

City of San Diego  
Office of the Mayor and City Council  
202 C Street  
San Diego, CA 92101

May 13, 2026

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council:

On behalf of the City of San Diego's Community Forest Advisory Board, we'd like to offer feedback on the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget. We respectfully urge you to restore several budget priorities that support Urban Forestry, within the Transportation Department and Parks & Recreation Department.

First, we request that you **restore the budget for the 1.0 FTE Urban Forestry Program Coordinator within the Transportation Department.** There are several important considerations supporting this request:

- **Mandated Expenditure Under Legal Settlement:** At least 50% of this position's salary for Fiscal Year 2027 is required under the City's 2022 settlement with the Air Pollution Control District (APCD) for prior violations. Although this funding comes from the General Fund, it is nonetheless a legally obligated expenditure. Eliminating the position will not eliminate the cost; the City remains obligated to fund this requirement regardless, meaning this reduction does not result in actual savings.
- **Critical Role in Public Safety and Risk Management:** The Program Coordinator serves as the contract manager for the City's two tree maintenance contracts, which are essential to maintaining public safety in the right-of-way. In the past year alone, there have been two reported fatalities involving falling trees or branches. In addition, incidents involving damage to private property continue to occur. These risks expose the City to significant liability, including potential litigation and civil settlements that could far exceed the cost of maintaining this staff position.

Second, we request that you restore budget for a **1.0 FTE Tree Maintenance Crewleader in the Parks and Recreation Department.**

- **Incident Response and Public Safety:** Early forecasts anticipate that San Diego will likely experience a "Super" El Nino the 2026-27 winter season, leading to wetter-than-average conditions with heavy rain and flooding. If these predictions materialize, the City of San Diego will need both proactive and reactive tree maintenance. Popular destinations including Balboa Park often experience tree

damage or loss during winter storms and the City will need to deploy resources quickly and efficiently.

Lastly, we request that you **consider a small incremental budget to plant and water up to 1,000 new trees**, which would also allow for tree planting to occur at key community events, such as Arbor Day and Kate Sessions Day. These tree planting events provide community education on the value of trees and help reinforce community support for tree care more broadly. Additionally, planting new trees helps the City grow its urban tree canopy coverage. The City of San Diego's landmark Climate Action Plan commits to increasing the City's urban tree canopy coverage to 35% by 2035. Currently the City estimates its tree canopy at 15%. To achieve a 20% increase in just 10 years will require incredible scaling and planting thousands of trees each year. As a reminder, the FY27 budget does not include any funding for tree planting. It is also important to note that the City's Climate Action Plan (CAP), while policy-driven, carries legal obligations. It is tied to the General Plan and implemented through CEQA, requiring City actions and projects to align with its measures. Recent legal agreements further require the City to monitor progress and adjust if targets are not met. Maintaining adequate urban forestry resources is therefore critical to meeting these commitments and limiting legal and financial risk.

It is important to recognize that the urban forestry program has already absorbed significant reductions. Last year's budget eliminated the City's Free Tree SD program and substantially reduced tree maintenance contracts, extending the pruning cycle from approximately seven years to twenty years – another risk exposure for the City. These changes have already diminished the City's capacity to maintain a safe and healthy urban forest. At this point, further cuts risk undermining essential services and increasing both public safety risks and financial exposure.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical issue and for your continued commitment to the well-being of our community.

Respectfully,  
Morgan Justice Black  
Chair, Community Forest Advisory Board