



**street sf
tree**

Annual Report
FISCAL YEAR 2019-2020



Table of Contents

- San Francisco Public Works: Mission and Vision 1
 - Bureau of Urban Forestry: Mission and Vision 1
- Overview 1
 - Highlights from the Past Year 2
- How We Got Started..... 3
- Street Tree and Sidewalk Maintenance 4
 - Street Trees: The “Worst First” 4
 - Priority Street Tree Pruning (Keymaps) Progress 5
 - Sidewalk Repair..... 8
 - Tree-related Sidewalk Damage Areas (Keymaps) Progress 9
- Staffing and Training 10
 - Staffing Plan and Hiring 10
 - Training and Staff Development 11
- Equipment and Vehicles..... 11
- Urban Forest Inspection 12
- Communications and Outreach 13
- Trees at Public Schools (San Francisco Unified School District) 16
- Financial Summary 16
- COVID-19 Impacts and Schedule Delays 17



San Francisco Public Works: Mission and Vision

San Francisco Public Works enhances the quality of life in San Francisco by providing outstanding public service. We design, build, operate, maintain, green and improve the City's infrastructure, public right of way and facilities with skill, pride and responsiveness in partnership with the San Francisco community.



Bureau of Urban Forestry: Mission and Vision

The Bureau of Urban Forestry enhances the City's green infrastructure by preserving, replacing and growing the trees and plants that make up our urban forest. The Bureau also repairs tree-related sidewalk damage.

Overview

San Francisco Public Works has been conducting street tree maintenance activities and tree-related sidewalk repair throughout the City since July 1, 2017. After three years of implementation, StreetTreeSF already has improved the health of San Francisco's urban forest by meeting its primary goal: maintaining the "worst first." Trees that posed a safety risk in heavily traveled public rights of way and tree-related sidewalk damage that posed tripping hazards were identified as high-priority areas for the program and have been addressed by StreetTreeSF in its first few years. This is the first major milestone for the program.



While crews and contractors have pruned trees and repaired sidewalks throughout the City with a focus on the "worst first," StreetTreeSF continues to work through its carefully planned schedule to service all 125,000 street trees and associated tree-related sidewalk damage throughout San Francisco.

The Bureau of Urban Forestry celebrated the completion of the "worst first" and many other successes in FY 2019-20, but also dealt with setbacks and pauses in work due to the COVID-19 health crisis. Details on the program's FY 2019-20 activities and accomplishments are highlighted below and on the following pages. We also include a review of FY 2019-20 interruptions and future schedule delays on the following pages.

Highlights from the Past Year



- Completed goal of addressing maintenance needs for the “worst first” street trees and sidewalk damage in the first few years of the program.
- Pruned 14,302 street trees; and a total of 39,076 trees since the start of the program.
- Removed 2,107 unhealthy and structurally unsound trees.
- Completed 32,405 street tree inspection requests.

- Repaired 144,405 square feet of tree-related sidewalk damage and performed needed basin expansions.
- Purchased \$1.8 million of new and replacement vehicles and equipment.
- Invested 761 hours in staff training and professional development.
- Shifted some outreach and communication focus to support large maintenance projects and to the development and upkeep of tree removal postings online, while also advancing general exposure of StreetTreeSF.
- Facilitated tree maintenance work at Philip and Sala Burton Academic High School.



How We Got Started

StreetTreeSF is the City of San Francisco’s program to professionally maintain and care for San Francisco’s 125,000 street trees. Managed by San Francisco Public Works’ Bureau of Urban Forestry, StreetTreeSF is the result of a voter-approved 2016 ballot measure that gave Public Works maintenance responsibility for the City’s street trees and set aside \$19 million annually to fund tree maintenance and tree-related sidewalk repairs.

In preparation for the implementation of StreetTreeSF, the Bureau of Urban Forestry completed a comprehensive point-in-time census of each street tree in San Francisco. The census provided the location and species of every street tree, as well as the condition, based on assessments made by professional arborists certified by the International Society of Arboriculture, or ISA.

The point-in-time census baseline information was used to develop a pruning schedule, giving preference to the trees most in need of immediate maintenance: the “worst first.” These are trees that pose a safety risk in heavily traveled public rights of way due to such factors as disease or poor limb and/or root structure.

A similar point-in-time census was conducted of all tree impacts on sidewalks across the City. The high-priority areas of focus were further filtered by identifying tree-related sidewalk tripping hazards near senior centers, schools and bus stops and other areas heavily traveled by vulnerable populations.



Both tree and sidewalk maintenance are carried out using an efficient and cost-effective system. This system organizes the City into manageable blocks, called “keymaps,” and each block gets routine inspections, pruning and tree-related sidewalk repairs.



