

DATE: April 28, 2026

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

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VIA: Kimbra McCarthy, City Manager

TITLE: **Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan – Draft Review**



STUDY SESSION MEMO

PURPOSE

Review and provide feedback on the draft Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan.

BACKGROUND

In June 2021, the City Council adopted seven Strategic Priorities, which included Sustainability and Climate Resiliency. Two related initiatives under this priority included:

- Updating the 2015 Community Tree Master Plan (CTMP)
- Defining biodiversity requirements for landscaping in Mountain View

Following Council direction, staff initiated two separate but related efforts: a modest update to the CTMP with Davey Resource Group, the original consultant, and development of a Biodiversity Strategy with San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI), a non-advocacy nonprofit with an established history of working with agencies to provide science-based environmental research and services. As work on the CTMP progressed, feedback from the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) and the community indicated a desire for a more comprehensive, forward-looking approach. In response, staff partnered with SFEI, with support from Davey Resource Group, to combine the two efforts into a single, integrated Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan (Plan) built on community needs, values, and priorities, with science-based guidance.

The Plan updates and expands the 2015 CTMP into a broader framework that addresses vegetation, wildlife habitat, and urban forest management within the context of climate adaptation, public health, and long-term ecosystem resilience. This integrated approach establishes clear priorities for long-term biodiversity within a comprehensive urban forest framework and positions Mountain View as a regional leader in urban biodiversity planning.

The Plan complements and supports several existing and in-progress City efforts and initiatives, including the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, Shoreline Wildlife Management Plan, North Bayshore Precise Plan, Climate Action Plan, Active Transportation Plan, and Capital Improvement Program planning, and is intended to guide future decision-making and integrate nature-based solutions into City projects and operations

The project was also included as a Sustainability and Climate Resilience initiative in the City Council's Fiscal Years 2023–2025 Strategic Work Plan.

Project Timeline

Development of the Plan began in 2022 and included multiple phases of technical analysis, community engagement, interdepartmental coordination, and public meetings. In 2023, staff paused the project to reassess and strengthen the community engagement strategy to ensure it was inclusive, well-timed, and aligned with the City's values. This adjustment allowed the project team to expand outreach methods, increase participation from underrepresented communities, and better reflect diverse perspectives and local priorities in the Plan.

The enhanced approach included additional public meetings that served as key touchpoints and engagement opportunities, resulting in stronger community input and a more comprehensive final product. These meetings included:

- **June 29, 2022** - City staff presented the PRC with the proposed scope of work for the Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan consultant, SFEI, and the PRC provided feedback.
- **February 14, 2023** – SFEI presented an overview of the project to the PRC, including team introductions, project tasks and milestones, goals, progress to date, and next steps.
- **June 14, 2023** – SFEI provided a project status update to the PRC, including completed tasks and an overview of the initial public outreach and engagement process.
- **June 12, 2024** - City staff provided the PRC with a project update that included the schedule of activities planned for the community outreach and engagement process. At this meeting, the PRC provided feedback on the proposed outreach approach.
- **September 11, 2024** – SFEI presented the PRC with project research findings, initial outreach feedback, and the development of a public survey. The presentation also introduced the preliminary draft of the Plan's vision, goals, and objectives, and the PRC provided feedback to guide the next phase of work.
- **October 8, 2025** – SFEI and City staff presented the PRC with the draft Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan and requested feedback.

- **October 15, 2025** - SFEI and City staff presented the Environmental Planning Commission (EPC) with the draft Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan and requested feedback.
- **January 21, 2026** - SFEI and City staff presented the PRC with the updated draft Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan and requested a recommendation to forward the draft Plan to City Council for review and adoption.

City Project Team

The Plan was developed through a coordinated citywide effort led by the Community Services Department, with participation from the Public Works Department, Community Development Department, and Sustainability Division. The City project team supported the project by:

- Providing data and technical input to the consultants for the existing conditions analysis;
- Assisting with community engagement events and activities;
- Participating in an implementation workshop to identify feasible actions and performance metrics; and
- Reviewing draft materials to ensure alignment with City policies, programs, and operational considerations.

This cross-departmental collaboration helped ensure the Plan is practical, implementable, and well-integrated into existing City processes and plans.

Public Engagement and Feedback

Public Engagement

The outreach process for the Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan was designed to be inclusive and involve a broad cross-section of the community. A variety of creative and effective methods were used to gather input and reflect diverse perspectives and local priorities. Engagement activities included:

- Eight public meetings to share project information and gather community input;
- Three pop-up events at community locations;
- Six public workshops, including a fully translated workshop for Spanish- and Mandarin-speaking residents;
- A public survey with more than 500 responses;

- Participation at neighborhood association meetings, block parties, and City events such as Monster Bash and Tree Lighting;
- An interactive online ideas portal on the project website; and
- A stakeholder workshop with approximately 40 participants focused on technical and community priorities.

