San Francisco Planning

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March 23, 2026

Ms. Angela Calvillo, Clerk
Honorable Mayor Lurie
City and County of San Francisco
City Hall, Room 244
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: **Transmittal of Planning Department Case Number 2025-012149PCA:**
Public Works, Administrative, Planning Codes - Street Trees
Board File No. 251211

Planning Commission Action: **Adopted a Recommendation for Approval with Modification**

Dear Ms. Calvillo and Mayor Lurie,

On March 12, 2026, the Planning Commission conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider the proposed Ordinance, introduced by Mayor Lurie, which would amend Section 138.1 of the Planning Code to projects to meet street tree obligations through the payment of an in-lieu fee and reference relevant sections of the Public Works Code, also amended by the Ordinance. At the hearing the Planning Commission adopted a recommendation for approval with modification.

The Commission's proposed modifications were as follows:

- Specify that legalizations of unauthorized dwelling units are exempt from street tree planting requirements in Public Works Code section 806(d)(1), in addition to existing provisions exempting Accessory Dwelling Units.

The proposed amendments are not defined as a project under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c) and 15378 because they do not result in a physical change in the environment.

Mayor, please advise the City Attorney at your earliest convenience if you wish to incorporate the changes recommended by the Commission.

Please find attached documents relating to the actions of the Commission. If you have any questions or require further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Lisa Gluckstein
Manager of Government Affairs

cc: Giulia Gualco-Nelson, Deputy City Attorney
Adam Thongsavat, Aide to Mayor Lurie
John Carroll, Office of the Clerk of the Board

ATTACHMENTS :

Planning Commission Resolution
Planning Department Executive Summary

San Francisco Planning

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PLANNING COMMISSION RESOLUTION NO. 21898

HEARING DATE: March 12, 2026

Project Name:	Public Works, Administrative, Planning Codes - Street Trees
Case Number:	2025-012149PCA
Initiated by:	Mayor Lurie
Staff Contact:	Lisa Gluckstein, Legislative Affairs Lisa.Gluckstein@sfgov.org; 628-652-7475

RESOLUTION ADOPTING A RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROPOSED ORDINANCE THAT WOULD AMEND THE PUBLIC WORKS CODE TO ALLOW DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS TO SATISFY STREET TREE PLANTING REQUIREMENTS THROUGH PAYMENT OF AN IN LIEU FEE OR PROVIDING ALTERNATIVE LANDSCAPING; EXEMPT ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS FROM STREET TREE PLANTING REQUIREMENTS; ELIMINATE APPEALS TO THE BOARD OF APPEALS FOR TREE REMOVALS UNDERTAKEN BY CITY DEPARTMENTS AND COMMISSIONS; AND UPDATE IN LIEU FEE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS; AMENDING THE ADMINISTRATIVE CODE TO CREATE A SEPARATE ACCOUNT WITHIN THE ADOPT-A-TREE FUND TO RECEIVE IN LIEU FEES FOR STREET TREE REQUIREMENTS; AMENDING THE PLANNING CODE TO UPDATE STREET TREE APPLICABILITY REQUIREMENTS; AFFIRMING THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT'S DETERMINATION UNDER THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT; MAKING FINDINGS OF CONSISTENCY WITH THE GENERAL PLAN, AND THE EIGHT PRIORITY POLICIES OF PLANNING CODE, SECTION 101.1; AND MAKING FINDINGS OF PUBLIC NECCESSITY, CONVENIENCE, AND WELFARE UNDER PLANNING CODE, SECTION 302.

WHEREAS, on December 9, 2025 Mayor Lurie introduced a proposed Ordinance under Board of Supervisors (hereinafter "Board") File Number 251211, which would amend Section 138.1 of the Planning Code to projects to meet street tree obligations through the payment of an in-lieu fee and reference relevant sections of the Public Works Code, also amended by the Ordinance;

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission (hereinafter "Commission") conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider the proposed Ordinance on March 12, 2026; and,

WHEREAS, the proposed Ordinance has been determined to be categorically exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act Section 15378 and 15060(c); and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has heard and considered the testimony presented to it at the public hearing and has further considered written materials and oral testimony presented on behalf of Department staff and other interested parties; and

WHEREAS, all pertinent documents may be found in the files of the Department, as the Custodian of Records, at 49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400, San Francisco; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has reviewed the proposed Ordinance; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission finds from the facts presented that the public necessity, convenience, and general welfare require the proposed amendment; and

MOVED, that the Planning Commission hereby adopts a **recommendation for approval with modifications** of the proposed ordinance. The Commission's proposed recommendation is as follows:

- Specify that legalizations of unauthorized dwelling units are exempt from street tree planting requirements in Public Works Code section 806(d)(1), in addition to existing provisions exempting Accessory Dwelling Units.