With 79% voter-approval, Proposition E gave way to StreetTreesSF, the Public Works program to care and maintain the City’s street trees and tree-related sidewalks.

Keymaps with the largest number of “worst first” trees and sidewalks received maintenance first to address immediate safety issues in public rights of way. Keymaps with less high-priority maintenance needs will be addressed after the worst first, later in the schedule.

StreetTreeSF drastically increased the scope of Public Works’ tree maintenance responsibilities. Prior to July 1, 2017, the Bureau of Urban Forestry was responsible for maintaining approximately 30,000 street trees, with private property owners and other government agencies responsible for the rest. The Bureau is now responsible for the maintenance of all street trees throughout the City, many of which have been neglected or received inconsistent care over the years.

During StreetTreeSF’s initial startup phase (2017-2021), the Bureau is prioritizing the most urgent tree maintenance needs. Once baseline conditions have been improved, routine maintenance activities will begin, including annual inspections of all street trees and pruning on a three- to five-year cycle, depending on the species of the tree.

Street Tree and Sidewalk Maintenance

Street Trees: The “Worst First”

FY 2019-20 marked StreetTreeSF’s most successful year as the program met its primary challenge: address the City’s most problematic street trees or “worst first.” These are trees that warrant priority pruning due to safety concerns, structural flaws or lack of clearance for overhead wires, traffic signs and signals, buildings and traffic flow.

Areas of the City with a high density of priority tree removals and pruning needs were the focus of StreetTreeSF’s initial years. To ensure resources are used most efficiently, all trees along blocks within these priority areas were pruned as part of StreetTreeSF’s “block pruning” or keymap approach.

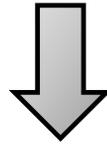
Block pruning is the practice of pruning all trees on a City block instead of only a single tree as part of an emergency or service request. This approach leverages economies of scale and reduces per-tree maintenance costs by utilizing labor, vehicles, equipment and traffic control for a larger volume of trees.

In its third year, StreetTreeSF pruned 14,302 street trees. Of these, 10,325 trees were pruned by contractors and 3,977 trees by in-house crews. The Bureau’s crews and contractors also removed 2,107 dead, dying or hazardous trees. Additionally, the Bureau issued 224 removal permits for trees removed by private entities.



Priority Street Tree Pruning (Keymaps) Progress

2017



2020



Areas with checkmarks have been serviced by StreetTreeSF since the start of the program in 2017. San Francisco Public Works' grid system divides the City into smaller geographic units, or keymaps, to help plan and coordinate maintenance activities. Keymaps containing higher concentrations of trees with priority pruning needs – “worst first” – are being prioritized for maintenance. Crews are prune all street trees on blocks within these priority keymaps as part of StreetTreeSF's block pruning approach.

Large Maintenance Projects

Urban Forestry is pruning more trees than it has in decades. Program resources allowing for the increase in pruning and maintenance have kicked off some large, long-awaited maintenance projects, such as the 24th Street Removal and Replacement Project and the Hayes Valley Removal and Replacement Project.

These projects encompass large scopes of work with 25+ trees per project, associated sidewalk repair and coordinated replacement plantings, all on a tight timeline based on the commitments made with the community and Board of Supervisors members and per the Urban Forestry Ordinance.

Each project requires detailed work from Urban Forestry Inspectors outside their regular day-to-day inspections; specific plans drafted on how many and which species of replacement trees will be planted; coordination of contractor crews brought on to conduct the work; and significant public outreach to engage the nearby community.



The City's Urban Forester reviews a ficus tree slated for removal during a walk-through of 24th Street in the Mission with community members.

Tree Planting and Establishment

The rate of tree removals during the initial years of StreetTreeSF exceeds past annual removal rates in San Francisco. This is due to the “worst first” policy to prioritize the removal of trees that pose the biggest threats to public safety.



A Public Works watering truck and landscape crew member fills gator-bags on a row of newly planted trees around Washington Square Park.

StreetTreeSF strategically focuses on funding maintenance operations. Under the voter-approved program, the dedicated funds do not cover new or replacement tree planting or the required three-year establishment period. Tree establishment, which requires weekly watering and more frequent pruning, is the most expensive part of tree planting.

Newly planted trees require weekly irrigation with approximately 20-25 gallons of water for three to four years, depending on their species, size and establishment success rate. By the end of the establishment period, a tree has generated enough roots to keep it alive without supplemental irrigation. Other factors, such as compacted soil, poor urban soil, grass, weeds and ornamental landscape plants, can extend the establishment period.

Formative pruning, sometimes called training or structural pruning, can help achieve good branch structure and reduce future hazards, such as codominant stems and branches hanging over the road. Proper staking and

monitoring ensure the upright development of a tree, so it does not pose a hazard to vehicles on the street. Young tree pruning requires several visits over a span of three to seven years.

