

Goleta's Urban Forest on Horizon

Community Input Solicited

By Ben Preston

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The relatively new city of Goleta held a stakeholders meeting last week to kick off the planning for its own urban forest.

Many cities, large and small, have a set of ordinances to protect their trees, and to ensure that when new ones are planted, the right trees go in the right places. Since Goleta was incorporated less than a decade ago, there has been an informal set of rules in place governing city trees, but the urban forest plan is intended to be more comprehensive.

About 60 percent of the city's trees are located on private property, but trees often cross over property lines, and need to be regulated to clear power lines and keep other infrastructure rights-of-way clear, so city officials are going for an overarching plan that deals with those issues. But beyond that, they are using new trees to increase oxygen production and reduce temperatures around the city.

"It's the kind of thing that bigger cities already have set up," said Steve Wagner, Goleta's director of community services. The city has received a three-year, \$30,000-grant from Cal Fire to cover the expense of formulating the plan.

One of the plan's key components is the tree list, which decrees which tree types are appropriate for the city, and where. While non-native species of trees will not be used for new plantings, city arborist Bill Millar was quick to point out that there are no plans to eradicate non-native eucalyptus groves, as the groves contain environmentally sensitive habitat areas—most notably the Ellwood Butterfly Preserve. "The tree list is a small piece of what we're trying to do, and it won't drive the plan," said Wagner, highlighting the plan's big picture focus. "The plan should drive the tree list."

Concerns raised by the 20 or so members of the public present at last week's meeting included potential viewshed impacts from excessively tall trees; as well as the potential for any number of as-yet-unforeseen problems that could occur if unqualified individuals were to make decisions. Wagner countered that the whole purpose of the plan was to prevent short-sighted tree planting. He encouraged arborists, landscape architects, and whoever has some expertise to share to get involved in the planning process.

According to Goleta's State of the Goleta Urban Forest Report –the plan's initial

step—the City of Goleta already holds "Tree City, USA" status, which requires a municipality to spend at least \$2 per capita on trees; to have a tree ordinance in place; and to foster volunteer programs for tree planting, young-tree care, and education. The city's annual tree budget is \$300,000, which Millar said more than qualifies it for the Tree City certification. And City Hall has been working closely with Goleta Valley Beautiful—an Alliance for Community Trees member nonprofit that has been operating in the Goleta Valley since 1974—to promote volunteer tree planting and care.

Wagner said that the draft urban forest management plan will be worked on by his staff over the next several months, and is scheduled for review by the city council next summer or fall. There will be more stakeholder meetings during this process. The dates and other particulars of those meetings have not yet been announced, but interested parties can contact the [City of Goleta](#) to get on an emailing roster for up-to-date information about Goleta's urban forest plans.