

LA County and LA City UFMP

Neighborhood Workshop Summary

Saturday, February 24, 2024,

11:00 AM to 1:00 PM

Kaiser Permanente Watts Medical Offices / Watts Counseling & Learning Center

1465 E 103rd St, Los Angeles, CA 90002

Introduction

On February 24, 2024, the Los Angeles City 15th District, led by Councilmember Tim McOsker and in collaboration with the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) team, hosted a community workshop to gather feedback for shaping the priorities of the UFMP. This event, in partnership with North East Trees and the UFMP team of both Los Angeles County and City, was conducted at the Kaiser Permanente Watts Medical Offices / Watts Counseling & Learning Center in Watts, California, drawing participation from 43 members of the Watts community.

Commencing at 11:00 AM, the workshop offered a valuable opportunity for local residents to share their perspectives and goals. A pivotal part of our community outreach and engagement strategy was the canvassing of 350 residences affiliated with the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) in the Jordan Downs, Nickerson Gardens, and Imperial Courts public housing. This hands-on approach enabled effective communication with a significant segment of the community, allowing North East Trees staff to establish a connection with HACLA's management and its diverse, primarily low-income residents. The workshop facilitated constructive dialogue on the community's needs, significantly advancing the collaborative efforts to develop the Los Angeles Urban Forest Master Plan.

Workshop

At North East Trees, our approach is encapsulated by the philosophy of *Radical Welcome*, which aims to create an environment reminiscent of the warmth and inclusivity one might find in a friend's home or that of a beloved relative. This approach marks a shift from traditional to transformational engagement, inviting participants into a communal space enriched with cultural foods and conversations before commencing formal proceedings. The program began with a greeting from Aaron Thomas, the Director of Urban Forestry at North East Trees, who subsequently introduced Stephanie Lane Pavón, MIG Project Manager and Strategic Planner, and Rachel Malarich, City of Los Angeles Urban Forest Officer. The initial presentation provided

a concise overview, outlined ways for the community to remain engaged in the process, and described the workshop's structure.

Following the presentation, attendees engaged in various activities across six distinct stations arranged throughout the venue. Below, we summarize the feedback and input collected during the neighborhood workshop.

Vision, Values, Storytelling

Attendees were asked to share their vision and values for the urban forest using post-it notes. Their vision and values include:

- The community envisions a future with a profound spiritual and cultural bond with nature, particularly with trees. This vision includes an increased awareness and appreciation for the surrounding environment, fostering a deeper understanding and respect for nature's role in our lives and cultural practices.
- The goal is to transform Watts into a verdant, tree-filled area providing ample space for children to engage in outdoor play. This green environment promotes physical health, mental well-being, and a safe, natural space for community interaction and childhood development.
- The community expresses a desire to plant more fruit trees throughout the neighborhood. This initiative aims to improve public health and address food deserts by giving residents easy access to fresh fruits, encouraging healthier eating habits, and fostering community engagement through shared gardening responsibilities and harvests.
- There is a vision to line the sidewalks of Watts with trees, creating shaded, inviting pathways for pedestrians. This greening effort aims to enhance the neighborhood's aesthetic appeal, reduce urban heat, and encourage walking and other forms of active transportation.
- The community aspires to establish gardens filled with medicinal plants accessible to all residents. These gardens would serve as a resource for natural health remedies and education about traditional and herbal medicine, promoting well-being and self-sufficiency in the community.
- Looking ahead, there is a collective aspiration for Watts to develop a more harmonious and integrated relationship with nature and trees over the next two decades. This vision encompasses enhanced environmental education, greater community involvement in green initiatives, and a shared commitment to preserving and nurturing the local ecosystem.
- The community advocates for integrating trees and green spaces within all K-12 school grounds in Watts. This initiative aims to provide students with a direct connection to

nature, enhancing their learning environment, supporting ecological education, and fostering a sense of stewardship towards the environment from an early age.