Finally, it's a tough life for street trees, especially new, young trees, as they face problems that include vandalism, accidental damage from car doors or big trucks, sandy soil, salty wind, pests and diseases. Site selection and species selection are both a critical first investment of time towards planting new trees.

As important as acquiring and planting a tree is to our urban forest, post-planting and early-year care are fundamental to establishment success. Watering may seem like an easy, low-cost task, but it requires a dedicated person or crew, a reliable and easily accessible water source and equipment. Young tree pruning requires skills training and consistent visits to train the tree. Consistency in care is crucial for street trees growing in an urban environment like San Francisco.



So much effort goes into planting a street tree, but it's the aftercare that determines its survival.

Urban Forestry receives some funding for planting establishment, all of which currently goes to areas of the City experiencing a large number of removals, such as 24th Street in the Mission and Hayes Valley. The impact that those removals have on neighborhoods can seem severe and cause community concern; therefore, prioritizing replacement trees in these areas is very important. Our nonprofit partner, Friends of the Urban Forest, helps with the replacement of trees in these areas, as well.

City crews, Friends of the Urban Forest and Climate Action Now, another nonprofit partner, help water approximately 2,500 trees citywide. These crews begin watering routes as early as 6 a.m. and deliver water to trees by filling gator-bags. This slow-release watering bag is designed to provide an efficient watering means to promote deep root growth.



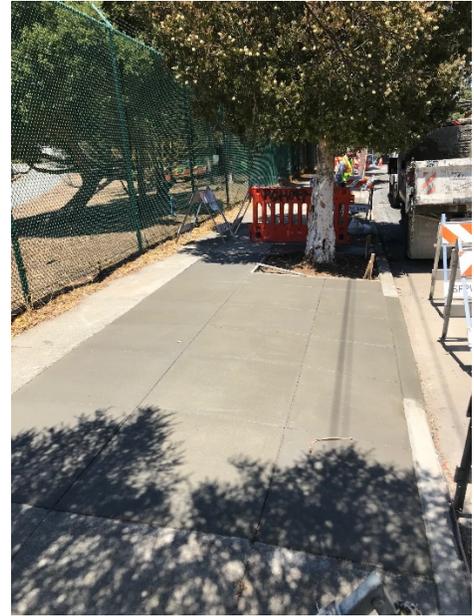
A resident waters a newly planted tree in front of their property.

Residential watering is a big help when it happens. Engaging residents and property owners to invest in a newly planted tree by watering weekly significantly increases the tree's survival chances. When a resident offers to water a street tree and follows through, they help improve our urban forest, and we all can watch as that tree grows and becomes a beautiful addition to our City's green infrastructure.

The removal of dead, diseased and dangerous trees during these first few years of StreetTreeSF has led to ongoing discussions on how best to secure funding to replenish and grow San Francisco's urban forest. Street trees are essential to the livability of San Francisco because of their physical, environmental, health and economic benefits. However, their value only can be realized if new trees are managed effectively from inception and through establishment. This requires a big investment in resources to water and prune young trees.

Sidewalk Repair

As part of StreetTreeSF, Public Works is responsible for the repair of all street tree-related sidewalk damage. In FY 2019-20, Public Works cement crews removed and replaced 144,405 square feet of damaged sidewalk.



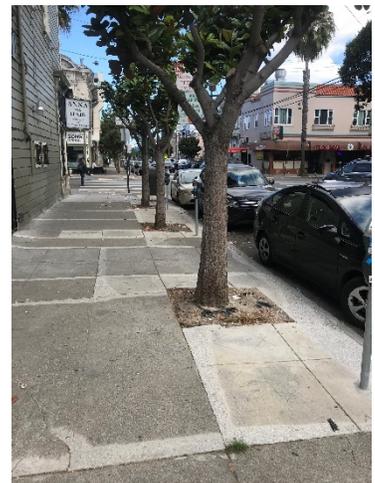
Before and after tree-related sidewalk removal and replacement.

After accomplishing the milestone of repairing the “worst first” sidewalks, StreetTreeSF cement crews now target repairs in areas with less severe damage and are located near vulnerable populations where the volume of pedestrian traffic is high.

Depending on the scale of damage, some tree-related sidewalk damage is repaired by a method known as concrete slicing. In FY 2019-20, our StreetTreeSF contractor sliced 19,434 sites throughout the City. To date, a total of 45,602 sites have been sliced throughout the City.

Concrete slicing utilizes specialized equipment to shave down a raised or buckled sidewalk to remove tree-related tripping hazards. Slicing is a fast, cost-effective and environmentally friendly approach to performing smaller sidewalk repairs (2 inches or less of concrete uplift).

