

Eric Lee
City of Davis
23 Russell Boulevard
Davis, CA 95616

January 10th, 2020

Dear Mr. Lee,

The Tree Davis Board of Directors, Kevin Robert Perry of Urban Rain Design, and I have reviewed the Draft Downtown Davis Specific Plan. The plan covers many important topics relevant to revitalizing and improving our city's downtown core and we commend the authors on the fact that sustainability and green infrastructure are considered.

However, we would like to note a few key omissions concerning the importance of trees and urban greenspace in placemaking, climate change mitigation and enhancement of business districts. We recommend the following to make the plan more comprehensive and complete:

- 1) **Chapter 1.2: Relationship to General Plan and Other Plans and Policy Documents:** The City of Davis' Tree Planting, Preservation, and Protection Ordinance (Tree Ordinance) should be included in the planning documents and regulatory framework section of the plan.

Rationale: The Tree Ordinance sets standards for the inclusion and protection of trees in city spaces and is especially important given the protection that the Tree Ordinance affords for trees during construction, remodeling and demolition. Without explicit inclusion of the Tree Ordinance, it is unlikely that the provisions of the ordinance will be applied to the plan – in which case, the City could potentially lose the financial resources already invested in downtown trees as well as the public goods/benefits that trees confer now and will confer in the future.

- 2) **Chapter 2: Existing Conditions:** The City of Davis Urban Forestry Division has an inventory of City, street and landmark trees. The status of those trees, along with their collective canopy attributes should be included in the Downtown Davis Existing Conditions section of the plan.

Rationale: Setting baseline conditions for downtown tree canopy will improve future goal-setting and decision-making regarding canopy enhancement measures in the downtown area.

Board of Directors

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- 3) **Chapter 7.1 & 7.2: Low Impact Development/Green Infrastructure; Stormwater Management and Green Infrastructure Improvements:** Urban trees are green infrastructure and should be included as such in this chapter – especially in the “Identifying Opportunities” section. Additionally, there are a number of more specific green infrastructure strategies that should be included within the “Matrix of Potential Green Infrastructure” (Figure 7.2), such as stormwater planters, rain gardens, green gutters, vegetated swales, and green walls. Further, if the Specific Plan is to serve as a visionary document for downtown, green infrastructure can and should be woven within streets, buildings, parking lots, parks, and plazas (not just streets, as the Plan currently indicates). Finally, we believe that a more site-specific “green infrastructure overlay” along with strategically selected green infrastructure demonstration project sites could be used to illustrate how green infrastructure can boldly enhance Davis’ downtown core and simultaneously educate the public about the benefits of urban stormwater retention, permeable surfaces and mitigation of urban heat islands. With all of these recommendations, we would be happy to sit down with the project team to discuss our suggestions further and provide support.

Rationale: Trees, in combination with an broader toolbox of green infrastructure strategies, will aid the City and its residents in adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change. For example, trees provide shade and cooling via evapotranspiration (which reduce building energy use) that decrease human exposure to heat stress – the Center for Disease control reports that extreme heat events cause more deaths in the United States than all other natural disasters combined. The occurrence of extreme heat events is projected to increase as the climate continues to warm. Additionally, trees and green infrastructure stormwater facilities clean and reduce stormwater runoff, improve air quality, store carbon, reduce noise, improve property values, provide jobs and enhance economic activity in business districts. Expanding the role of urban trees and green infrastructure will help distinguish Davis as the environmental leader that it strives to be.

- 4) **Form-based Code:**
- a. Currently lacks specifications on growing space for trees, including adequate space above- and below-ground. Adequate soil (volume and type) is critical for a healthy mature tree’s extensive root system.
 - b. Currently lacks specifications on tree species to be considered for the downtown area. A pallet of small, medium and large climate-ready shade tree species should be specified for planting.
 - c. Currently lacks specification on structure build-out and implications for green infrastructure.
 - d. Should allot a certain percentage of setback or frontage space for green infrastructure.

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- e. Should include goals for tree canopy cover – both at the scale of the overall downtown area as well as parcel-by-parcel for private property.
- f. Should include goals for percentage pervious surfaces and urban landscape.

Rationale: A plan that lacks the above specifications runs the risk of advocating lofty ideals with no means of achieving plan goals. This could result in the loss of: existing tree canopy, the opportunity to expand the downtown tree canopy and landscape/pervious surfaces, the opportunity for the City of Davis to serve as a leader in urban greening/sustainability and the public health and economic benefits that accompany them.

Thank you very much to the authors for their diligent work in preparing this plan. Davis is a very special community in many ways, not the least of which is that our city government leaders work to make intentional choices about the future of our town and the vitality of our downtown core. I hope that our comments concerning the importance of trees in this pursuit can become a useful part of the revision of the draft plan.

Please feel free to contact me with any comments, questions or feedback.

Best regards,

Erin Donley Marineau

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Executive Director

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