Findings

Having reviewed the materials identified in the preamble above, and having heard all testimony and arguments, this Commission finds, concludes, and determines as follows:

The Commission finds that the proposed Ordinance allows for increased project flexibility and administrative efficiency while also advancing the City's proactive urban forestry goals. The creation of an in-lieu fee option provides project sponsors—especially those with small-scale residential projects—a predictable alternative to the existing street tree permitting process. This reduces the burden on individual property owners, offering project flexibility that can expedite development. Crucially, the pooled in-lieu fees will be dedicated to a separate account within the Adopt-A-Tree Fund, creating a sustainable funding stream. This resource enhances the Bureau of Urban Forestry's capacity to pursue proactive, city-led tree planting and essential maintenance at scale, which is necessary to achieve the Urban Forest Plan's goal of increasing the city's tree canopy. Furthermore, by directing funds towards Public Works' proactive efforts, the Ordinance advances racial and social equity by allowing the City to pursue planting in low-canopy areas, addressing existing disparities.

General Plan Compliance

The proposed Ordinance and the Commission's recommended modifications are consistent with the following Objectives and Policies of the General Plan:

URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT

Policy 1.4
PROTECT AND PROMOTE LARGE-SCALE LANDSCAPING AND OPEN SPACE THAT DEFINE DISTRICTS AND TOPOGRAPHY.

By creating a predictable in-lieu fee option, the ordinance ensures a steady funding stream for large-scale

City-led tree planting efforts that enhance neighborhood character and citywide landscape identity. Redirecting responsibility from individual property owners to Public Works supports more consistent, coordinated planting aligned with long-term urban design objectives. The ordinance therefore advances the preservation and expansion of district-defining tree canopy in keeping with Policy 1.4.

RECREATION & OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

OBJECTIVE 4
PROTECT AND ENHANCE BIODIVERSITY AND ENCOURAGE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

Policy 4.3
Integrate the protection and restoration of local biodiversity into open space construction, renovation, management, and maintenance

The Ordinance promotes Policy 4.3 by enabling Public Works to use in-lieu fees for planting and watering trees for three years, ensuring that new trees receive the early care necessary for long-term ecological health. Allowing alternative landscaping in situations where trees cannot be planted ensures continuous biodiversity-supportive improvements even when project-level constraints exist. These provisions strengthen the City's capacity to restore and manage its urban forest as a cohesive, sustainable system.

HOUSING ELEMENT

Policy 27
Improve coordination, alignment, shared mission, and functionality of post-entitlement permit processes across agencies and jurisdictions to speed housing construction starts, especially for 100% affordable housing and development agreements.

The ordinance supports Policy 27 by simplifying post-entitlement requirements through the option to satisfy tree-planting obligations with an in-lieu fee, avoiding lengthy permitting processes. By reducing inter-agency bottlenecks and creating a clearer, more predictable process for applicants, the ordinance enhances coordination between Planning, Public Works, and the Department of Building Inspection. This streamlined framework helps accelerate construction starts for all projects, including affordable housing, by minimizing unexpected final-stage delays.

Policy 31
Facilitate small and mid-rise multi-family buildings that private development can deliver to serve middle-income households without deed restriction, including through adding units in lower-density areas or by adding ADUs.

By exempting new Accessory Dwelling Units and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units from street tree requirements, the ordinance removes a cost and permitting barrier that can discourage small-scale infill projects. Providing an in-lieu fee alternative for other eligible projects further reduces administrative burdens that often disproportionately affect small and mid-rise multifamily development. These changes help enable modest, incremental housing additions—particularly ADUs and small-scale expansions—consistent with Policy 31's goal of expanding middle-income housing opportunities.

Planning Code Section 101 Findings

The proposed amendments to the Planning Code are consistent with the eight Priority Policies set forth in Section 101.1(b) of the Planning Code in that:

1. That existing neighborhood-serving retail uses be preserved and enhanced and future opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of such businesses enhanced;

   The proposed Ordinance would not have a negative effect on neighborhood serving retail uses and will not have a negative effect on opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of neighborhood-serving retail.

