



CITY OF COSTA MESA

77 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

Agenda Report

File #: 26-149

Meeting Date: 2/17/2026

TITLE:

CITY OF COSTA MESA'S URBAN CANOPY AND LAND ASSESSMENT

DEPARTMENT: PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT/MAINTENANCE SERVICES
DIVISION

PRESENTED BY: RAJA SETHURAMAN, PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

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RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the City Council review and provide feedback on the City of Costa Mesa's Urban Canopy and Land Assessment.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Costa Mesa's urban forest contains approximately 23,000 trees located on City property. This includes city facilities, parks, parkways, sports fields, streets and medians. The City's tree inventory has an estimated value of over \$85 million and has a diversity of over 270 different tree species. Despite a history of drought and existing and newly established invasive pests and diseases, the overall condition of the urban forest is at a healthy level. The City's Arborist, in conjunction with the tree maintenance contractor, has assigned a rating of "Fair" or "Good" (the two highest ratings possible) to 94% of the City's urban forest. A vast majority of those trees, over 87%, were rated as "Good".

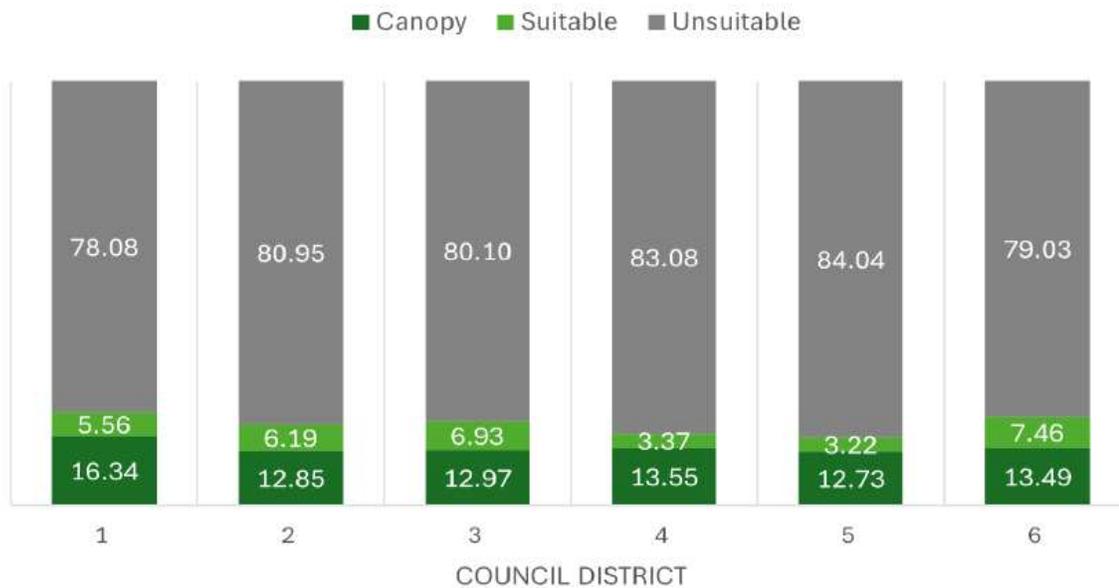
The City's urban forest and corresponding tree canopy contribute significantly to environmental quality, public health, water management, economic stability, and overall aesthetics of the City. The City Council has also identified the need to review and expand the tree canopy, especially in areas that are tree deficient. In order to address this need, the City contracted West Coast Arborists, Inc. to conduct an Urban Tree Canopy and Land Assessment (Attachment1). The primary goal of this assessment is to provide a baseline evaluation of Costa Mesa's tree canopy, analyze its distribution, and develop actionable, data driven plans for future strategies for urban forestry development across various geographic areas to maximize the urban forest benefits citywide.

ANALYSIS:

According to the assessment, the City of Costa Mesa currently has 13.88% tree canopy cover citywide. While this may seem low, approximately 80.49% of land is unsuitable for tree planting due to existing land use constraints such as buildings, roads, and water bodies. Approximately 5.63% of the city remains available for future tree planting.