- The ultimate vision is for every neighborhood within Watts to have its own natural park. These parks would serve as vital green spaces for recreation, community gathering, and environmental education, ensuring all residents have equal access to nature and its benefits.

Community members were also encouraged to share a story about trees that support their vision and values. Stories could be shared through an audio recording posted to social media using the hashtag #UrbanForestLA, using a post-it, drawing a picture, or writing their story in their agenda/comment sheet. The following stories were captured via audio interviews:

- *“I think it's extremely important not just for their [HACLA Residents] physical health when they go outside and they're able to breathe in the fresh air, but also for their mental health. When you see green, and you see trees, it makes you feel a lot better. I know there's a correlation between people not getting dementia and seeing more wood in green, so I definitely think it not just impacts them physically but also mentally.”* Elizabeth Aguilar, HACLA Green Ambassador—Nickerson Gardens and Imperial Courts.
- *[SP interview] “A los árboles, y cómo se deben cuidar, y qué necesitamos para cuidarlos para que nos den buena sombra y para que nos den buen beneficio. Para mí, si salgo a caminar y hay árboles, me voy por la sombrita y camino a gusto, y si hace calor, sirve mucho. Y para mí, ese es un beneficio. Y si hay una banquita por ahí, pues uno se sienta debajo de un árbol y ya se relaja.”* Eunice Martinez, Age 75, Watts Resident—Jordan Down
- *[SP interview translation] “About the trees, and how they should be cared for, and what we need to do to take care of them so that they provide us with good shade and so that they offer us great benefits. For me, if I go out for a walk and there are trees, I head for the shade and walk comfortably, and if it's hot, it's very helpful. And for me, that is a benefit. And if there's a bench around, then one can sit down under a tree and just relax.”* Eunice Martinez, Age 75, Watts Resident—Jordan Down
- *“When I was born my dad, his responsibility was to get the placenta and the umbilical cord and bury it and plant a tree over it. And that was a lesson that showed that it was the importance of that tree and grounded us and rooted us back and the connection back to our Mother Earth, that one day we would go back into that Mother Earth to continue the cycle of life.”* Saul Figueroa, Compton Resident and Native Huichol.

Benefits of Trees

Community members were asked to indicate which benefits from trees mattered most to them. These are the major themes among the choices and comments from participants:

Shade/cooling

- In light of global warming and rising temperatures, community members emphasized the increasing necessity of shade for future well-being, arguing that access to shade should not be considered a luxury but a fundamental human right due to its critical role in protecting individuals from harmful UV rays and excessive heat.

Habitat for wildlife

- The local community recognized the essential role trees play as habitats for wildlife, pointing out that the survival of many animal species is intricately linked to tree populations, which provide shelter, food, and nesting sites.

Food/fruit

- No reasons were given in this section.

Clean air

- The importance of clean air was highlighted, focusing on how trees contribute to air purification. This is especially pertinent in reducing asthma rates, as trees absorb pollutants and produce oxygen, improving public health.

Stormwater capture

- Regarding stormwater capture, the community pointed out that trees play a vital role in absorbing water, which helps to prevent runoff and flooding, keeping water in the soil and away from the streets, thus mitigating the effects of heavy rainfall.

Mental health

- The positive impact of trees on mental health was a significant point of discussion, with community members noting that trees contribute to joy and peace, suggesting that their presence in a community can lead to improved mental well-being for its residents.

Physical health

- Regarding physical health, it was noted that walking in natural environments, particularly those filled with trees, supports overall well-being and promotes better physical health, as it encourages exercise and provides a serene environment for activity.

Cultural significance/importance

- The cultural significance of trees was acknowledged, with community members expressing how trees foster a deeper connection to Mother Earth. Additionally, fruit trees were noted for their particular importance across various cultures, highlighting their role in cultural traditions and practices.

Beauty/aesthetics

- Aesthetically, trees were recognized for their ability to enhance the beauty of a community, contributing to a more pleasant and attractive environment, which in turn fosters a sense of pride and positivity among residents.