2. That existing housing and neighborhood character be conserved and protected in order to preserve the cultural and economic diversity of our neighborhoods;

   The proposed Ordinance would not have a negative effect on housing or neighborhood character.

3. That the City's supply of affordable housing be preserved and enhanced;

   The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's supply of affordable housing.

4. That commuter traffic not impede MUNI transit service or overburden our streets or neighborhood parking;

   The proposed Ordinance would not result in commuter traffic impeding MUNI transit service or overburdening the streets or neighborhood parking.

5. That a diverse economic base be maintained by protecting our industrial and service sectors from displacement due to commercial office development, and that future opportunities for resident employment and ownership in these sectors be enhanced;

   The proposed Ordinance would not cause displacement of the industrial or service sectors due to office development, and future opportunities for resident employment or ownership in these sectors would not be impaired.

6. That the City achieve the greatest possible preparedness to protect against injury and loss of life in an earthquake;

   The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on City's preparedness against injury and loss of life in an earthquake.

7. That the landmarks and historic buildings be preserved;

   The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's Landmarks and historic buildings.

8. That our parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas be protected from

development;

The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas.

Planning Code Section 302 Findings.

The Planning Commission finds from the facts presented that the public necessity, convenience and general welfare require the proposed amendments to the Planning Code as set forth in Section 302.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission hereby ADOPTS A RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL WITH MODIFICATIONS of the proposed Ordinance as described in this Resolution.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Commission at its meeting on March 12, 2026.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES:	McGarry, So, Braun, Campbell
NOES:	Williams, Imperial
ABSENT:	Moore
ADOPTED:	March 12, 2026

San Francisco Planning

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
PLANNING CODE TEXT AMENDMENT

HEARING DATE: March 12, 2026

90-Day Deadline: March 19, 2026

Project Name:	Public Works, Administrative, Planning Codes - Street Trees
Case Number:	2025-012149PCA [Board File No. 251211]
Initiated by:	Mayor Lurie / Introduced December 9, 2025
Staff Contact:	Gluckstein, Legislative Affairs sfgov.org; 628-652-7475
Environmental Review:	Not a Project Under CEQA

RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt a Recommendation for Approval**

Planning Code Amendment

The proposed Ordinance would amend the Public Works Code to allow development projects to satisfy street tree planting requirements through payment of an in lieu fee or providing alternative landscaping; exempt accessory dwelling units from street tree planting requirements; and update in lieu fee reporting requirements; amending the Administrative Code to create a separate account within the Adopt-A-Tree Fund to receive in lieu fees for street tree requirements. It would amend the Planning Code to update street tree applicability requirements in line with the aforementioned amendments.

Note that this Ordinance would also modify how appeals to the Board of Appeals for tree removals are undertaken by City departments and commissions, however, that item is beyond the scope of the Commission's review.

The Way It Is Now:

1. The Planning Code requires certain development projects to plant street trees in accordance with the Public Works Code. Under the Public Works Code, one street tree is required for every 20 feet of linear frontage for development projects that (a) construct a new building, (b) add a dwelling unit, (c) add a

curb cut, (d) add a garage, or (e) add 500 gross square feet or more to an existing building.

2. Payment of an in-lieu fee in satisfaction of this tree planting requirement is only authorized when: (1) the project is constructing new accessory dwelling units (ADUs) or the legalizing existing unauthorized dwelling units, (2) the Public Works Director determines that planting of a street tree is impossible, impractical, or unsafe, or (3) the Planning Director and Public Works director agree that overriding City policy renders tree planting inappropriate. Under scenario (3), the Public Works Director may alternatively authorize the planting of alternative landscaping in lieu of a street tree.

3. The Department of Public Works assesses in-lieu fees at the post-entitlement permitting phase prior to the issuance of building permits.

4. In-lieu fees are deposited in the Adopt-A-Tree Fund to be expended solely for the purposes of planting and maintaining trees under the jurisdiction of the Department of Public Works.

The Way It Would Be:

1. New construction Accessory Dwelling Units and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units would be exempt from tree planting requirements under the Public Works Code to align with state law. The criteria for calculating required trees would otherwise remain unchanged.

2. The Planning Code would allow certain development projects to either plant street trees in accordance with existing Public Works Code requirements **or** pay the applicable in-lieu fee ($2,590 per tree for 2025-26). Additionally, in circumstances where tree planting is impossible, impractical, or unsafe, the project would be able to satisfy the tree planting requirement through alternative sidewalk landscaping, subject to Public Works Director specifications.