This assessment evaluated Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) and Possible Planting Areas (PPA) across multiple geographic areas to provide relevant insights for different stakeholders. By identifying the distribution of tree canopy and planting opportunities across these scales, the City can take a more strategic and data-driven approach to urban forestry management. The assessment considered several geographic boundaries, including the citywide boundary (1), six city council districts (6), thirty-seven census tracts (37), twenty land-use groups (20), and thirty-four designated park areas (34). This multi-scale approach allows for targeted decision-making to enhance Costa Mesa’s urban forest.

Suitable vs Unsuitable Percentage



This chart illustrates the proportions of total tree canopy, suitable planting areas, and unsuitable planting areas within each council district.

District	Canopy (Sqft)	Suitable (Sqft)	Unsuitable (Sqft)	Total Area (Sqft)
1	18,789,743.95	6,400,041.64	51,731,990.22	115,026,391.30
2	12,009,395.78	5,790,041.72	33,642,265.02	93,479,583.35
3	9,802,908.63	5,237,125.25	27,502,277.33	75,596,229.03
4	3,464,911.76	861,709.18	10,990,825.62	25,574,421.83
5	9,770,084.24	2,475,327.11	41,432,486.49	76,767,708.46
6	7,475,158.18	4,132,294.40	27,411,033.16	55,405,142.28

This table shows canopy cover, suitable planting area, and unsuitable planting area in relation to each council district in square feet.

The assessment provides insight into the ecological benefits of the City's urban forest in several key factors such as pollution removal, carbon storage and carbon sequestration. In addition, a risk assessment was performed based on the specific composition of Costa Mesa's urban forest and the potential threat of pests to the most prevalently planted tree species.

Lastly, the assessment provides a summary section with recommendations in several categories, including where tree canopy is lacking, where the most opportunity lies, areas most in need of protection, and any general citywide trends or disparities.

The Tree Canopy Assessment was presented to the Parks and Community Services (PACS) Commission on November 13, 2025. The PACS Commission, following the presentation and discussion, provided the following recommendations and requested that they be included in the agenda report to City Council:

- Include a mapping of tree inventory so that the relationship of tree canopy to pedestrian opportunity zones, major roadway corridors and tree-deficient areas can be analyzed.
- Collaborate with Newport Mesa Unified School District (NMUSD) to increase tree canopy at various school properties, especially in areas that are lacking adequate canopy cover.
- Collaborate with other districts such as Mesa Water for tree planting efforts.
- Increase mulching activities in landscaped areas throughout the City.
- Dedicate a portion of Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget for streets towards trees.
- Repurpose a portion of golf course adjacent to Fairview Developmental Center (FDC) for increasing open space and tree canopy.
- Conduct outreach to residents, especially in multi-family areas for additional tree planting and provide incentives for planting trees.
- Address tree canopy and social equity issues.
- Consider an Adopt a Tree program for planting and maintenance of trees.
- Identify and promote health benefits of trees, especially in areas deficient in tree canopy.
- Identify areas where trees were removed and ensure new trees are planted.
- Incorporate tree canopy recommendations within Safe Routes to School project.
- Prioritize areas with poor tree canopy and low unsuitable planting.
- Provide Planning Commission with the presentation on tree canopy.

Following the PACS Commission presentation, the City has been working with the consultant to develop mapping of various layers, such as tree inventory, maintenance program, and environmental and health benefits. These will be included on the City website following staff review and approval.

ALTERNATIVES:

There are no alternatives to consider for this item as it is informational in nature.

FISCAL REVIEW:

No fiscal review is required for this item.

LEGAL REVIEW:

The City Attorney's Office has reviewed this report and approves it as to form.

CITY COUNCIL GOALS AND PRIORITIES:

This item supports City Council goal to advance environmental sustainability and climate resiliency.

CONCLUSION:

Staff recommends the City Council review and provide feedback on the City of Costa Mesa's Urban Canopy and Land Assessment.