



To: Commissioner Carmen Rubio, BPS Director Oliveira, PCEF Program Manager Sam Baraso, David Grandfield

December 5, 2022

Dear Commissioners Rubio, Director Oliveira, Mr. Baraso & Mr. Grandfield,

We are thrilled with the recent dedication of PCEF investment to growing Portland's tree canopy where it's needed most! This five-year effort has the potential to transform Portland's urban forest and diversify the workforce that maintains it, but this depends largely on whether its implementation is true to PCEF's vision of centering "community-led climate action that advances racial and social justice." To ensure that this precedent-setting investment follows both the letter and spirit of the PCEF charter, we request the immediate creation of a public/private roundtable to determine how best to effectively build out a new program, grounded in equitable partnerships, that advances PCEF's climate justice goals of empowering historically disenfranchised communities and creating the diverse workforce needed to support a flourishing green economy.

Without such a roundtable for both input and oversight, we are concerned that the bulk of the funding and program decision making may be controlled by one city bureau and will lack integration with ongoing community-led initiatives. It is vitally important that any City office entrusted with administering PCEF funds demonstrates a deep and abiding commitment to community and inter-bureau partnerships that advance racial and social justice. Placing \$40 million in community climate equity funds in the care of an office that lacks strong relationships¹ may lead to results counter to both [PCEF's guiding principles](#) and the goals set out in 2018's "[Growing a more equitable urban forest: Portland's citywide tree planting strategy](#)" ("Equitable Urban Forest Strategy").²

The above-mentioned public/private roundtable should be convened rapidly and meet as frequently as needed to work out an implementation plan and guide all personnel decisions for this process. Group members should include 1) all bureaus involved in tree planting/maintenance/ROW planning/management: PP&R, BES, BPS, PBOT, BDS, PWB³, 2) community leaders with experience in tree-related workforce development and planting/maintenance work especially with historically disenfranchised communities, 3) at least one member of the Urban Forestry Commission, and 4) at least one member of the PCEF Grant Committee. It should be led by the PCEF contract facilitators who are also leading the Climate Investment Plan (CIP) development process.

To be clear: the goal of this endeavor is not solely tree planting; the goal is canopy expansion to provide health and ecosystem services as we head toward hotter summers. This will require massive public and private mobilization to train up workers who can provide five years of ongoing, dependable maintenance, to ensure that trees thrive for

¹ See e.g. [Portland's unfriendly treatment of Friends of Trees - OPB](#)

² "[i]mplementing all of the recommendations in the [Equitable Urban Forest Strategy] will require continued funding, commitment, and collaboration from the multiple bureaus and organizations that plant trees in the city. Portland's current tree code and current resource levels are constraints for implementation. For example, right-of-way tree maintenance is currently unfunded and is assigned to the adjacent property owner by Title 11." *Equitable Urban Forest Strategy*, p. 19

³ PP&R - Urban Forestry & Landscape Services; BES - leadership experience with Grey to Green, industrial lands, multifamily properties, stormwater management, natural area plantings; BPS- planning, environmental goals, experience with sensitive lands; PBOT plans and manages complete streets, all pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle corridors; BDS approves new development plans, inspects tree protection measures, final inspections; PWB has the power to determine if there is space for trees.

decades.⁴ In addition to having all essential voices at the table, creating this group would also integrate past and parallel equitable canopy expansion efforts as Portland designs the 2023-2028 CIP.

Such a group would:

- Revive the “Equitable Urban Forest Strategy” and thoroughly review which of its recommendations has, and has not been, accomplished. The Equitable Urban Forest Strategy provides a solid basis for PCEF’s Climate Investment Plan. (See Exhibit A)
- Finally establish a coordination body, like the Inter-Bureau Street Tree Task Force, which was proposed by the Urban Forestry Commission, approved and funded by City Council in May 2018 to find a way to maintain street trees. It was also recommended in the [Equitable Urban Forest Strategy](#), *pg 19*.
- Build on the experience of Bureau of Environmental Services employees and contractors who organized [Grey to Green](#), the ambitious and holistic green infrastructure campaign that included tree procurement and planting launched during Sam Adams’ time, where 32K street trees were planted with community partners from 2008-2013.
- Ensure publication of the 2019 tree maintenance study PP&R commissioned from Davey Tree. This updated the 2009 study, currently posted on the [ParksUF](#) website. It includes a budget with maintenance calculations for the City to assume full management of street trees, which could help to inform how to allocate PCEF funds and how to write the Urban Forest Management Plan (also being written 2023-2024).
- Identify key workforce training partnerships with potential to scale up community-based training programs and paid internships with nonprofits and private sector arborists; use the 2019 Davey study and experience of Urban Forestry staff, plus Connecting Canopies partners to estimate planting and maintenance workload in particular regions of our city.