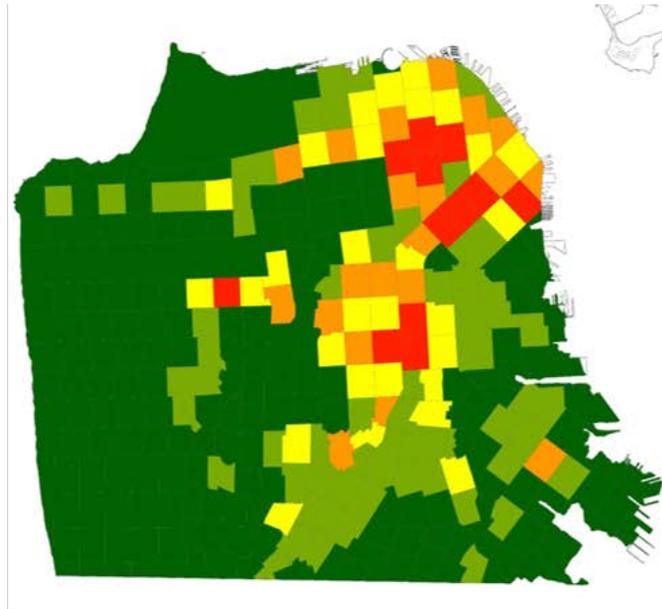
Where damage is more severe, removal and replacement of an existing sidewalk is required. Tree basin expansions also require concrete to be cut away to make room for expanding tree roots or expanding trunks.



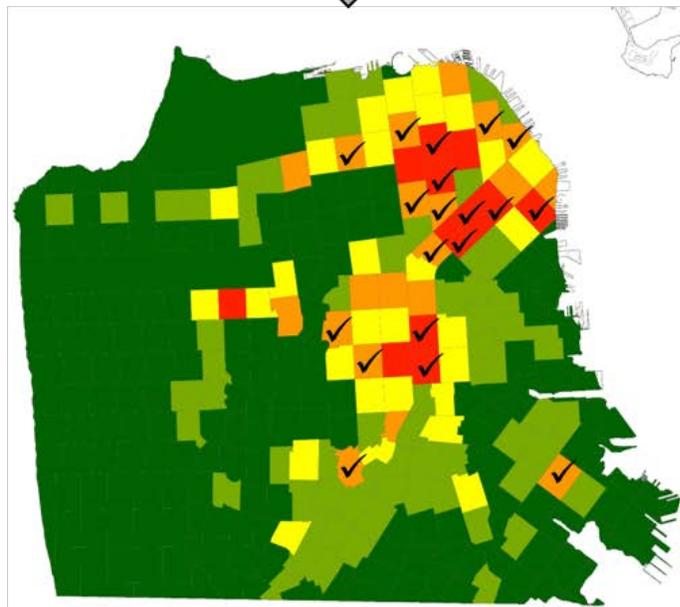
Sidewalk after being treated by concrete slicing. Lighter areas show where raised concrete was shaved down.

Tree-related Sidewalk Damage Areas (Keymaps) Progress

2017



2020



Areas with checkmarks have been completed by StreetTreeSF since the start of the program in 2017. StreetTreeSF prioritizes repair of street tree-related sidewalk damage in areas located near neighborhood commercial corridors, schools, hospitals, senior centers and the Vision Zero high-injury network, also known as “hot spots,” as reflected on the map in red. Repairs in most “hot spot” areas either have been completed or are underway in order to keep pedestrians safe while travelling in high-traffic public rights of way.

Staffing and Training

Staffing Plan and Hiring

To meet the increased workload and demands of StreetTreeSF, the Bureau of Urban Forestry projected a total staffing need of 55 new employees. In FY 2019-20, the Bureau filled four of these positions with the hiring of four Arborists Technicians, but one arborist retired, and another transferred, for a net gain of only two Arborist Technicians. Additionally, the Contracts and Grants Manager took a promotive position at the SFMTA. The Principal Business Analyst has taken over the contracting responsibilities, with help from our Senior Clerk.