The stakeholder workshop was a two-hour session designed for community members, volunteers, and partners with technical expertise or a strong interest in biodiversity and the urban forest. Breakout discussions addressed topics such as designing and planting within the built environment, incorporating habitat into transportation and transit corridors, and protecting spaces for nature. Participants identified key themes and provided recommendations that informed the Plan's development.

The draft Plan was publicly released 10 days prior to the October 8, 2025, Parks and Recreation Commission meeting. The public was invited to review the document and provide feedback on the guiding questions. Notice of the draft Plan was posted on the City and project websites and distributed to stakeholder groups, neighborhood associations, and community mailing lists to support broad awareness.

These combined outreach efforts, including community events, multilingual workshops, targeted stakeholder discussions, and early public review, provided a comprehensive engagement process that informed the Plan's development and priorities.

Overview of Public Feedback

Overall public feedback generally fell into four primary themes:

- **Community Priorities:** Residents focused on the "lived experience" of the plan, specifically the need for more tree canopy in heat-vulnerable areas, native pollinator habitats, and opportunities for local stewardship and tree giveaways.
- **City Accountability:** Both the PRC and EPC stressed that the Plan must be more than an aspiration; it requires "City-led" language and a commitment to staffing and leadership to ensure follow-through.
- **Practicality and Phasing:** Feedback highlighted the need to balance ambitious goals with the reality of maintenance costs and infrastructure conflicts.
- **Accessibility:** Both the public and the Commissions requested a plan that is easy to navigate, with clear metrics to track progress over time.

Attachment 2 includes a high-level summary of public feedback received.

DISCUSSION

Plan Vision, Goals, and Actions

Consistent with the public feedback received, the draft Plan establishes the following long-term vision:

**Mountain View is a healthy, connected, and resilient community
where people and nature thrive together.**

The draft Plan is structured around the following four goals and objectives:

1. Connect People and Nature

- Support a network of connected green spaces across the City.
- Foster a cultural shift that spotlights biodiversity and integrates it into Mountain View's sense of place.

2. Foster Places of Refuge

- Foster a healthier built environment for nature and people.
- Balance opportunities for community enjoyment of nature with the needs of native species.

3. Build Resilience

- Grow, protect, and care for a resilient urban forest, continuing progress towards the goal of 22.7% canopy cover by 2030.
- Support quality habitat that sustains a diversity of life.
- Use greening opportunities to adapt to future climate conditions.

4. Activate and Collaborate

- Activate and collaborate with the community.
- Activate and collaborate with design practitioners and large landowners.
- Enhance collaboration across City departments to optimize implementation of the Plan through City programs, projects, operations, and maintenance.
- Coordinate with other agencies to identify opportunities for aligning visions and collaborating on initiatives that enhance shared natural resources.

These goals and objectives are supported by 25 prioritized actions organized into short-, medium- and long-term timeframes and relative cost ranges. The actions are designed to:

- Expand and diversify the urban tree canopy;
- Increase native and climate-adapted landscaping;
- Improve habitat quality and ecological connectivity;
- Integrate biodiversity into City planning, capital projects, and maintenance practices;
- Advance equity by prioritizing investments in areas with lower canopy cover and higher heat vulnerability; and
- Strengthen partnerships and community stewardship.

The draft Plan’s vision, goals, and actions serve as a roadmap to enhance biodiversity, expand tree canopy cover, and integrate nature into the City’s fabric while balancing community needs.

Metrics and Targets

The draft Plan includes a framework for tracking progress through quantitative metrics and targets. The recommended and supplemental metrics combine local insights from the Mountain View community and City staff with international research and best practices for tracking urban biodiversity performance. These metrics will track progress on topics such as:

- Citywide tree canopy coverage;
- Public tree planting totals;
- Acres converted to native or habitat-supportive landscaping; and
- Community participation in programs.

Targets establish measurable benchmarks for these metrics. The Plan carries forward several targets from the 2015 CTMP, including:

- Achieving 22.7% citywide tree canopy coverage by 2030;
- Planting 1,575 additional public trees by 2030; and
- Increasing shade tree planting to provide shade for at least 40% of paved parking areas (measured at 20 years).

Together, these measures provide a system for monitoring progress, supporting adaptive management, and maintaining accountability as community needs and environmental conditions evolve.

Implementation

The draft Plan includes a clear implementation framework that defines leadership, interdepartmental roles, and responsibilities for carrying out the Plan's actions. An implementation matrix, organized under the "Implementation: Vision to Action" structure, categorizes actions by short-, medium-, and long-term timeframes and identifies relative cost ranges. The short-term category includes both "In Progress" and "Upon Plan Adoption" actions to reflect the City's ongoing efforts and near-term priorities.