⁴ “A conventional approach to growing canopy would be for the city to simply plant more trees in low-canopy areas. However, **planting a tree is only the first of many steps in growing tree canopy**. . . For tree planting efforts to be successful, communities must have the resources and support to care for trees, and they must value and desire trees. Without this capacity and willingness, canopy expansion efforts are likely to be unsuccessful. Growing the urban forest -- equitably -- first requires a better understanding of the concerns and needs of communities around trees and planting.” *Id.* *p.10 (emphasis added)*.

It would be contrary to all public expectations to launch this program without the relevant staff, community leaders, and community voices that informed both the creation and passing of PCEF as well as the 2018 Equitable Urban Forest Strategy. This body of work represents a major City investment in hundreds of hours of robust community involvement and is 100% in alignment with PCEF's mission. It is an excellent blueprint for co-creating a truly equitable urban forest tended by engaged land stewards and the community-based empowerment strategies contained within it should be the cornerstone of the CIP drafting process.

Portland already has a canopy expansion strategy in place and we are excited about the potential this investment holds to follow through on it. As stated above, we request that community leaders and all relevant bureaus are immediately brought to the table to plan next steps and realize the great promise of the 2018 Equitable Urban Forest Strategy and this monumental investment in our protective canopy. We request a meeting with Commissioner Rubio and PCEF leadership to formally collaborate with the City to advance shade equity, justice and community partnerships, so that all Portlanders can access the life-saving benefits of trees.

Sincerely,

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EXHIBIT A: Abbreviated list of recommendations from the 2018 Equitable Urban Forest Tree Planting Strategy

1. FUND PLANTING AND MAINTENANCE IN PRIORITY PLANTING AREAS

- a. Fund and plant trees in the right-of-way, yards, parks, and schools to reduce financial barriers.
- b. Increase planting efforts focusing on rental properties and advocate for tenants who want trees.
- c. Provide varied, multiple opportunities for tree planting that minimize barriers to participation.
- d. Pursue funding right-of-way tree maintenance to reduce financial burdens, encourage tree planting, and
- e. Build trust with historically underserved communities.

2. CONDUCT CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION FOR COMMUNITIES OF COLOR, IMMIGRANT, AND REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

- a. Conduct culturally-specific outreach and education on trees addressing benefits, myths, planting, tree care, involvement opportunities, permitting, and local issues.
- b. Train and hire leaders in culturally-specific communities to engage with those communities and conduct outreach and education on trees and tree planting.
- c. Locate and deliver outreach and education programs where key communities live and work; engage communities at their events and institutions.
- d. Conduct events in the language most appropriate for a community, translate materials, and distribute materials strategically through appropriate outlets.
- e. Review and retool existing volunteer, outreach, and education programs to ensure accessibility and appeal to communities of color, immigrant, and refugee communities.
- f. Provide incentives to participation in outreach and education events, such as childcare, meals, and transportation vouchers.
- g. Partner with schools in priority planting areas to plant trees with youth.

3. DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

- a. Partner and contract with culturally-specific organizations for planting, tree care, education, outreach, and job training.

- b. Invest in long-term relationships and trust building with leaders of culturally-specific organizations, such as nonprofits, businesses, and faith communities.
- c. Collaborate with city bureaus and residents to identify planting opportunities in priority planting areas, such as excess right-of-way, affordable housing, parks, and others.

4. PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

- a. Promote use of the planting tool to focus planting efforts on priority planting areas.
- b. Establish a protocol for defining and updating priority planting areas using the best available data.
- c. Review and update existing canopy targets in updates to the Urban Forest Management Plan.
- d. Based on canopy targets, develop specific planting targets and timelines in updates to the Urban Forest Management Plan.
- e. Collaborate with city bureaus to avoid conflicts between tree planting and future development in under-improved rights-of-way.
- f. Improve communication and collaboration among city bureaus and partners involved in tree planting to improve effectiveness and minimize redundancies.

5. MONITOR AND ASSESS PLANTING EFFORTS IN PRIORITY SERVICE AREAS

- a. Track and evaluate tree planting and participant demographics to determine if trees are being planted in low-income, low-canopy areas.
- b. Monitor health and survival of trees planted to determine if tree plantings are successful and to inform future management approaches.

EXHIBIT B: (Access hyperlinks [here](#))

**Public & private organizations growing workforce capacity
and East Portland tree canopy**