The Bureau will continue to work to fill vacant positions with a focus on Arborists Technicians, but continues to encounter existing challenges and future challenges including:

- finding qualified Arborist Technician applicants due to a limited pool of candidates
- working through hiring backlog due to human resources delays impacted by the Covid-19 crisis
- working within the limits of a new budget, cut by \$2.1 million to assist the City with the Covid-19 response
- only hiring Covid-19-related positions after March 2020, leaving vacant positions unfilled for an undetermined amount of time

StreetTreeSF Staffing Plan (2017-2021)

Job Title	Class Number	Existing Positions	StreetTreeSF Funded Positions				Total Potential Staff	Total Current Staff
			Total Additional Positions	HIRED	LEFT	VACANT		
Arborist Tech	3434	13	14	8	5	11	27	16
Arborist Supervisor I	3436	3	3	1	0	2	6	4
General Laborer	7514	0	14	6	0	8	14	6
Principal Administrative Analyst	1824	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Public Information Officer	1312	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Urban Forestry Inspector	3435	5	2	1	0	1	7	6
Senior Clerk	1406	1	1	1	0	0	2	2
Cement Finisher Supervisor I	7227	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Cement Mason	7311	0	4	4	0	0	4	4
Operating Engineer	7328	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Truck Driver	7355	3	1	1	0	0	4	4
Manager IV	932	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Principal Business Analyst	1054	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Management Assistant	1842	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Apprentice Arborist Tech	3408	1	8	0	0	9	9	1
Clerk	1404	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
TOTALS		26	55	27	5	34	81	48

Training and Staff Development

In FY 2019-20, the Bureau invested 761 hours in staff training to ensure safe operations and high-quality service delivery. All staff are required to complete at least 10 hours of professional development training annually. The decrease in training hours this year is primarily due to the COVID-19 health crisis shelter-in-place order. Training completed by Bureau staff includes:

- Line Clearance Arborist Certification (Arborists)
- Cone Delineation/Traffic Control Techniques (Arborists, Cement Masons, Laborers)
- Defensive Driving (All)
- Safety/Code of Safe Practice (All)
- Stump Grinding (Arborists)
- City Pruning Standards (Arborists)



Arborists attend electrical line safety training.

Equipment and Vehicles

To accommodate the increased workload and staffing, the Bureau of Urban Forestry is utilizing StreetTreeSF's funding to purchase equipment and vehicles. In FY 2019-20, the Bureau purchased 12 new and replacement vehicles and other equipment, valued at approximately \$1.8 million. The new equipment included an expanded vehicle fleet (aerial lift bucket trucks, 10-wheel dumps and mini-dumps) and equipment inventory (chippers and stump grinders). The replacement equipment replaced old vehicles with frequent breakdowns and high repair costs.

Current Inventory and New Equipment and Vehicle Purchases (2017-2021)

Item	Before StreetTreeSF	StreetTreeSF Funded Equipment			Total Removed from Service*	Total
		FY 17/18 Purchased Equipment	FY 18/19 Purchased Equipment	FY 19/20 Purchased Equipment		
Aerial Lift Bucket Truck	6	2	5	2	3	12
Knuckle Boom	1	0	0	0		1
Chipper	4	3	1	6		14
Chipper Truck	5	2	0	0	1	6
Stump Grinder	2	0	7	0	2	7
Backhoe Loader	0	1	1	0		2
Saw Truck	0	2	1	0		3

Compressor	1	1	0	0		2
Utility Truck	10	6	9	0		25
10-Wheel Dump Truck	0	0	1	2		3
Mini Dump Truck	1	2	3	2		8
Packer	1	0	0	0		1
Air Compressor	0	0	1	0		1
Mini-Excavator	0	0	1	0		1
TOTALS	31	19	30	12	6	86

*Equipment or vehicles surrendered for not meeting CARB standards or decommissioned due to multiple operational issues that made vehicle unserviceable.

Urban Forest Inspection

Since a tree's condition can change between the time it was assessed during the street tree census and when it is scheduled for pruning, each tree is re-evaluated by a Bureau of Urban Forestry ISA-certified Arborist before any work begins. Once a keymap is identified as upcoming on the maintenance schedule, an Urban Forestry Inspector walks the entire keymap – between 10 to 12 city blocks – to assess each street tree and make maintenance recommendations. The pre-inspection of a keymap is a critical component of StreetTreeSF program that necessitates a substantial amount of time and effort.

In FY 2019-20, Bureau of Urban Forestry Inspectors completed 32,405 internal and public inspection requests. Internal inspections include the inspection of keymap areas before maintenance. Additional inspections are conducted after a keymap has been completed (and sometimes during the specific operation) to check the quality and consistency of the maintenance work being provided. Public inspection activities include responding to public service requests through the 311 customer service center, assessing tree and sidewalk conditions outside of scheduled maintenance, and reviewing development and tree removal permits.

In June 2020, the Urban Forestry Inspection Team prepped for their move to a brand-new building, the City's consolidated permit center located at 49 South Van Ness Avenue. The Inspection Team continued their work amid prep for the move and maintained compliance with COVID-19 Health Order guidance.



Communications and Outreach

Public information and outreach continue to be essential to the success of StreetTreeSF. In its third year, some outreach efforts shifted and focused on much needed and long-awaited maintenance projects the Bureau can now conduct with the resources from StreetTreeSF. Several large removal and replacement projects required targeted communications planning and outreach, including the 24th Street and Hayes Valley Removal and Replacement projects.