Sense of place

- Trees were also noted for their role in creating a sense of place, with their presence helping to define and improve the quality of community spaces, making them more welcoming and livable.

Other

- No reasons were given in this section.

Concerns and Priorities

Attendees were asked to share what their greatest concerns are related to trees. These are the major themes among the choices and comments from participants:

Mess (leaves/flowers/fruits)

- No reasons were given in this section.

Maintenance (cost/need)

- The community emphasized the need for better education regarding tree maintenance, suggesting a lack of knowledge and resources available to residents on properly caring for urban trees, which could lead to more effective and efficient maintenance practices.

Hazards (falling trees/limbs)

- No reasons were given in this section.

Power lines (obstructed)

- Regarding power lines, there is a recognized danger in having trees too close to them. This could lead to power outages or pose safety risks if trees or branches fall and disrupt the lines, suggesting a need for careful planning and regular trimming.

Sidewalks (lifted/broken)

- The issue of lifted or broken sidewalks in Watts was acknowledged, with residents clarifying that many of these issues are not caused by trees. However, they also suggested that trees might improve the aesthetics and condition of dilapidated streets, indicating a nuanced view of the impact of urban forestry on infrastructure.

Street lights (blocked)

- The community noted the problem of broken street lights, stating that this issue is prevalent enough to overshadow any potential obstruction caused by trees. Additionally, the lack of adequate street lighting was highlighted as a factor contributing to feelings of unsafety in the neighborhood, suggesting a need for improved urban infrastructure independent of the urban forest.

Pipes (broken)

- There was a complaint about the slow response of the City of Los Angeles in fixing broken pipes, indicating concerns about water management and infrastructure maintenance that could affect tree health and community safety.

Fire risk

- No reasons were given in this section.

Pests

- The issue of pests was raised, with concerns that they can lead to health problems for residents, underlining the need for pest management in maintaining a healthy urban forest.

Water use

- No reasons were given in this section.

Other safety concerns

- Lastly, there were safety concerns regarding the consumption of fruit from trees grown in Watts, questioning whether environmental pollution might affect the safety of consuming such fruit, indicating a need for environmental testing and public health guidance.

Other

- No reasons were given in this section.

Neighborhood Needs

When sharing where trees need to be **maintained or preserved**, community members shared reasons why the following places are important:

Front and backyards:

- During the meeting, residents raised questions about the costs associated with proper tree trimming, seeking clarity on why tree maintenance is perceived as expensive. This concern reflects the community's desire to maintain and preserve trees in their front and backyards. Still, it highlights a need for accessible information on affordable tree care services and the justification behind the costs involved.

Specific locations mentioned include:

- none

Schools:

- In the context of local schools, there was a strong call for adding more trees in playgrounds and around school buildings. This initiative stems from the concern that school classrooms are becoming increasingly hotter, impacting the learning environment. Community members believe that planting more trees can provide natural cooling through shade, thus creating a more conducive and comfortable educational setting.

Specific locations mentioned include:

- none

Sidewalks/medians/right-of-way:

- The conversation around sidewalks, medians, and rights-of-way focused on the potential of trees to enhance the aesthetic and functional aspects of streets, making them more enjoyable and inviting for residents. Furthermore, it was suggested that the presence of trees could encourage more people to walk by providing shade and beautifying walking paths, thus promoting a healthier lifestyle among community members.

Specific locations mentioned include:

- none

Parks:

- Regarding parks, the community expressed a desire for more trees to provide additional shade. This is based on the understanding that increased tree coverage in parks would enhance the usability and enjoyment of these public spaces, particularly during warmer months, enabling residents to engage in outdoor activities comfortably and safely.

