



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

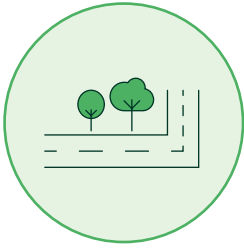
What does the urban forest look like in your neighborhood? Is it full and thriving, its shade expansive and cooling? Or is it weak and declining, too sparse to improve air and water quality? Do trees shade the west side of your home or workplace, conserving energy and sequestering carbon?

Municipalities across the United States have increasingly come to recognize the value that the urban forest provides to environmental, economic, and community health. Urban forests deliver a vast range of benefits to our cities, from improved air and water quality and school performance, to reduced urban heat impacts and childhood asthma rates. We now know that healthy urban forests are dynamic contributors to flourishing communities. While we often refer to parks as the “lungs of the city,” it is the urban forest that often fills that role.

More recently, municipalities have begun to reckon with biases in the way cities are planned and built and to consider how these inequities extend to the urban forest. Multiple recent studies demonstrate that areas considered “prime real estate” in the 1930s have two to four times more tree canopy than formerly redlined areas. Nearly a century later, this disparity matters because it correlates to continued adverse public health outcomes, reduced livability, and decreased resilience in the face of climate change.

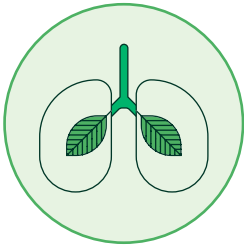
STRATEGIES FOR A THRIVING URBAN FOREST

The strategies presented in this action plan provide guidance for Salt Lake City to align its resources and actions in the built environment with its goals for sustainability and equity and describes concrete steps to implement equitable practices for a resilient future.



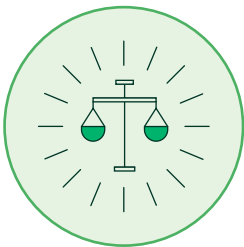
THE URBAN FOREST IS PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

When properly planned, planted, and protected, urban forests contribute to public and environmental health and mitigate some effects of climate change. Salt Lake City should strive for balance in stewardship of its urban forest, which can be achieved by viewing the urban forest as public, living infrastructure. As cities grow and change, trade-offs must occur to increase housing, transportation, and employment choice for residents. Well-managed infrastructure systems make our cities healthy, livable places, and require funding to build and maintain. By valuing the urban forest as public infrastructure with wide-ranging benefits, the City can make better, more informed decisions about the urban forest's growth and preservation.



MAXIMIZE THE URBAN FOREST'S RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The living infrastructure of Salt Lake City's urban forest provides economic, environmental, and community returns much greater than any single built infrastructure system. To responsibly steward taxpayer dollars, the City's policy and planning decisions guiding the City's investments in the preservation and growth of the urban forest should maximize these returns. Enhanced coordination between City departments and partners, and new approaches to infrastructure that combine functions, can help Salt Lake City reap the greatest returns on all the benefits the urban forest provides. From carbon sequestration to improved community cohesion, the urban forest can both mitigate negative environmental impacts and provide positive returns to public health.



PARTNER TO EQUITABLY DISTRIBUTE URBAN FOREST BENEFITS

To implement the growth and maintenance of the urban forest at the scale needed to mitigate environmental and public health impacts, the City should explore partnerships with a range of organizations and agencies. At the same time, revisiting and redefining the equitable rights and responsibilities of residents in stewarding neighborhood street trees is critical to ensuring the City will continue to benefit from the urban forest over the long term. Investigating and implementing new and expanded mechanisms for funding the urban forest will also increase the equitable distribution of its benefits.



PLAN AND DESIGN THE URBAN FOREST IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Planning for the urban forest with an approach that combines urban design principles for creating inviting, attractive, and comfortable places for people with environmental impact mitigation strategies is key to public health and wellbeing returns. As the City grows, planning and designing the urban forest to enhance its environmental and aesthetic benefits in our public spaces (sidewalks, streets parks, and plazas) will become increasingly critical to maintaining livability.

This Action Plan offers a full range of strategies to help planners, designers, and land managers continue to rethink and reinvigorate the performance of Salt Lake City's urban forest. This plan charts a course to preserve and grow the capacity of our living infrastructure to clean our air, cool our City, and create great community places for all Salt Lakers.