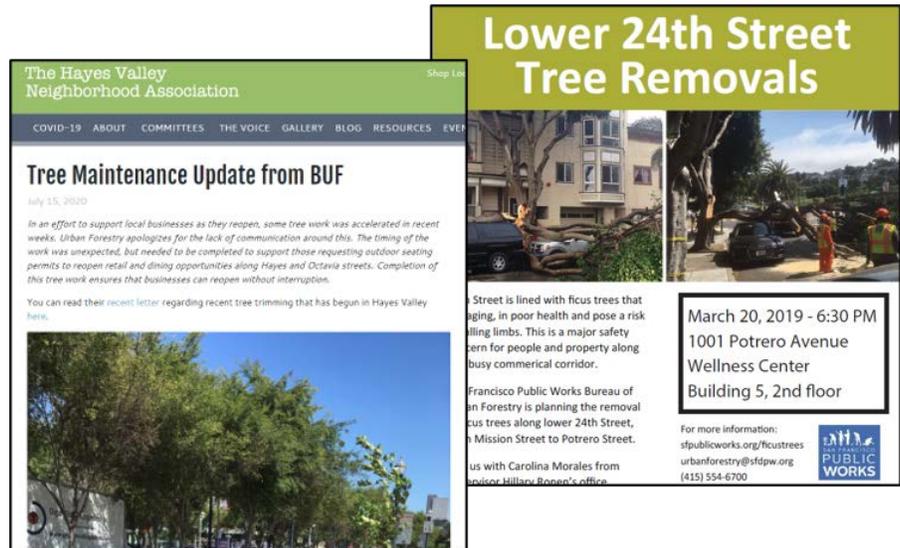
Other outreach efforts have shifted with the public's interests, such as the interest in tree removals which continued to increase due to the resources available through StreetTreeSF. The establishment of the Tree Removal Notification webpage has provided transparency and insight into the Bureau's work. Continual improvements have been made to the StreetTreeSF website (opt-out information, application information, public pruning map, etc.) to improve awareness of the program and its priorities.

The COVID-19 health crisis impacted the program's communications arm as our Public Information Officer (PIO) was reassigned as a Disaster Service Worker for approximately five months. The pause in communications and outreach work impacted day-to-day communications, specific project support and general program exposure, but program communications prior to the COVID-19 health crisis celebrated many accomplishments in FY 2019-20, including:

- Development, launch and continual improvement of the new Tree Removal Notification webpage, the online notification platform for the public to view details associated with tree removals citywide.
- Creation of multilingual collateral material (brochure, flyer and webpage) for the Street Tree Maintenance Agreement (opt-out) and trained the Urban Forestry Inspection Team on materials, agreement and procedure for current and future opt-outs.

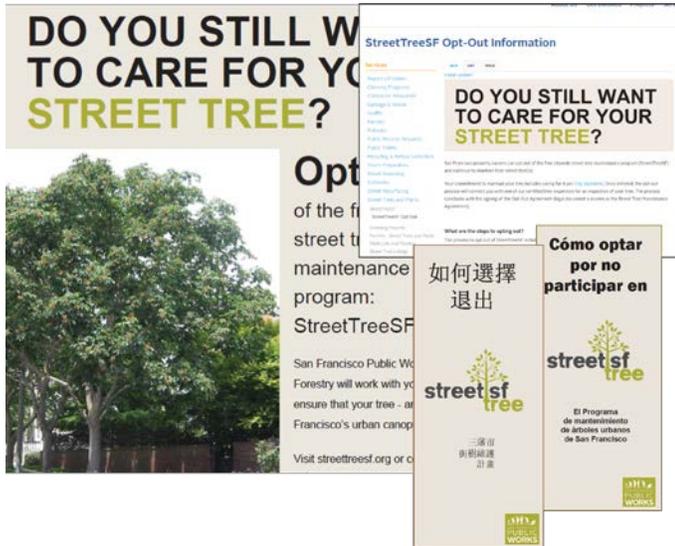
- Development and implementation of communications tailored for the 24th Street Ficus Removal and Replacement Project and the Hayes Valley Ficus Removal and Replacement Project, including community meetings and a walk-throughs with the City's Urban Forester, promotion of meetings through neighborhood flyering, social media and via neighborhood

associations, detailed project scope documents, responding to public inquires and comment, and supporting the City Urban Forester during several hearings to review the appeals made by members of the public.



