

Dear Chair and Members of the streamlining task force, my name is Igor Laćan. I have been a member of the Urban Forestry Council since 2015, and Chair since 2023.

I am writing to provide additional information on the Council's role and accomplishments, and to note several misapprehensions in the staff report.

Urban Forestry Council accomplishes its advisory, coordination, and facilitation functions using several distinct processes, which are not carried out or addressed by any other City commission, policy body, or agency. While the staff report suggest that some of those functions “could be” transferred elsewhere, it is plain that new resources – **i.e., additional public funding** – will be required to enable those other commissions or agencies to perform the functions the Council currently performs.

For example, the Landmark Tree Program – with its complexities of designating trees that may be private, on the street or in a park – is going to be a massive administrative challenge for any city agency, none of which today has the capacity to engage with difficult public discussions that often arise. No funds will be saved, and no time will be saved by disbanding the Council and instead forcing multiple entities to pick up this work. What will be lost are the advantages of having a clear focus on urban trees, a predictable and frequent meeting schedule that encourages public interaction, and the wide-ranging expertise of the Council members that enables careful deliberation on issues that are both technically complex, frequently changing and often contentious.

Regarding the technical aspects of urban tree management and the need to address change, the staff report notes the completion of the street tree management plan, but misinterprets that as the management plan for the entire urban forest (a rather important technical detail!), which it is not; we still are working on plans for park trees and trees on non-city property. But even once completed, the comprehensive urban forest management plan will need regular update and revision, a function analogous to the one which the Council now performs with respect to the City Tree List (updated every few years), and the Urban Forest Report (updated yearly). These updates involve substantial cross-agency coordination and public participation – exactly the functions in which the Council excels.

Regarding the complexity of managing urban trees, the staff report notes that advisory committees, such as the UFC, “should bring outside expertise that would otherwise be missing from government or create pathways for public involvement on an issue” But then the report fails to note the diversity of expertise of the UFC members themselves – “the outside expertise” that is contained within the Council itself. UFC members who are not City staff have included (now and in the past) ecologists, foresters, arborists, landscape architects, lawyers, educators, gardeners,

pest management experts, and others who work professionally with urban landscapes, trees, and communities. It is highly unlikely that a proposed “passive meeting body” would include this diversity of expertise and a commitment to engaging substantively with difficult issues.

Dissolving the Council would be a massive step backwards for San Francisco. When it was created in 2003, the Council was a pioneering step in recognizing the importance of urban trees to the welfare of San Franciscans. This critical role of trees had long been recognized across the Eastern, Southern, and Northwestern US, where even smaller cities commonly have a “tree board” that enables public participation and serves as coordinating and advisory body. Indeed, a “tree board” is an element of the “Tree City USA” certification, which San Francisco proudly holds. I am contacted every year by other cities in California who are considering setting up their own version of a tree advisory body, and the Council’s work serves as a model for how to organize, fund, and run a public-focused urban forestry program.

San Francisco is a challenging place to grow and maintain urban trees. If we are serious about enabling all San Franciscans to benefit from our urban canopy, we need to retain the one City advisory body that has been dedicated to, and has proven successful in, facilitating this important work.

I am attaching below a more detailed look at some of the issues; please contact me if any additional information would be helpful.

Thank you,

Igor

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## **Details and comments regarding the staff report:**

**Urban Forest Plan:** While the Planning Department lists the Urban Forest Plan as "completed," only Phase 1 has been finalized. This phase addresses street trees, which make up only a portion of the urban forest. Crucial future phases, focusing on trees in parks and open spaces, as well as private property, remain uncompleted. These phases are essential to achieving a holistic, citywide urban forest strategy.

**The UFC Fulfills a Unique Coordination Role:** Although individual departments have staff managing trees on their respective lands, only the UFC Coordinator is tasked with cross-agency collaboration among City departments, regional agencies, community-based organizations (CBOs), and nonprofits.

**Loss of Invaluable Expertise from Non-City Members:** While City staff can perform some functions, the elimination of the UFC would result in the loss of specialized volunteer expertise from non-City members. These individuals contribute significant value to the City's urban forestry efforts. Current UFC members include:

**Igor Lacan:** Urban Forestry Advisor for the University of California Cooperative Extension for the San Francisco Bay Area. Applied ecologist with over 15 years of experience in research and environmental management, specializing in urban natural resources, stormwater management, and tree care in cities. Provides technical and policy guidance to municipalities, practitioners, and the public to support sustainable urban forest management. ISA Certified arborist.

**Morgan Vaissett Fauvel:** Integrated Pest Management and Grounds Program Manager at UCSF. Certified arborist (International Society of Arboriculture).

**Karla Nagy:** Licensed landscape architect (California) and certified arborist (ISA). Program & Education Manager at the Urban & Community Forestry Society. Former Vice President of Friends of the Urban Forest.