3. If a project elects to pay the in-lieu fee, the Planning Department would notify the Department of Building Inspection of this fee obligation alongside other development fees.

4. In-lieu fees collected under this program would be deposited into a separate account within the Adopt-A-Tree Fund and would be expended solely for the purposes of planting and watering trees for three years. These fees would be subject to annual Controller's Office reporting.

Background

This Ordinance is part of Mayor Lurie's PermitSF initiative, a citywide effort to modernize and streamline San Francisco's permitting and regulatory processes to reduce delays, improve customer experience, and increase predictability in the City's development review system. The purpose of this Ordinance is to give project sponsors more flexibility in how they meet street tree planting requirements, reduce permitting delays, and allow Public Works to collect fees that support large-scale tree planting efforts.

Issues and Considerations

San Francisco's Urban Forest Plan

Adopted in 2015, San Francisco's Urban Forest Plan establishes a framework for improving the City's tree canopy from 105,000 street trees to 155,000 street trees by 2035. The City adopted this Plan to address the fact that San Francisco has among the smallest tree canopy of major US cities at 13.7%.[1] Additionally, one of the Department's key findings is that the inadequate maintenance funding and fragmented maintenance structure has compromised the health and safety of the City's street trees.

> One of the Department's key findings is that the inadequate maintenance funding and fragmented maintenance structure has compromised the health and safety of the City's street trees.

Emphasizing the value of centralized street tree maintenance and management, the Urban Forest Plan recommends that "[t]he current practice of transferring maintenance responsibility for street trees to private property owners should stop."[2] The proposed Ordinance would align with this overall goal by creating more funding for the Department of Public Works to pursue proactive street tree planting while also placing more trees under its direct responsibility.

> "The current practice of transferring maintenance responsibility for street trees to private property owners should stop." – *excerpt from the Urban Forest Plan*

Project Flexibility

To comply with current street tree planting requirements, a project sponsor must submit a proposed tree and tree well design, seek permit approval from the Bureau of Urban Forestry, construct the proposed tree well, plant the tree, and maintain the young tree through regular watering for at least three years (after which regular watering is typically not necessary). Certain projects subject to tree-planting requirements, such as additions of 500 square feet or more, might not propose alterations to the front façade, setback, or street-adjacent furnishing area. For these projects, requiring a street tree creates a new design and construction obligation that is otherwise unrelated to the project's scope. Allowing an in-lieu fee provides an option to project sponsors who wish to avoid the delay and burden associated with the process of planting a street tree, while still supporting the City's broader urban tree canopy goals.

> Allowing an in-lieu fee provides an option to project sponsors who wish to avoid the delay and burden associated with the process of planting a street tree, while still supporting the City's broader urban

[1] In 2014, the City's urban tree canopy (13.7%), measured by the amount of land covered by trees when viewed from above, was one of the smallest among major U.S. cities, less than Los Angeles (21%), Chicago (17%), and New York (24%). City and County of San Francisco, Planning Department, *Urban Forest Plan (Final)* (San Francisco: City and County of San Francisco, September 23, 2014), accessed March 2, 2026, https://sfplanning.s3.amazonaws.com/default/files/plans-and-programs/planning-for-the-city/urban-forest-plan/Urban_Forest_Plan_Final-092314WEB.pdf, 27.
[2] Ibid., 18.

> tree canopy goals.

Bureau of Urban Forestry Capacity

The Bureau of Urban Forestry (BUF) employs several arborists who staff street tree permitting while also performing a variety of other functions, such as inspections and field work. Because of staffing constraints, down from 6 arborists in 2023 to 3 currently, BUF review of street tree planting permits is a known source of delay for many projects awaiting building permit approvals. Applicants often discover their street tree planting requirements at the very end of the permitting process – leading to frustration and am average 32-day wait for BUF permit approval. Under this proposal, projects may elect to avoid this permitting timeframe by paying the in-lieu fee. Furthermore, reducing the permit review burden on BUF staff allows these arborists to prioritize tree inspection and maintenance work, in addition to planning for and managing contract work for proactive City-led tree planting.

> Because of staffing constraints, review of street tree planting permits is a known source of delay for many projects awaiting building permit approvals.