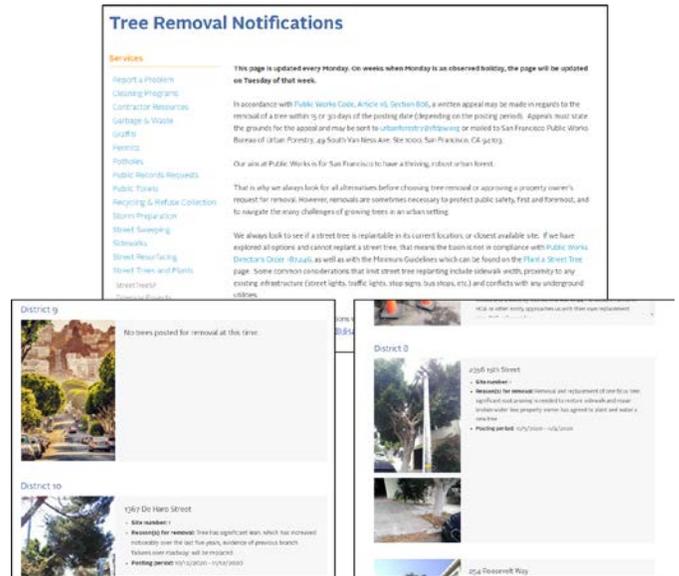
- Tabled at monthly Community Clean Team events (one in each of the 11 supervisors' districts) with multilingual outreach materials (brochures, flyers, information boards), activities and giveaways to educate and inform the public of tree maintenance activities – these activities were paused during the COVID-19 health crisis.
- Revamped online interactive pruning map to make “Complete” vs. “Active” vs. “Planned” keymaps clearer and to provide more information about the completion date or the planned estimated time of pruning for a keymap.
- Added QR code on door hangers, No Parking signs and planting crossbrace stickers for easy, scannable access to StreetTreeSF information at sfpublicworks.org/streettreesf.
- Continued timely distribution of door hangers in keymap area before the start of maintenance activities.
- Continued updates to the Bureau of Urban Forestry's website, including updates to fees, forms and applications.
- Continued Street Tree Care class and “Don't Prune” campaign to educate citation recipients of proper tree care and the role of StreetTreeSF – classes were paused during the COVID-19 health crisis.

Street Tree Maintenance Agreement Brochure/Flyer/Webpage



The StreetTreeSF Street Tree Maintenance agreement allows property owners to opt out of the program with a commitment to care for their tree(s) according to City pruning standards. Material explaining the option is available in English, Spanish and Chinese.

Tree Removal Notification Webpage



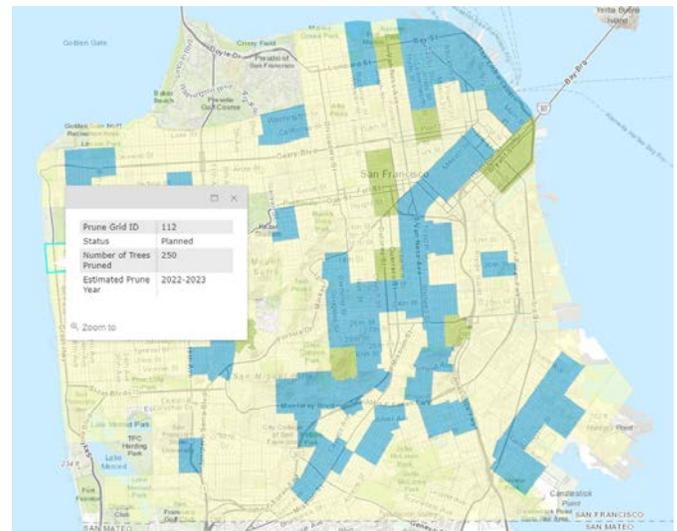
The establishment of the Tree Removal Notification webpage on the SF Public Works website provides transparency on the details of tree removals – a part of StreetTreeSF work that has increased in recent years and captured the attention of tree advocates and the general public alike.

Clean Team



StreetTreeSF tables at monthly Public Works Clean Team events, providing multi-language outreach materials, activities and giveaways to educate and answer questions about tree maintenance activities. Each year there are 11 events, one event in every supervisorial district.

Online Map



The online pruning map available to the public at streettreesf.org/streettreesf clearly identifies completed keymaps, active keymaps and planned keymaps and provides details about completion dates or estimated service time.

Trees at Public Schools (San Francisco Unified School District)

StreetTreeSF’s annual funding includes up to \$500,000 for tree maintenance on SFUSD properties. The Bureau of Urban Forestry works with SFUSD to program these funds to address the school district’s tree-related priorities.

In FY 2019-20, this funding supported contracted maintenance work at Phillip and Sala Burton Academic High School, including removing 40 unsafe trees and the pruning of two trees that were overtaking the school’s roof.