The draft Plan outlines 25 actions spanning policy and regulatory updates, planning and data, capital investments and asset management, operations and maintenance, partnerships, community engagement, and program development. Implementation is phased across short-, medium-, and long-term horizons to support a strategic and manageable approach and will require sufficient staffing capacity for successful execution. While some actions can be implemented within existing resources, through supplemental funding strategies, or phased through the annual budget and Capital Improvement Program (CIP) process, others will require new or enhanced funding sources.

Implementation priorities and associated funding needs will be evaluated and advanced through the City's annual budget and CIP processes. Potential funding strategies identified in the Plan include grants, partnerships, development-related fees, and other external or alternative funding opportunities.

Commission Review and Recommendation

The PRC and EPC reviewed the draft Plan in October 2025 and provided feedback focused on strengthening City ownership and accountability, reinforcing implementation, clarifying priorities, and emphasizing native planting, habitat value, and feasibility. Staff and SFEI incorporated this input into a revised draft.

On January 21, 2026, the PRC reviewed the updated draft Plan, which included targeted revisions in response to earlier Commission and public feedback. Key updates included:

- Reprioritizing Action 23 to the short-term timeframe;
- Adding a metric to track privately managed trees through community-submitted data;

- Strengthening coordination between the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan and the Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan, particularly to advance equitable access to shade, cooling, and biodiversity benefits citywide; and
- Strengthening the implementation framework to affirm the City’s commitment to providing adequate staffing capacity, which may include dedicated staff and/or consultant support to coordinate and advance Plan implementation.

At its January 21, 2026, meeting, the PRC recommended forwarding the draft Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan to the City Council for review and adoption and approved the following motion:

“To forward the draft Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan to the City Council with a statement that the PRC enthusiastically supports the Plan. To address concerns regarding implementation, the PRC recommends that the City Council adopt the draft Plan with a commitment to allocating resources to implement the current phase while also developing detailed project plans and deliverables for future phases. The PRC further recommends assigning or hiring a dedicated staff coordinator or consultant to facilitate implementation.”

Fiscal Impact

Project 23-37, Biodiversity Strategy, is funded with \$1.0 million from CIP reserves. No additional appropriation is requested at this time to complete the development and adoption of the Plan.

The Plan includes planning-level cost estimates to illustrate the scale of investment required to expand, maintain, and enhance biodiversity and the urban forest over time. While the City’s existing funding sources - including the General Fund, Capital Improvement Program (CIP), Tree Mitigation Fund, and limited reserve funds - support ongoing operations and incremental capital improvements, they are not sufficient to fully achieve the Plan’s vision, goals, and objectives. Additional funding will be needed to cover future actions, which may include funds from a potential revenue measure.

Summary

The draft Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan represents a comprehensive, science-based roadmap to protect, enhance, and manage Mountain View’s natural assets while supporting climate resilience, public health, and community well-being. Developed through extensive community engagement, interdepartmental collaboration, and Commission review, the Plan reflects local priorities and aligns with the City’s broader sustainability and planning efforts.

City Council feedback at this Study Session will help confirm the Plan’s overall policy direction and ensure that the vision, goals, and implementation approach appropriately reflect Council priorities. Staff will use Council input to refine the document in preparation for final consideration and adoption.

QUESTION FOR COUNCIL

Staff seeks City Council input on the following question:

Does Council agree that the draft Plan is generally consistent with community priorities and City policies and plans, and that it provides an appropriate long-term policy framework that balances ambition with flexibility to support phased implementation, or does Council have other feedback?

LEVINE ACT

California Government Code Section 84308 (also known as the Levine Act) prohibits city officials from participating in any proceeding involving a “license, permit, or other entitlement for use” if the official has received a campaign contribution exceeding \$500 from a party, participant, or agent of a party or participant within the last 12 months. The Levine Act is intended to prevent financial influence on decisions that affect specific, identifiable persons or participants. For more information see the Fair Political Practices Commission website: www.fppc.ca.gov/learn/pay-to-play-limits-and-prohibitions.html

Please see below for information about whether the recommended action for this agenda item is subject to or exempt from the Levine Act.

EXEMPT FROM THE LEVINE ACT

- General policy and legislative actions

NEXT STEPS

Following the Study Session, City staff will incorporate feedback received from the City Council to prepare a refined draft of the Plan. The updated draft plan will return to City Council for consideration and adoption in June 2026.

PUBLIC NOTICING

In addition to the standard agenda posting, notice of this meeting was posted on the City website and the project website, BiodiversityMV.com. Notice was also distributed to stakeholder groups, neighborhood associations, and community distribution lists to support broad public awareness.

- Attachments:
1. Draft Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan
 2. Overview of Public Feedback