

Mayor Edwin M. Lee  
City and County of San Francisco  
San Francisco City Hall, Room 200  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

May 25, 2011

Dear Mayor Lee:

As organizations concerned with the effects climate change will have on San Francisco's biodiversity, natural environment, and green infrastructure, and as panelists on the 'Gray to Green' Advisory Panel to the San Francisco Climate Action Plan, we appreciated the opportunity to learn about the City's Climate Action Strategy.

We are writing to express our support for the City and County of San Francisco's greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, and to recommend that the City incorporate urban greening and green infrastructure into its larger climate planning efforts in regards to both greenhouse gas mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

Our specific recommendations, listed below, fall into four categories:

a) **Guiding Principles**

- (1) The City, when forming green space management policies, should consider local ecosystem functioning and climate science.
- (2) The City should work towards managing and investing in its green infrastructure with the same policy vigor and performance expectations as it does in its built man-made infrastructure, when addressing ecosystem functions for climate mitigation and adaptation.
- (3) When planning for urban green space the City should support the activities of neighborhoods and community groups in their roles as local stewards of our green spaces. (see c.1.c) below.
- (4)

b) **Specific Recommendations: Mitigation**

- (1) Align city policy related to street tree responsibility with national best practices, especially regarding who adopts the liability for an installed street tree. The City should also explore ways to reduce the financial cost to property owners to maintain and install new street trees and other green infrastructure in the streetscape.
- (2) Add new climate considerations to the criteria for DPW street trees, including carbon sequestration, water uptake, and heat island reduction through shading and evaporative cooling. *Street trees and other green infrastructure can reduce carbon emissions, reduce storm water runoff, and reduce the urban heat island effect.*
- (3) City Departments should explore ways that green infrastructure and new public spaces can be water-neutral or irrigated with alternative water supplies such as harvested rainwater or recycled water. Green infrastructure projects, and the green components of certain public spaces such as those in the Street Parks and Pavement to Parks programs, are currently hindered by limited access to water supplies.

c) **Specific Recommendations: Adaptation**

- (1) To inform its climate change adaptation efforts, the City should set a goal of conducting a comprehensive study on the effects of climate change on San Francisco, and of implementing green infrastructure improvements in line with the results of that study. This should include:
  - (a) conducting a tree canopy "census" and identifying opportunities for better shade-tree coverage in underserved and intensely urbanized areas. This could be accomplished through direct plantings in the public right of way, grants to community tree-planting groups, or utility rebates for planting on private property. *San Francisco will be affected by climate change through increased temperatures in addition to sea level rise. We may expect an eightfold*

*increase in “extreme heat” days by the end of the century; shade-tree coverage will mitigate these effects.*

- (b) improving green infrastructure to reduce flooding events, making maximum use of public parkland and connectors.
  - (c) developing a measure of social cohesion and community strength as it relates to care of local the green infrastructure, given the important role place-based communities must play in responding to climate disasters.
- (2) Healthier ecological communities are more resilient to global change, and so the City should prioritize ecological restoration of our native grasslands, shrublands, creeks and dunes when appropriate and feasible.

**d) Specific Recommendations: Organization**

- (1) The Mayor’s Office should coordinate an interdepartmental panel on green space policies in order to increase communication between City departments and identify synergies in land management practices, and to establish a unified process for community greening of public parcels.
- (2) When SFPUC’s efforts towards watershed based planning include recommendations for green infrastructure improvements, all land owning City agencies should collaborate on implementation of their finding Grants disbursed by the City’s Department of the Environment should include requirements that the grantee spend the granted money locally whenever possible.

We look forward to continued work with the City as we move together into a new era of integrated and ecologically-based urban and climate planning.

Sincerely,

The Gray to Green Advisory Panel to the San Francisco Climate Action Strategy

**Ana Alvarez, Chair** – San Francisco Department of Recreation and Park

**Laura Tam** – SPUR

**Karen Kidwell & Julia Brashares** – San Francisco Parks Trust

**Casey Allen** - SF Landscapes

**Victoria Bell** – Neighborhood Parks Council

**John Bela** – REBAR

**Arden Bucklin-Sporer** - SFUSD Green Schoolyard Alliance

**Jeffrey Betcher** – Quesada Gardens Initiative

**Peter Brastow** – Nature in the City

**Dan Flanagan & Doug Wildman** – Friends of the Urban Forest