TO:     HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL
FROM:   CITY MANAGER DEPARTMENT: CITY MANAGER’S OFFICE
DATE:   JANUARY 22, 2007 CMR:121:07
SUBJECT: PROGRESS REPORT ON URBAN FOREST MASTER PLAN DEVELOPMENT

RECOMMENDATION
This is an informational report and no Council action is required.

BACKGROUND
On April 17, 2006 (Earth Day), the City Council adopted recommendations from a Colleagues’ Memo related to several environmental initiatives. One of these initiatives was the update of Palo Alto’s Street Tree Management Plan. The Council adopted this plan in 1983 based on the recommendations of the Palo Alto Tree Advisory Task Force. The plan had the following goals:

1) Tree Canopy Density: Required 50 percent density on each single lineal block on both sides and tree removal and replacement at the end of the tree’s useful life;
2) Solar Access: Provide for amicable co-existence of trees with solar energy;
3) Species Selection: Provide for the “right tree in the right place;”
4) Replacement Criteria: Health of tree, 50 percent of canopy, and retain trees as long as practical; and
5) Public Education and Involvement: Solicit and incorporate resident input.

Given that many of these original plan goals have been met, the Colleagues’ Memo identified areas of concern that a future plan would address, including: an updated database of street trees; a more refined inventory of street trees in parks and non-residential rights-of-way; planned replacement of trees whose roots cause sidewalk ruptures; and an analysis of the mortality rate of street trees by species and age. The Council directed staff to work with CANOPY and other interested citizens and to return to Council in Spring of 2007 with a draft update to the Street Tree Management Plan. This staff report will provide an update to the Council on progress made to date and will outline next steps for plan development.

DISCUSSION
In September 2006, a group was formed to begin work on the update to the Street Tree Management Plan. This group includes staff from Public Works, Administrative Services, Utilities, Parks, Open Space, Planning, the City Manager’s Office and representatives from CANOPY. The team has been working since September to define the scope and process for the update. At the outset, the team identified the need to broaden the scope of the Street Tree Management Plan to encompass all elements of the City’s urban forest. Currently, the City has
numerous documents that address different elements of the urban forest, including the Comprehensive Plan and the Tree Technical Manual. However, there is no single document that identifies the overall goals and management strategies for the urban forest. The goal of the working group has thus become the creation of a comprehensive document that addresses the management, protection and enhancement of the City’s urban forest resources. This document will identify the issues facing Palo Alto’s urban forest and will provide concrete actions for addressing these issues.

The overall mission for the plan, as defined by the working group, is as follows:

*Manage the City’s urban forest to maximize sustainable outcomes for the community.*

One of the key elements of the plan will be to define the value and benefits of the community’s urban forest resources. This element provides the foundation upon which the rest of the plan will build. The working group has defined two overarching goals for the plan: 1) To understand and maintain the existing urban forest conditions, and 2) To evaluate the most appropriate and effective mechanisms for enhancing and expanding the tree canopy. The action items to achieve these two goals will generally fall under one of four focus areas: 1) community/stakeholders; 2) best practices; 3) land development and management; and 4) interdepartmental coordination.

The first focus area is community/stakeholders. The involvement of the community and key stakeholders in both the development and implementation of the plan is critical. CANOPY is already providing resources to support the working group’s efforts and will continue to play a role in the plan’s development and implementation. Additionally, staff intends to engage the community in the plan development. The working group will define this process over the next few months and plans to go out to the community before returning to Council with the draft plan. The final plan will identify ways the community contributed to the plan development and will outline action items for encouraging future partnerships. It will also define mechanisms for educating and motivating the community around the urban forest. Some of the action items under this focus area may include: developing a policy on memorial tree requests/donations and identifying incentives for tree planting.

The second focus area is best practices. Under this focus area, the working group will identify action items related to industry best practices for urban forest management. This will include items related to technology, tree care, habitat protection, and natural resource management, among others. This will form the nuts and bolts of the plan and will identify technical resources that the organization needs to effectively accomplish the plan goals. Some of the action items under this focus area may include: defining criteria for species selection; updating the street and park tree inventories and integrating these with the City’s Geographic Information System (GIS) software; and developing an integrated urban forest education/resource website.

The third focus area is land development and management. This focus area will primarily work to integrate the protection and addition of trees within the land development process. The key action items will revolve around policies for public and private sector development in both the
Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance. One of the key action items under this focus area will be the update of the City’s Tree Technical Manual.

The final focus area is interdepartmental coordination. The conflicts between trees and the City’s infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, utility pipelines) are a key issue in the management of the urban forest. The City should be setting the example for effectively working together on these issues. Some of the key action items under this focus area may include: developing a working group for capital projects and creating urban forest guidelines for capital projects.

Attachment A demonstrates the proposed organizational structure of the plan. The next steps for the working group will be to develop the community engagement process and to further define and refine the action items, resources and timelines. This work will continue throughout the spring. Staff anticipates returning to Council in late spring or early summer with a draft of the plan.

RESOURCE IMPACT
In support of this work effort, the City has applied for a State Proposition 40 grant from the California Department of Forestry. The grant would potentially help fund the development of the plan as well as the community engagement process. The grant application also included a request for funding to enhance the City’s GIS software to enable effective integration of the City’s tree inventory. The pre-proposal deadline for the grant application was December 6, 2006. Staff anticipates receiving notification regarding the grant within the next month. These resources are key to the development of the plan. If the City is unsuccessful in receiving this grant application, staff will need to reevaluate the scope of the master plan work program. Depending on the outcome of the grant application, staff may return to Council with alternate funding strategies for the plan.

The final Urban Forest Master Plan document will identify the resource needs associated with each of the action items included in the plan.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS
This work effort is consistent with the City Council’s direction in the April 2006 Colleagues’ Memo and the City’s Sustainability Policy. Additionally, this work effort is consistent with the policies and programs under the City’s Comprehensive Plan Goal N-3: A thriving “urban forest” that provides ecological, economic, and aesthetic benefits for Palo Alto.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW
This is not a project requiring environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Attachment A: Urban Forest Master Plan Proposed Organizational Structure

PREPARED BY:

KELLY MORARIU
DEPARTMENT HEAD:

GLENN ROBERTS
Public Works Director

VALERIE FONG
Utilities Director

CITY MANAGER APPROVAL:

EMILY HARRISON
Assistant City Manager