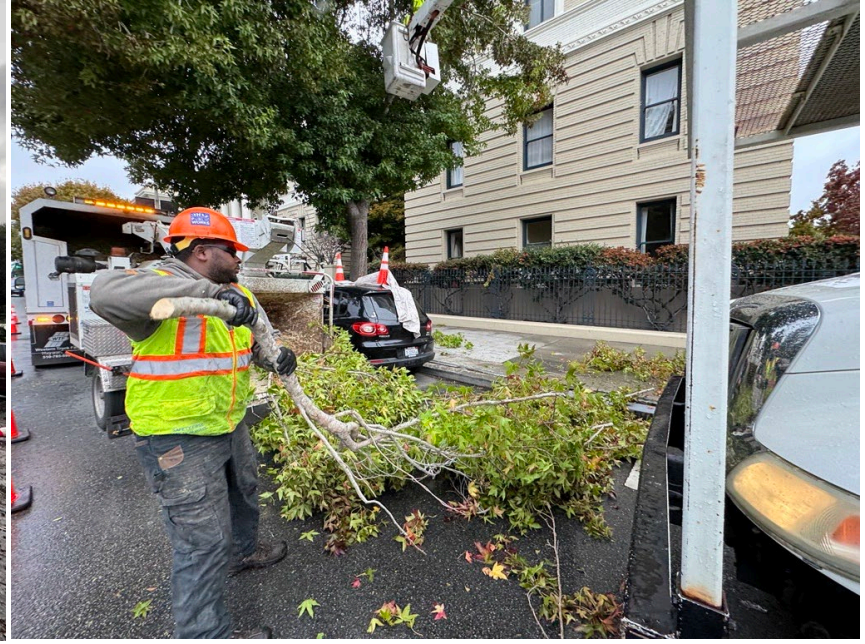


July 27, 2026 – Land Use and Transportation Committee

Street Tree Standards, Appeals and Adopt-A-Tree Fund

Ian Schneider, Public Works Government Affairs
David Moore, Public Works Urban Forestry

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC WORKS

Mission and Vision

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

Trees are more than just beautiful additions to urban life. They are an essential component of the City's ecosystem and provide enormous environmental and social benefits. They help manage stormwater, reduce air pollution, sequester carbon, save energy, increase property values, provide wildlife habitat, calm traffic, provide a more pleasant pedestrian experience and benefit human health.

Bureau of Urban Forestry Operations

- Manages 125,000+ public street trees
- 24/7 tree emergency response
- Issues tree permits & reviews development plans
- Prunes 10,000 trees annually
- 3,800+ tree inspections per year
- Partners to plant/water ~4,000 trees yearly
- Repairs 25,000 sq ft of sidewalk damage yearly, plus delivers other cement projects
- Maintains medians, boulevards and landscaping
- Maintains medians, boulevards and landscaping public street trees

