Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Santa Clara Valley Chapter
California Native Plant Society

February 8, 2021

To: Mountain View Parks and Recreation Commission and Urban Forestry Board

Re: Community Tree Master Plan

The commission is asked to review the identified elements and Update to Community Tree Master Plan process to update the 2015 Plan and provide input as staff and the consultant prepare for the next steps. The staff report states that the updated Plan will include recommendations for a revised goal for canopy coverage as well as other canopy goals and recommended steps to reach those goals.

Canopy coverage is only one metric to consider when calculating the value of the urban forest. The value that the urban forest provides in supporting biodiversity must be recognized (1), and a "revolution" in thinking about street trees, stormwater infrastructure and plantings in parks and open space is needed (2). A recently formed resident group - GreenSpaceMV - has started advocating for healthy communities that thrive with urban tree canopy, nature and native biodiversity. In its recent Goal Setting meeting, several City Council members spoke to the importance of canopy, but also of birdsong, and planting native plants for pollinators.

Mountain View has a good foundation for implementing an ecologically robust urban forest and habitat. The North Bayshore Precise Plan (3) includes a Plant Palette that emphasizes locally native trees and shrubs, yet includes some non-native species that provide habitat value. These species fill a critically missing element in our urban forest and without them, our biodiversity will continue to plummet. Indeed, native plantings at the Google Green Loop, along Shorebird Way, Charleston Rd., along Plymouth St. and on Google's Property in North Bayshore demonstrate that butterflies and native bees may return if the plants they require for a full life cycle are available to them. Systematic Audubon observations suggest that Migratory songbirds diversity has increased in these areas as well. Indeed, Google continues to expand their plantings of locally native trees along streets in North Bayshore and on its properties in Mountain View and Sunnyvale. It is planning the entire streetscape of their 80-acres Downtown West project in San Jose to be comprised of native trees.

Recent studies provide scientifically based guidelines for planning the transition to native plantings in parks, streets and stormwater management systems in ways that regenerate nature and support native species (4). Also, since locally native oak species are the backbone of much of our valley's ecosystem, re-oaking (5) plays a critical role in restoring urban ecology. Since locally native pollinators breed almost

exclusively on locally native species, local stock is paramount (6). The North Bayshore Precise Plan recommends that 80% of plantings be native. We support this recommendation and hope that all trees being considered for plantings are evaluated for their contribution to bird and pollinator habitat.

While the current percentage of native trees in Mountain View is not known, most cities have lost their native canopy and habitat connectivity, and it is our impression that Mountain View is no exception. The historical preference for trees that suffer no insect "damage" and drop no residues created a biologically poor canopy where insects are rare, and birds find shelter but little food. We can, and must, change this attitude and combine an effort for re-generation of nature in the City with public outreach and education that highlights the importance of biodiversity in the City forest, including all City infrastructure (7).

In response to the staff report, we ask:

1. "Ecosystem Benefits" of trees and the urban forest should be amended to include contribution to sustaining and increasing biodiversity. We suggest including the following goal: "Re-generated native woodland and riparian landscapes as the key ecological basis of the urban forest with focus on locally native species and habitat."
2. Priority Planting Plan should include prioritization of locally native oaks and other locally native trees (80%) and consider additional trees that provide habitat value to local biodiversity.
3. An assessment of tree species, especially native trees, should be added to any Canopy assessment (see Cupertino's tree inventory, 6) as a basis for identifying opportunities to plant native trees in a way that creates habitat and habitat connectivity for birds and pollinators. In addition, maintenance practices should be re-evaluated to allow for more tree "damage" in support of biodiversity and consider appropriate maintenance protocols.
4. A recommended tree palette for residents should be based on the trees that are included in the North Bayshore Precise Plan, with the addition of fruit trees. Non-native trees should not be recommended.
5. "Next Steps" must include robust public outreach.

Thank you for considering our comments,

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References

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