Specific locations mentioned include:

- none

Other:

- none

Specific locations mentioned include:

- none

Places that were noted by attendees that **need planted trees** include:

Front and backyards:

- none

Specific locations mentioned include:

- none

Schools:

- none

Specific locations mentioned include:

- none

Sidewalks/medians/right-of-way:

- none

Specific locations mentioned include:

- none

Parks

- none

Specific locations mentioned include:

- none

Other

- none

Specific locations mentioned include:

My Role in the Urban Forest

These are the roles community members currently hold in the urban forest:

- Enjoy trees
- Learn about trees
- Care for trees
- Speak for trees
- Plant trees
- Work with trees

Attendees mentioned currently participating in certain roles for various reasons. A summary of these comments is below:

- Enjoy trees:
 - During the neighborhood meeting, concerns were raised about the limitations faced by residents living in low-income housing, particularly their inability to plant trees. This issue highlights the need for policies or programs that enable all community members, regardless of their housing situation, to contribute to and benefit from urban forestry efforts, suggesting a gap in current urban greening initiatives that needs to be addressed.
- Learn about trees:
 - The community expressed a strong interest in having access to free tree care classes. This desire indicates a willingness among residents to learn about and engage in the proper maintenance of trees, pointing to a potential area for community development and educational programming that could empower residents with the necessary knowledge and skills.
- Care for trees:
 - There was a call for more comprehensive information on tree care available to the public. This need reflects a broader desire for accessible, practical guidance that can assist residents in supporting the health and growth of the urban forest, ensuring that trees thrive and continue to provide their many benefits to the community.
- Speak for trees:
 - Residents expressed readiness to advocate for more trees within the City of Los Angeles, showing a proactive stance towards environmental enhancement and urban greening. This readiness to engage in advocacy indicates a community motivated to work towards a greener, more sustainable urban environment.
- Plant trees:
 - The community also identified a need for more tree planting opportunities, suggesting a demand for initiatives that allow residents to actively participate in expanding the urban forest. This points to the potential for increased collaboration between city authorities, local organizations, and residents in tree-planting efforts.

- Work with trees:
 - Some residents expressed an interest in volunteering for tree care and maintenance, indicating a willingness to contribute their time and effort to the upkeep of the urban forest. Local environmental groups or municipal programs could leverage this enthusiasm for volunteerism to enhance community involvement in urban greening initiatives.
 - There was a consensus on the need for more tree care and maintenance education, highlighting a community-wide desire for increased knowledge and training in this area. This reflects an understanding of the importance of ongoing education to ensure the health and sustainability of the urban forest, benefiting both the environment and the community at large.

Roles community members would like to have in the future and what they need to fulfill these roles include:

Enjoy Trees

- No reasons were given in this section.

Learn about trees:

- The community expressed a strong interest in having access to free tree care classes. This desire indicates a willingness among residents to learn about and engage in the proper maintenance of trees, pointing to a potential area for community development and educational programming that could empower residents with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Care for trees

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Speak for trees:

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Work with trees

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Reflections

Attendees shared their most important takeaways from the workshop. Below is a summary of key ideas:

- During the discussion, one participant expressed concern regarding the title "City Forest Officer," suggesting that the term "Officer" might be associated with law enforcement, potentially leading to misunderstandings and trust issues within the community. This feedback reflects a sensitivity to language and the importance of titles that accurately reflect the roles and intentions of individuals working within urban forestry without evoking unintended connotations.
- Another community member, a woman, inquired about the availability of resources and guides for residents on properly watering their trees. This question highlights a need for accessible, user-friendly information to empower residents with the knowledge and skills necessary for the effective care and maintenance of urban trees, ensuring their health and longevity.
- Additionally, one man emphasized the importance of increasing public education and providing more signage around trees, particularly regarding their benefits, which extend beyond environmental contributions to include medicinal properties. This suggestion points to a broader need for awareness-raising efforts to enhance community understanding and appreciation of trees, fostering a more informed and engaged public.