Other Legislative Changes - Appeals

This Ordinance also proposes two separate changes to the appeals for two types of tree removals, both of which are beyond the scope of the Commission's review. However, a very brief overview of these provisions is provided for context below:

- Public Works removals of hazard trees (i.e., trees that pose an imminent hazard to person or property) would no longer be appealable to the Board of Appeals.
- City-initiated removals of trees on City property would no longer be appealable to the Board of Appeals under the current legislative language. However, staff understands that this provision will be amended to maintain these appeals, subject to certain procedural limitations.

General Plan Compliance

The proposed Ordinance supports multiple General Plan policies by expanding large-scale, City-led tree planting and coordinated urban forest management, thereby enhancing district character, biodiversity, and long-term ecological health. By creating a predictable in-lieu fee option and allowing alternative landscaping, the Ordinance strengthens the City's ability to implement cohesive urban forestry improvements while reducing permitting burdens that can delay housing projects. These streamlining measures also improve inter-agency coordination and remove barriers for small-scale and ADU development, advancing policies that facilitate timely housing delivery and incremental housing production citywide.

Racial and Social Equity Analysis

The proposed Ordinance advances racial and social equity by dedicating in-lieu fees from developers—who benefit from reduced administrative burden—to a fund for proactive, City-led street tree planting and maintenance by the Department of Public Works. This strategy may help address the existing disparity in urban tree canopy, which often aligns with socio-economic and racial factors, by allowing Public Works to prioritize planting in low-canopy areas. The potential negative impact of fewer immediate on-site tree plantings is mitigated by the strategic use of the pooled funds to advance environmental equity at a wider scale, in alignment with the City's environmental justice goals. Furthermore, the Ordinance requires the City to track both fee collection sources and expenditures to ensure tree planting funds are being used appropriately and in accordance with the City's racial and social equity goals.

Implementation

The Department has determined that this Ordinance will impact our current implementation procedures in the following ways:

- Planning Department staff would be responsible for determining whether street tree planting requirements are triggered and would inform project applicants of their tree planting obligations or in-lieu fee obligations.
- If a project applicant elects to proceed with tree planting, Planning would refer the applicant to the Bureau of Urban Forestry for permitting under the existing system;
- If a project applicant elects to proceed with in-lieu fee payment, then the planner would include this fee amount in the Planning Approval Letter alongside other project fee obligations. Payment of these fees must be submitted prior to building permits issuance.

Recommendation

The Department recommends that the Commission *adopt a recommendation for approval* of the proposed Ordinance and adopt the attached Draft Resolution to that effect.

Basis for Recommendation

The Department finds that the proposed Ordinance allows for increased project flexibility and administrative efficiency while also advancing the City's proactive urban forestry goals. The creation of an in-lieu fee option provides project sponsors—especially those with small-scale residential projects—a predictable alternative to the existing street tree permitting process. This reduces the burden on individual property owners, offering project flexibility that can expedite development. Crucially, the pooled in-lieu fees will be dedicated to a separate account within the Adopt-A-Tree Fund, creating a sustainable funding stream. This resource enhances the Bureau of Urban Forestry's capacity to pursue proactive, city-led tree planting and essential maintenance at scale, which is necessary to achieve the Urban Forest Plan's goal of increasing the city's tree canopy. Furthermore, by directing funds towards Public Works' proactive efforts, the Ordinance advances

racial and social equity by allowing the City to pursue planting in low-canopy areas, addressing existing disparities.

Required Commission Action

The proposed Ordinance is before the Commission so that it may adopt a recommendation of approval, disapproval, or approval with modifications.

Environmental Review

The proposed amendments are not defined as a project under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(2) and 15378 because they do not result in a physical change in the environment.

Public Comment

The Clerk of the Board of Supervisors received approximately 125 public comment letters for this Ordinance. This includes several letters that were transmitted multiple times by the same individuals, and other form letters that were transmitted by many individuals, and a letter from the San Francisco Forest Alliance. The Department reviewed and included for this Commission's review approximately 16 unique letter texts that reflect the letters received. The comment letters also include an Action Network petition for "Protect San Francisco Trees!" with 583 signatories submitted by Joshua Klipp. Those letters are attached.

ATTACHMENTS:

Exhibit A: Draft Planning Commission Resolution
Exhibit B: Board of Supervisors File No. 251211
Exhibit C: Letters of Opposition

Portions of this report were drafted and/or edited with the assistance of Microsoft Copilot, in accordance with the City and County of San Francisco's policy on the use of generative AI tools.