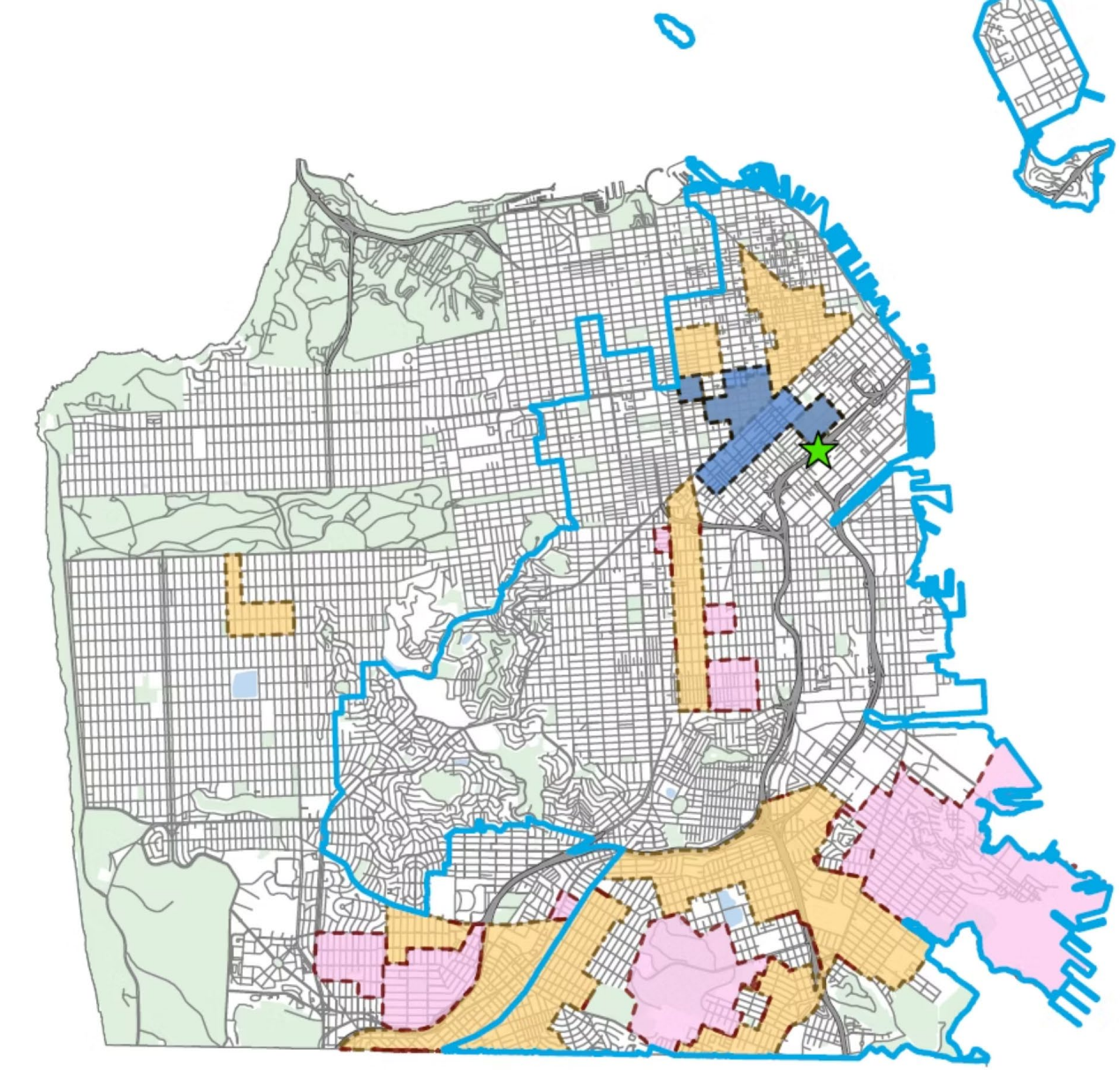
SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC WORKS

Proactive Planting and Maintenance

How More Funding Could Be Deployed

- Plant trees **where canopy is needed most**, including on low-canopy corridors beyond the subject property
- Expand existing **Friends of the Urban Forest** planting projects
- Deploy funds in areas **outside grant-restricted geographies**

This change also would advance the **Urban Forest Plan** goal of having the City take on more of the early care of newly planted street trees.



Legislative Overview

1 In-Lieu Fee

- Allow smaller projects to choose between in-lieu fee or planting trees. Large projects (50k+ sf) would be subject to tree planting.
- Exempt ADUs.

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2 Appeals of City-Initiated Removals on City Land

- Appeal options remain subject to timing limitations

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3 Appeals of Hazard Tree Removals

- Retain appeal to Public Works Director and eliminate appeal to Board of Appeals

Tree Planting Requirements and In-Lieu Fee Option

- Eligible projects may choose to plant a tree via the Public Works permit process *or* pay the in-lieu fee.
- All ADUs exempt from street tree planting, aligning local code with state law (Gov. Code §66323).
- Planning Department notifies project sponsors of tree obligations earlier — at the Planning Approval stage via the Planning Approval Letter.
- In-lieu fees paid into the Adopt-A-Tree Fund dedicated solely for tree planting and watering, subject to Controller's Office reporting.

- Large projects (those subject to Better Streets Plan requirements) would not be able to fee out unless planting is not possible.
- Smaller projects could still elect to fee out.

Appeals of City-Initiated Tree removals

City-initiated removals of trees on City property remain subject to two appeal pathways:

(1) Public Works Director and

(2) Board of Appeals

Under the proposed ordinance, appeals to Board of Appeals must be scheduled within 15 days and acted upon within 30 days to address open-ended delays.

Hazard Trees Updates

Trees considered to be "hazards" are posted for removal for a 15-day period.