Questions community members in attendance still have about the workshop topics include:

- During the meeting, residents asked about the costs associated with proper tree trimming, seeking clarity on why tree maintenance is perceived as expensive. This concern reflects the community's desire to maintain and preserve trees in their front and backyards. Still, it highlights a need for accessible information on affordable tree care services and the justification behind the costs involved.
- The conversation around sidewalks, medians, and rights-of-way focused on the potential of trees to enhance the aesthetic and functional aspects of streets, making them more enjoyable and inviting for residents. Furthermore, the presence of trees could encourage

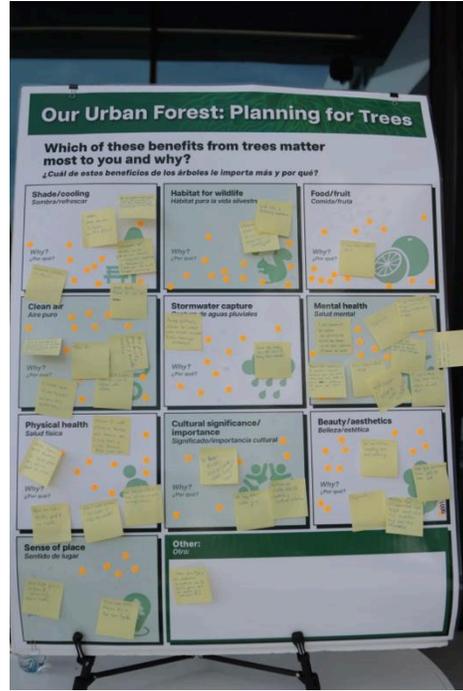
more people to walk by providing shade and beautifying walking paths, thus promoting a healthier lifestyle among community members.

Appendix of Workshop Materials

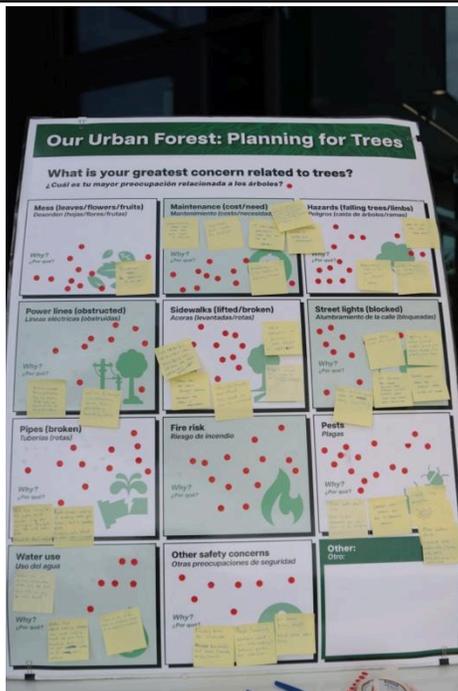
Vision, Values, Storytelling



Benefits of Trees

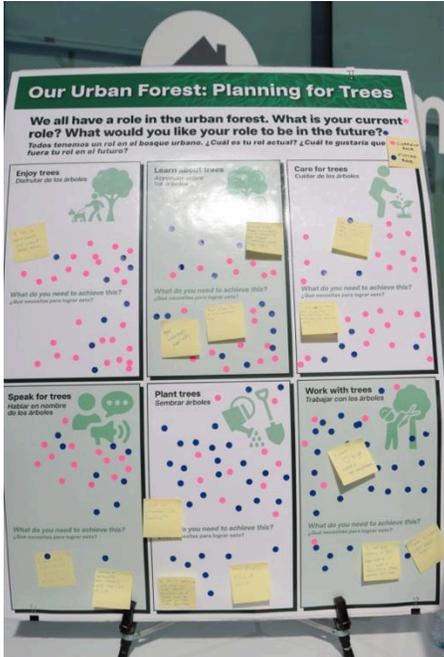


Concerns and Priorities



Neighborhood Needs



<i>My Role in the Urban Forest</i>	<i>Reflections</i>
	<p data-bbox="992 380 1252 411" style="text-align: center;"><i>“no image capture”</i></p>

<i>Photos from neighborhood workshop</i>	
	Pleased see attached folder
<i>Scanned sign-in sheets</i>	
	Pleased see attached folder and MIG team has physical copies.
<i>Scanned agenda/comment sheet</i>	
	Please see the attached folder and physical copies will be delivered to the MIG Team.