**DATE**

Portland City Council

1221 SW Fourth Ave.

Portland, Oregon 97204

Dear Mayor Wheeler and Portland City Commissioners:

The Urban Forestry Commission urges the City Council to support the proposed enhancements to Portland Parks & Recreation's Urban Forestry Division budget and elements of the Bureau of Environmental Services budget cited on the next page of this letter.

The Urban Forestry Commission’s duties include: *Advising the City Forester, the Director and Commissioner-in-Charge of the Bureau of Parks and Recreation, and Citizen’s Budget Advisory Committee on the preparation and contents of the annual Forestry Division budget request* (11.20.020 E.3) and *Considering and making recommendations to the City Council pertaining to…Other City bureau budget proposals that may substantially affect programs relating to trees and the urban forest* (11.20.020 E.4.c). (underlines added)

The Portland Parks and Recreation’s Urban Forestry Division has identified the following requested resources as necessary to improve the management of Portland’s critical Urban Forest infrastructure, and as important, to improve City accountability and community trust and respect for Portland’s urban forest management efforts.

1. **Code Compliance Package – 6 FTE for code compliance and permit inspection -** $749,374 (16.9% Permitting & Regulations budget increase) - These resources are long overdue. Staff have not had the capacity to adequately enforce existing tree regulations since Title 11 went into effect in 2016. This reduces accountability and credibility in the community. Additional staff will allow prompt investigation of alleged violations, including illegal tree removal and damage, abate hazard and nuisance trees, and ensure that new trees are planted as required by permit.
2. **Permitting and Regulation Service Continuity** – **1 FTE** - $123,000 (2.7% Permitting and Regulations budget increase) – This additional tree inspector position will improve permit accuracy, processing time, customer service, and technical assistance to Portlanders. Currently processing tree permit applications can take 12 weeks, which is not acceptable and reduces City credibility with the community.
3. **Arborist Trainee Program – 3 FTE** - $296,710 (5.3% Tree Maintenance and Operations budget increase) - 3 additional positions in the Arborist Trainee classification will increase arboricultural career opportunities for diverse applicants and will leverage existing collaborations with interested community partners including IRCO, Latino Network, and Urban League.
4. **Promote Equity in Permitting Services – 0 FTE** – This proposal is for $8,000 in ongoing funds to sustain the PP&R’s hardship fee waiver program that was piloted during COVID-19. Allowing permit fee waivers will help eliminate financial barriers to PP&R’s tree permitting services.

In addition, the Urban Forestry Commission strongly supports funding for other City programs that contribute to the health and sustainability of Portland’s urban forest. Specifically, we urge the City Council to maintain the Bureau of Environmental Services budget for tree-related and watershed health-related programs, including:

* Urban tree planting
* Invasive species control and natural area restoration
* Tree maintenance
* Pavement removal
* Community partnerships
* Outreach and education
* Community grant funding

This important work is work helps to decrease stormwater runoff, improve water quality, increase tree canopy, build climate resilience, and address equity priorities that center on our community’s needs.  These efforts also enable and empower community participation and in activities benefitting Portland’s urban forest and watershed health overall.

In closing, Urban Forestry Commission asks that the City Council to take an additional critical step now to address existing and growing urban forest-related disparities and to improve Portland’s climate resilience. Specifically, we ask that the City Council direct Portland Parks and Recreation to recommend long-term dedicated funding sources for street tree maintenance. This funding is needed to allow the City to shift the legal responsibility for maintaining trees in the right-of-way from the abutting property owner to the City.  As it stands, many Portlanders are not willing to plant street trees due to the cost of maintaining them. As a result, areas with lower income residents will continue to have fewer trees and experience more severe impacts from heat events than areas where residents have sufficient financial resources to welcome new street trees next to their property.  Portland’s valuable street trees assets should be managed as critical infrastructure so that the important heat island amelioration and other benefits they provide can be spread equitably across the City.

Thank you for your consideration and your efforts to make Portland a healthy city equitable city.

Vivek Shandas, PhD

Urban Forestry Commission Chair

cc: Urban Forestry Commission

 Adena Long, Director Portland Parks and Recreation

 Jenn Cairo, City Forester

 Dawn Uchiyama, Interim Director Bureau of Environmental Services