possible
- Roots grow under favorable conditions



Tree Planting & Volunteer Events

Kate Sessions Day

- 150 volunteers
- Oak Park Community Park
- 42 new street and parks trees

Arbor Day

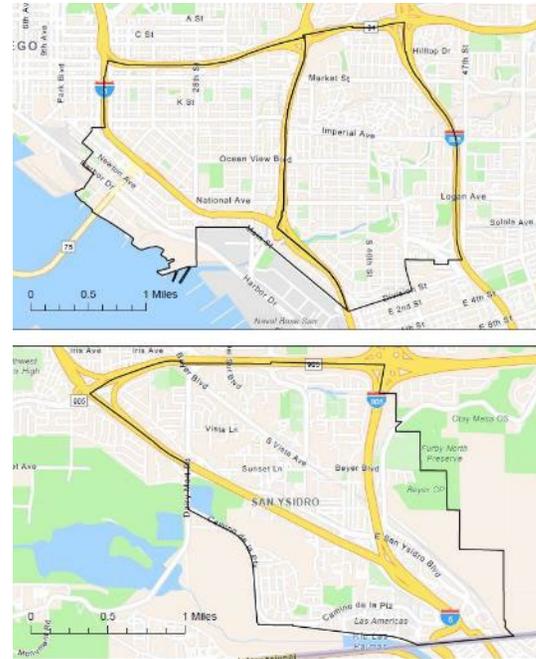
- Nearly 200 volunteers
 - Colina Del Sol Park
 - Planted over 60 new park & street trees
- 2026 Arbor Day = Gompers Park – April 24th!



Significant Tree Planting Efforts

- **Trees For Communities - \$4.69M** to plant and water trees in all feasible locations to mitigate air pollution - includes 160 new tree wells - 2,800 trees planted
- **Ready, Set, Grow San Diego - \$10M** grant to plant and water over 5,000 trees, plus protect over 600 existing trees
- **Community Engagement & Addressing Equity** under both projects

Trees for Communities



Ready, Set, Grow San Diego



Urban Forestry Code & Policy Changes

Municipal Code and Council Policies:

- Approximately 50 or more
- Street Planting Code - Ch.6, Article 2, Div. 6
- CP 200-05
- CP 900-19

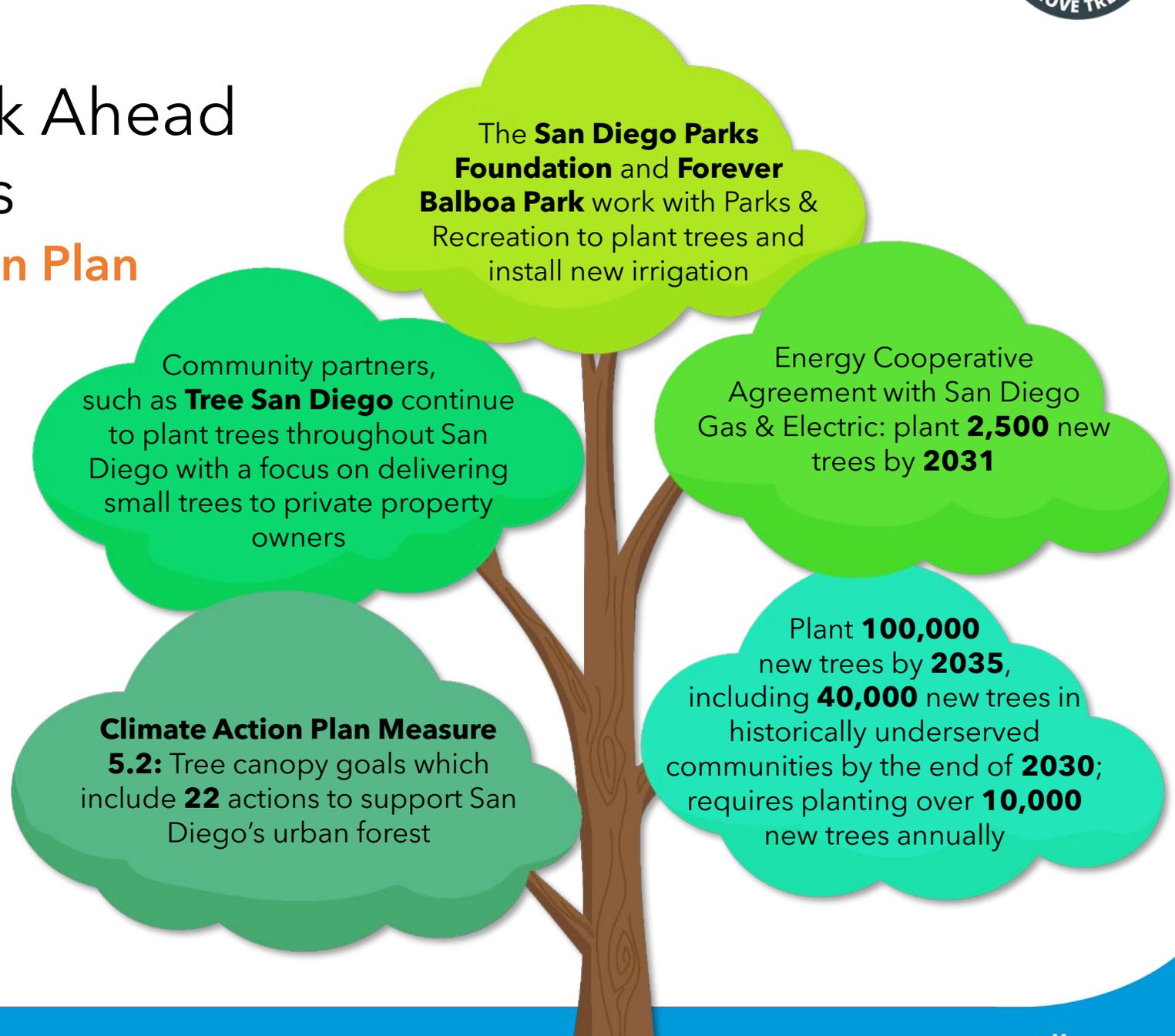
Long Term:

- Updated Urban Forestry Management Plan
- Work with other Departments for additional code and policy changes
- Spec. changes for tree planting and others



FY'27 Look Ahead and Goals

Climate Action Plan





Brian Widener, City Forester

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Learn more at: www.sandiego.gov/trees



**Grow a Green
San Diego**