



Follow-Up:

L.A. Tree Trimming & Maintenance Audit

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SUMMARY

Trees are essential infrastructure that provide Angelenos with significant environmental, public health, and economic benefits. Trees located in the public right-of-way (“street trees”) are especially important because they enrich public spaces and make neighborhoods more livable. Proper care and maintenance is essential to protecting tree health and ensuring that trees do not injure pedestrians, damage property, or obstruct signage. The City has previously estimated that there are approximately 700,000 street trees in Los Angeles, consisting of more than 700 different species. The Public Works Bureau of Street Services (StreetsLA) is responsible for caring for street trees, and ensuring the public right-of-way is clear of tree-related hazards.



In 2019, our Office completed a comprehensive review of StreetsLA's street tree management program. **We found that the department had fallen seriously behind on street tree maintenance and care due to resource constraints and a lack of modern information management tools and data.** StreetsLA was trimming street trees on an 18-year cycle in fiscal year (FY) 2018, far slower than the five-year trim cycle recognized as an industry best practice. The estimated per-tree cost to proactively trim a street tree (i.e., not responding to tree-related emergencies) was \$215 in FY2018.

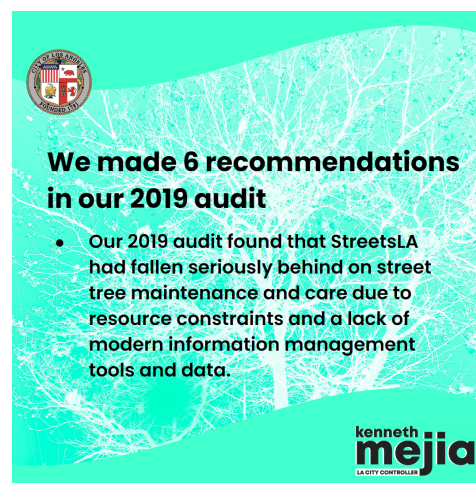
The purpose of this follow-up report is to review the overall status of the program and measure StreetsLA's progress in implementing the recommendations from

our 2019 review. It is not a new review of the program, and does not make additional recommendations.

Follow-Up Results

Overall, we found that StreetsLA has made progress in addressing issues identified in our 2019 report. StreetsLA has implemented four recommendations, and one recommendation is in progress. They will not be implementing one recommendation. StreetsLA has modernized its maintenance and information management systems, and is developing a new street tree inventory which should be completed by the end of 2023. However, the department still faces challenges, and our Office remains concerned about StreetsLA's ability to maintain the City's large street tree population.

Tree maintenance costs are increasing, and StreetsLA has been trimming fewer trees annually. StreetsLA's proactive





trim cycle for FY2022 slowed to 21 years, and the estimated per-tree cost to proactively trim a tree is over \$400. We continue to encourage policymakers and StreetsLA to consider alternative staffing and contract management models in the future.

There are other issues related to helping the City develop and maintain a healthy, vibrant urban forest. **In 2019, the City's Sustainable City pLAN (commonly referred to as "Los Angeles Green New Deal") set a citywide goal of planting 90,000 additional trees by the end of 2021** as a first step toward "increasing the tree canopy in areas of greatest need by at least 50% by 2028 to grow a more equitable urban forest that provides cooling, public health, habitat, energy savings, and other benefits." **A year after the 2021 target date, the City's tree planting efforts are still 20,000 short, jeopardizing the ambitious 2028 goal.**