Medford City Council
Medford, Massachusetts

| MEETING DATE | SPONSORED BY |
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| March 10, 2026 | Anna Callahan, City Councilor |

## AGENDA ITEM

**26-055** - Motion to Properly Fund Medford's Tree Canopy

## FULL TEXT AND DESCRIPTION

Whereas the goal of government of the City of Medford is to create a sustainable, vibrant, and equitable community through focused investment in housing, economic development, and infrastructure as stated in our 30-year Comprehensive Plan,

Whereas Medford's tree canopy is a vital part of the City's infrastructure that helps to create our sustainable, vibrant, and equitable community and has a replacement value of $21,822,291,

Whereas climate change exacerbates flooding and summer heat,

Whereas Medford's urban tree canopy reduces surface temperatures by up to 20°F in shaded areas, cleans the air, reduces flooding and enhances public health,

Whereas in Medford, our 9,866 public trees mitigate 2,245,080 gallons of stormwater each year, sequester 211,980 pounds of carbon each year, remove 6,060 pounds of air pollutants each year, and store a cumulative 11,353,660 pounds of carbon over their lifetime,

Whereas tree-lined streets are linked to increased walking activity and improved physical and mental health.

Whereas trees provide important services to the City and its residents, and are a public good, whether they are on private property or public property,

Whereas the residents of the city are adversely impacted by the hot summers, flooding, and air pollution,

Whereas Environmental Justice (EJ) communities often have less canopy, fewer green spaces, lower air quality, and higher summer heat, than other areas of the city and have experienced a greater rate of canopy loss over time,

Whereas a predominance of pavement and buildings and lack of trees and green space results in heat islands, which are areas of extreme heat,

Whereas the city now has an inventory of trees that shows the condition of each tree on its streets and in its parks, and an Urban Tree Management Plan,

Whereas the city's tree canopy in City Rights-of-Ways declined at a rate of 1.67% per year from 2015 to 2021,

Whereas the canopy coverage in Medford's urbanized areas was approximately 35% citywide in 2015 and is now approximately 20%,

Whereas the city removes more trees than it plants per year,

Whereas the city has 912 vacant planting sites and 424 sites with stumps that are suitable for trees on city streets, and 9,880 public trees on Medford-owned land or within the public right-of-way, as surveyed in the Medford Tree Inventory,

Whereas a diverse canopy is a resilient canopy, and whereas, in contrast, Medford's canopy has a preponderance of two species, Norway maples (21.3%) and Callery pear (17.9%), which are invasive, nonnative and on the State's Prohibited Plant List,

Whereas tree canopy is declining citywide, with the greatest losses in residential, right-of-way, and Environmental Justice areas where heat and flooding risks are highest,

Whereas the City's trees are stressed by periodic droughts that are exacerbated by climate change and this stress weakens and kills trees and whereas these problems can be mitigated with appropriate care,

Whereas all recently planted trees need water,

Whereas pruning is necessary to improve the longevity of older trees and the proper growth of young trees,

Whereas increasing resources for planting and managing the urban forest could stem the decline of our valuable tree canopy,

Whereas facilitating the planting of trees on city streets by volunteers could save the city money because contractor-planted ball and burlap trees cost seven to ten  times the cost of bare root trees planted by volunteers,

Whereas if Medford increases its annual public tree planting of 200 trees by the end of 2025,maintaining 22% canopy cover on City-managed land by 2030 would require planting roughly 840 trees annually for the next five years,

Whereas the requirements for volunteer planting of trees include identifying a site or sites that are amenable to group planting of trees, a city requirement for liability insurance by the volunteer group, a requirement for informed supervision of volunteer planting, a commitment of the city to water the trees that are planted,

Whereas if Medford increases its annual citywide tree planting of 200 trees by the end of 2025, maintaining 20% canopy cover in urbanized lands by 2030 would require planting roughly 2,360 trees annually for the next five years; now, therefore:

Be it resolved that the City Council urge the administration to fund the full implementation of the Urban Tree Management Plan,

Be it further resolved that the City Council will embed tree and canopy protection requirements into zoning,

Be it further resolved that the City Council urges the administration to embed tree and canopy protection requirements into permitting, capital projects, development processes and resource allocation, development review processes and all relevant City decisions and policies throughout the budgeting, management and administration of the city,

Be it further resolved that the City Council will set a goal of 35% canopy cover in residential areas to be achieved in the next 10 years,

Be it further resolved that the City Council request that the administration allocate resources in the upcoming budget to hiring additional staff or contracting to prune, water and care for the City’s trees in regular maintenance cycles, and annually update the tree inventory,

Be it further resolved that the City Council request that the administration allocate resources in the upcoming budget to watering trees planted in the last three years and large trees that the city tree inventory has shown to be in fair to poor condition, on a weekly basis in dry periods during the growing season,

Be it further resolved that the City Council request that the administration obtain yearly LIDAR aerial photography datasets to enable it to monitor the tree canopy throughout the city and assess progress toward goals,

Be it further resolved that the City Council request that the administration allocate resources to ramp up municipal tree planting from 200 to 400 trees per year by 2027,

Be it further resolved that the City Council request that the administration allocate resources in the upcoming budget to foster the volunteer planting of city trees through partnerships with community organizations, by enhancing its budget for trees that are planted by volunteers, by identifying appropriate species for particular tree pits, by ensuring that the appropriate liability insurance can be obtained and funding it if necessary, by agreeing upon protocols for planting trees with appropriate supervision, and otherwise removing barriers and obstacles to volunteer planting, such that volunteers can plant trees by fall of 2026,

Be it further resolved that the City Council request that the administration prioritize locations for planting trees, especially trees that will be large in areas of low canopy, and especially in Management Zones 2 and 3, which roughly encompass the neighborhoods of Wellington, East Medford, Hillside, and South Medford as described in the Urban Forest Management Plan.

## RECOMMENDATION

## FISCAL IMPACT

## ATTACHMENTS

None