Amendment today will restore public appeal to the Public Works Director and eliminate Board of Appeals appeal.

What qualifies as a Hazardous Tree?

A “hazardous tree" is a tree that poses an imminent hazard to person or property.

The Public Works Director may determine that a tree is a hazard if it or any part of it:

1. **appears dead, dangerous, or likely to fall,** even after proper maintenance activities are performed to eliminate dead or dangerous parts;
2. **obstructs or damages a street sidewalk,** or other existing structure;
3. harbors a serious disease or infestation threatening the health of other trees;
4. interferes with vehicular or pedestrian traffic; or
5. poses any **other significant hazard** or potential hazard, as determined by the Public Works Director, provided,

However, that feasible measures have been applied to abate any such hazard, such as applicable maintenance activities as defined in Section 802 of the Public Works Code.

Street Trees posted for removal in FY26

37	37	191
Hazardous trees	Emergency trees	Other trees

- Planned sidewalk repair that require tree removals
- Trees that are in decline, but are small
- Trees that could become hazardous in a 1-year timeframe
- Permit related removals where trees are significant trees on private property with foundation repair
- Trees posted for City construction/streetscapes/capital improvement

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC WORKS

Main Library

7-month appeals process, 3 tree failures

The Main Library block had 17 Ficus trees with documented reverse taper — a known indicator of imminent root failure — yet the appeals process delayed action for years.

- Main Library applied to remove in 2019. Many protests; Main Library withdrew their application.
- In May 2021, tree fell on Public Works truck. BUF initiated tree removal, went all the way to Board of Appeals.
- During wait for Board of Appeals, 1 additional tree failed on Hyde Street.
- Only 8 of 17 trees permitted for removal after 7-month-long appeals process (Board of Appeals Decision issued 12/2021).
- In September 2023, a tree denied for removal failed on Grove Street.
- Remaining Ficus trees are still in poor condition — the risk has not been fully resolved.

11 Hyde St.

Main Library Site Ficus Failure

Summary of Amendments

	Existing Code	Version 1	Proposed Amendments
In-Lieu Fee	All projects subject to tree planting requirements must plant trees unless impossible, impractical or unsafe.	All projects subject to tree planting requirements may elect to fee out.	Large projects (those subject to Better Streets Plan requirements) would not be able to fee out unless planting is not possible. Smaller projects could still elect to fee out.
Street Tree Removal on City Land	Removals of street trees are subject to: (1) 30-day notice period, (2) appeal to Director of Public Works, and (3) appeal to Board of Appeals.	Eliminated appeals for City-initiated removals on City land.	Appeals are restored. Appeals to Board of Appeals must be scheduled within 15 days of filing and acted upon within 30 days of filings.
Hazard Tree Removals	Removals of hazard street trees subject to: (1) 15-day notice period, (2) appeal to Director of Public Works, and (3) appeal to Board of Appeals.	Eliminated appeals for removals of hazard street trees.	**[Sup. Mahmood Amendment to be made in Committee]** Removals of hazard street trees subject to: (1) 15-day notice period, (2) appeal to Director of Public Works, but no appeal to Board of Appeals.
Other	-	-	Clarify and reduce redundancy in Planning Code language.

THANK YOU

Appendix

Hazard Tree Removal Notice

Aviso de Corte de Árbol de Peligro

緊急樹木移除通知

The Director of Public Works has determined that this tree is an immediate public safety hazard and meets departmental criteria for removal.

Location: _____ # of trees: _____

Reason(s) for removal:

- ☐ Dead, dangerous, or likely to fall (immediate structural hazard)
- ☐ Obstructing or damaging a street, sidewalk, or other existing infrastructure
- ☐ Tree has serious disease that threatens the health of other trees
- ☐ Interfering with vehicular or pedestrian traffic
- ☐ Poses other significant hazard:

Will tree be replaced?

- ☐ Yes, meets all planting guidelines
- ☐ Yes, unless conflicting underground utilities found
- ☐ No because:
  - ☐ Inadequate spacing between adjacent trees
  - ☐ Conflict with underground utilities identified
  - ☐ Other:

This tree removal notice must remain posted from _____ to _____

For more information / Para más información / 想要查询更多信息

Bureau of Urban Forestry, 49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1000, San Francisco, CA 94103

(628) 652-TREE (8733), urbanforestry@sfdpw.org, sfpublicworks.org/tree-removal-notification