

City of Davis Tree Commission Comments on the Draft Downtown Plan Documents

To whom it may concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Downtown Plan and the associated documents. The Tree Commission has reviewed the available materials at multiple commission meetings and presents the following concerns and suggestions for improvement.

The proposed plan is aspirational and does not include adequate detail within the draft code documents to realize the landscapes presented in the visuals found throughout the plan. The Tree Commission feels that trees and urban canopy were completely overlooked when developing the form based code that is intended to move our city effectively towards the vibrant, tree-lined urban utopia the plan visually presents.

- Trees are fundamental to placemaking and provide significant human health, economic, social, and sustainability benefits. The draft Article 40.13 includes 27 pages on signage placement and design and zero on trees or related green infrastructure, its placement and its ongoing care. This is a gross oversight and must be rectified.
- There is no information on the current condition and placement of plan area tree resources or the retention, protection, or replacement of these resources. Our downtown area is currently fairly well canopied; a situation that will not persist without significant changes within Article 40.13 and an up-to-date City Tree Ordinance that reflects current science and best practices.
- Trees are the primary tool identified with the living landscape adaptation plan currently being developed by UC Davis. This Downtown Plan is devoid of mechanisms that would require climate appropriate landscaping. Additionally, the water efficient landscaping section (40.42) is entirely missing from the draft documents.
- Both the preservation of currently present downtown trees and the careful planning to ensure adequate soil space, proper above ground placement, and ongoing care of trees and other green infrastructure elements are critical to developing the vision presented in the plan. Developing requirements to ensure these goals are met are much more difficult than most people realize. Trees and other green infrastructure will only exist within the future downtown if it is required, properly planned for, and an enforcement mechanism is created and enforced.
- Unless our downtown trees can grow roots to support themselves, we will not be able to have safe, large, shady trees in our downtown area. This will require a careful look at the setback and frontage allowances in all building types presented in Article 40.13 and strict rules on how adequate soil space can be achieved.
- As the plan stands, there are no requirements for trees or other green infrastructure anywhere other than along the street. This should be re-evaluated for, at minimum, the Neighborhood Small and Neighborhood Medium areas. A canopy minimum should be considered for all area types to encourage the inclusion of green infrastructure solutions.
- Technologies exist to support urban tree canopy and green infrastructure even in the most difficult settings. Creation of a supporting document; either the "Tree Technical

Manual or Downtown Green Infrastructure Manual” should be developed to ensure that flexibility and creative solutions can be used by developers while ensuring our community realizes the walkable, shady, and beautiful community we all wish to live in.

- It is important that healthy trees with significant projected longevity are preserved. Either additional review of projects with impacts to existing trees must be required OR the downtown plan should map, evaluate, and identify the requirements for the protection of all trees currently located within the plan area.

In short, the Tree Commission urges the adoption of a Downtown Plan that:

1. Preserves existing canopy
2. Describes the pathway to our future climate adapted urban forest by establishing clear protocol for where and how new trees are planted
3. Describes a mechanism for ensuring new and existing tree and green infrastructure continues to thrive after planting and/or preservation
4. Defines clear, enforceable policies

The Tree Commission is ready and willing to assist in the ongoing development of a Downtown Plan that supports a future urban core that is green, beautiful, shady in the summertime, climate adapted, water efficient, and equitable for all community members. We appreciate the attention given to the concerns we have presented here.

Sincerely,
The City of Davis Tree Commission
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Stacey Parker
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