



Highlights

Why OCA Did This Study

In accordance with the Office of the City Auditor’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Work Plan, we conducted this audit to determine if the Urban Forestry Program (UFP) is ensuring that the tree maintenance Contractor is adequately meeting contractual obligations and whether the UFP has the staffing and equipment capacity to complete their current backlog and maintain a reasonable level of open work orders.

What OCA Recommends

OCA made [Four Recommendations](#) to improve the program, all of which management agreed to implement. We recommend the TSWD Urban Forestry Program:

- Develop and implement a Contract Compliance Plan for the tree trimming contract.
- Require the Contractor to include additional palm tree characteristics along with invoice documentation.
- Develop a process to track and monitor key performance indicators related to service notifications. Program management should identify relevant key performance indicators that will address the program’s workload and resource capacity.
- Develop a mechanism for reporting service notification performance measures to City leadership and the public.

For more information, contact the Office of the City Auditor at (619)533-3165 or cityauditor@sandiego.gov

Performance Audit of the City’s Right-of-Way Tree Maintenance Program

The Transportation & Storm Water Department Urban Forestry Program Can Provide Greater Assurance That Tree Trimming Services Are Meeting Expectations Through Better Contract Administration and the Use of Additional Program Performance Measures

What OCA Found

San Diego’s urban forest provides significant contributions to the quality of life for residents and visitors, as trees make a vital and affordable contribution to the overall well-being of the community. The City adopted a five-year plan to manage its Urban Forestry Program (UFP) in 2017. The Transportation & Storm Water Department (TSWD) is responsible for management of the City’s UFP. The primary goals of the UFP are to increase the City’s urban tree canopy cover, maximize the efficiencies in maintaining the benefits of trees and minimize the risk of trees in an urban environment.

According to the most recent count of street trees, there are over 200,000 street trees in the public right-of-way. Twenty percent of the street trees are some type of palm tree, and the other 80 percent are considered shade trees. The UFP goal has been to trim 44,000 trees per year and most of these trees are trimmed by the program’s Contractor as part of the \$2.4 million annual contract for FYs 2016–19. A proposed \$1.1 million reduction to shade tree trimming in FY 2020 will effectively eliminate all scheduled shade trimming and reduce the total number of trees trimmed to 25,000. Most of the service notifications received by the program for tree maintenance are addressed by City work crews and Arborists.

Five Most Common Street Tree Types in San Diego

Tree Type	Quantity
Queen Palm	22,875
Carrot Wood	13,607
Pine	12,675
Eucalyptus	12,000
Mexican Fan Palm	11,630



Source: OCA, based on street tree inventory provided by TSWD.

Finding 1: Contract Administration

The UFP does not have sufficient contract administration to provide assurance that the vendor responsible for tree maintenance is meeting contractual obligations. The contract scope of work includes specifications for the level of services to be provided, but there is not a contract compliance process in place to monitor Contractor performance. An effective contract administration process leads to lower operational cost, increased agency satisfaction and efficiency in delivering services to taxpayers. In addition, the invoice documentation provided by the Contractor for palm trees does not provide sufficient documentation of work performed to determine whether tree maintenance was billed at the correct rate.

Finding 2: Program Performance Measures

The TSWD lacks key performance indicators (KPIs) that would help the UFP track and monitor its progress on addressing service notification workload. Most service notifications received by the program are addressed by City work crews and Arborists, but performance measures related specifically to these tree service notifications have not been published in the City’s Annual Budget. Additional KPIs are necessary to demonstrate City staff’s ability to respond to requests made by the public.