In FY 2019-20, tree removal and pruning work was performed at Phillip and Sala Burton Academic High School (400 Mansell Street).

Financial Summary

In FY 2019-20, StreetTreeSF’s annual budget totaled \$19.4 million. The full amount was programmed and encumbered with the largest amounts dedicated to Bureau of Urban Forestry staff and tree maintenance contractors. Actual expenditures within the fiscal year amounted to \$24 million, as shown in the accompanying table.

Expense	Prior Year Balance	Amount Budgeted	Actuals	Year End Balance
Staff	(\$2,500,000)	\$8,100,000	\$13,100,000*	(\$7,500,000)
Contractors	2,300,00	\$9,500,000	\$7,300,000	\$4,500,000
Equipment & Vehicles	4,200,000	\$1,800,000	\$3,600,000	\$2,400,00
Total	4,000,000	\$19,400,000	\$24,000,000	(\$600,000)

*Staff actuals reflect a combination of hiring, ramped up operations, cost-of-living wage increase, and overhead rate increase.

Due to the fiscal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the StreetTreeSF baseline was reduced by \$2.1 million at the end of FY 2019-20 to aid Citywide General Fund rebalancing efforts.

COVID-19 Impacts and Schedule Delays

Toward the end of FY 2019-20, the COVID-19 health crisis stopped scheduled street tree pruning and tree-related sidewalk repair work for months. Health orders forced City and contractor crews to pause work and reassess safety procedures to accommodate social distancing measures and stock up on personal protective equipment.

Urban Forestry maintained half of its workforce and focused only on essential, emergency projects for the next few months. For internal Public Works tree and cement crews, this meant that all scheduled maintenance work was put on hold and only the most essential work was completed, namely, the highest priority immediate public safety hazards and emergencies. For external contractor crews, this meant all work and contracts issued by Public Works were put on hold with an indefinite timeline.



Work resumed when authorities determined it was safe for field staff to work within new safety guidelines. Crews needed to comply with the guidelines, such as one person per truck to maintain social distancing, which significantly limited the number of staff members in the field. StreetTreeSF contractors were able to return to work. However, along with our internal tree crews, scheduled maintenance work was still on hold, so contractors had to refocus their efforts on emergency work only. This included emergencies throughout the City, such as removing fallen limbs, pedestrian and visibility obstructions and damaged trees. Tree-related sidewalk repair crews also resumed work and refocused efforts from scheduled repair work to repair the highest priority sidewalk damage posing major tripping hazards in public rights of way.



The COVID-19 health crisis also impacted the work that takes place in the office to support the field work. Public Works employees are all considered first responders and can be activated and deployed as needed during an emergency. During the pandemic, our Public Information Officer, Urban Forestry Inspection Team clerk and an Urban Forestry Inspector were assigned to cover COVID-19 assignments as full-time Disaster Service Workers for periods of months. Other Public Works operations staff took on alternate assignments to help address the global pandemic in San Francisco.

Disaster Service Worker deployments and reassignments compounded setbacks for the program. Upon returning to regular assignments, staff picked up day-to-day tasks again but had much catchup to do in terms of special public projects and internal administrative support projects.

In the last three years, StreetTreeSF has advanced closer to a baseline maintenance schedule where routine pruning and sidewalk repair is

standard. But the unexpected pause in work due to an unprecedented public health crisis had a significant impact on tree and sidewalk maintenance activities, and the residual effects will be felt in the scheduling of future maintenance activities.



An overgrown Chinese Elm – an example of how large of a problem deferred maintenance can become.

While StreetTreeSF has accomplished the task of addressing the “worst first” street trees, the greatest challenge continues to be deferred maintenance, particularly now as COVID-19 delays have added months of growth to street trees. Before the COVID-19 hit, deferred maintenance referred to trees that had not received care for many years, in some cases up to 10 to 12 years. Now, as the City is slowly emerging from shelter in place, trees with existing deferred maintenance that have not yet received their first visit from StreetTreeSF have additional new growth, which will demand more of our resources when it comes time to service them. And trees that have been visited and maintained by StreetTreeSF in the last few years have added new growth, which likely will require another maintenance visit sooner rather than later. These impacts also will be felt with the increase in tree-related sidewalk damage and uplift, increasing safety issues in the public rights of way.

StreetTreeSF’s startup phase and initial estimate to get to baseline was 2017–2021. Now, when we factor in COVID-19 delays and the re-prioritizing of the most urgent tree and tree-related sidewalk maintenance needs, we estimate that baseline conditions largely will be achieved by FY 2021-22. Only then will routine maintenance activities begin, including annual inspections of all street trees and pruning on the optimal three- to five-year cycle.



Public Works arborists.



YOUR STREET TREE CARE PROFESSIONAL