**Pam Nagle:** Licensed landscape architect (California) and certified arborist (ISA). Has designed projects for SFPUC, SFUSD, RPD, and DPW. Active volunteer Planting Leader with Friends of the Urban Forest since 2002.

**Edgar Xochitl Flores:** Farm Manager at Hummingbird Farm, serving environmental justice communities through public education and sustainable land stewardship.

**Caroline Scanlan:** Certified arborist (ISA) and Tree Planting Program Manager at Friends of the Urban Forest, overseeing the planting of 1,500 street trees annually. Former Program Manager of GreenSkills at Yale School of the Environment, a green jobs program for youth and adults with employment barriers.

**Joshua Klipp:** Attorney (Bar No. 203176) since 1999, with experience at the San Francisco Superior Court, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and various federal agencies. Specializes

in Employment Law and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Founder of accessibility-focused firm Made Welcome. Active volunteer Planting Leader with Friends of the Urban Forest since 2010. Co-founder of Mission Verde, which significantly expanded tree planting in the Mission. Longtime advocate for urban forestry programs.

**Antonio Moreno:** Gardener and cultural educator with experience working with the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the Presidio Trust, focusing on cultural affairs and the inclusion of local Native perspectives and practices. His work includes harvesting native plants for cultural uses and leading culturally relevant workshops. Currently works with the nonprofit A Living Library, building community through the stewardship of native plant gardens in OMI/Excelsior, Bernal Heights, and Chinatown.

**Lew Stringer:** Associate Director of Natural Resources at the Presidio Trust, with over 25 years of experience in ecological restoration, research, and education. Has led biodiversity restoration efforts in the Presidio since 2003. Serves on the steering committees of Reimagining San Francisco and the Golden Gate Biosphere Network.

**Majority of Trees in SF Are Outside DPW Jurisdiction:** Approximately 81% of San Francisco's trees are not street trees. The UFC is the only body designed to address and coordinate tree management across multiple jurisdictions, including parks, schools, private land, and federal property.

**Dedicated Forum for Complex, Cross-Cutting Issues:** The UFC provides a dedicated forum for discussing complex and often contentious urban forestry issues. Recent examples include:

Wildfire and safety concerns in eucalyptus plantations.

Equitable tree distribution and canopy coverage in areas like SoMa.

Without the UFC, such issues would be addressed only sporadically in broader commissions, lacking both the subject matter expertise and consistent attention needed.

**Streamlined Operations and Cost Reduction:** In line with the City's goals to streamline governance, the UFC has already taken proactive steps to reduce its operational costs. This includes dissolving standing committees and adopting an efficient workflow that enables critical work to continue between meetings.

**Citywide Coordination Role of UFC:** Funding from DPW, Planning, RPD, PUC, and the Port support the Urban Forestry Council Coordinator role as part of the Urban Forestry Ordinance in the Environment Code.

**Coordinating citywide urban forestry planning efforts,** including implementation of the Urban Forest Plan and Climate Action Plan (CAP) strategies.

**Administering the Landmark Tree Ordinance,** including evaluating nominations and supporting preservation of culturally or ecologically significant trees.

**Producing and publishing the annual Urban Forestry Report**, which compiles data from 20+ agencies to provide a comprehensive view of San Francisco’s urban forest.

**Serving as a centralized resource** for the Board of Supervisors, City staff, and residents on urban forestry-related policies, planning, and best practices.

**Supporting public outreach, education, and programming** to raise awareness and visibility of urban forestry issues and initiatives.

Core responsibilities of the UFC Coordinator include:

**Identifying and coordinating grant opportunities** across departments to leverage funding for urban greening and tree planting efforts.

Development of **departmental guidance for capital projects** that enhances carbon sequestration, biodiversity, and use of native species.

Maintenance of working relationships with over **21 city agencies and external partners**, including nonprofits, vendors, and advocacy groups, to align urban forestry activities citywide.

Conducting and disseminating **urban forestry research and policy recommendations** to inform City planning and decision-making.

In support of the City’s CAP goals, the UFC Coordinator also leads or contributes to:

Development of **departmental guidance for capital projects** that enhances carbon sequestration, biodiversity, and use of native species.

Maintenance of working relationships with over **21 city agencies and external partners**, including nonprofits, vendors, and advocacy groups, to align urban forestry activities citywide.

Conducting and disseminating **urban forestry research and policy recommendations** to inform City planning and decision-making.

**A Model for Urban Forestry Governance:** Cities regularly seek guidance on its structure and operations, most recently Oakland, which consulted the UFC while forming its own Urban Forestry Council. The Council’s annual Urban Forestry Report is also unique, with over 20 years of data collection used as a reference for urban forestry planning, policy, and reporting in other cities.

**Essential Ongoing Work Should Not Be Lost:** The council is uniquely capable platform for cross-sector collaboration, specialized guidance, and public input on issues related to San Francisco’s entire urban forest the UFC in some capacity or integrate its full scope of functions into a new structure that preserves its cross-agency collaboration, public engagement, and independent technical expertise.