



CITY OF ALBANY CITY COUNCIL AGENDA STAFF REPORT

Agenda Date: November 17, 2025
Reviewed by: NA

SUBJECT: Street Tree and Streetlight: Program Development and Potential Revenue Measures

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SUMMARY

Albany has adopted the Street Tree Management Plan and performed a Citywide Streetlighting Evaluation. Presented here are the potential implementation steps for both street trees and streetlights, and the funding implications for each.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the Council:

1. Receive a presentation on potential programmatic developments in City services related to Street Trees and Streetlighting, and potential funding options; and
2. Provide direction on the path forward for each program, and direct staff to pursue funding as needed for each.

BACKGROUND

On July 7, 2025 the City Council received a [presentation](#) on potential revenue measures for funding core City services and unmet needs. Council indicated a general interest in further consideration of potential funding mechanisms for enhancing the City's street tree management program, providing additional funding for streetlighting maintenance and improvements and General Fund operations. The funding mechanisms discussed included:

- Transfer Tax update to include additional tiers
- Business License Tax modernization
- Collection of taxes from possessory interest properties
- Special tax

Street trees and streetlights are important elements in the urban landscape and contribute to Albany's character and comfort. Consequently, the City has recently completed planning studies for each to help guide development of these important programs. The following is a high-level overview of each program.

Street Trees

The Street Tree Management Plan (STMP) was initiated in March of 2022 with the goal of creating a programmatic plan to help guide City street tree-related decision-making to improve canopy cover along public rights-of-way. The STMP evolved out of several policy documents adopted in recent years, including the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) adopted in 2019, and the City's General Plan approved in 2016. The STMP was undertaken in two phases:

- 1) Performing an inventory of all existing street trees and vacant planting sites in Albany (completed 2023); and
- 2) Developing a programmatic plan which was adopted by Council on September 15, 2025 (Resolution No. 2025-55).

The STMP lays out a series of goals, objectives, and actions which together represent a comprehensive approach to managing Albany's urban forest. This approach includes more holistic maintenance, increased biodiversity, and engaging the community in street tree stewardship.

Staff presented to the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Commission throughout the STMP development process and incorporated recommendations. Most recently on October 9, 2025, Staff gave an informational presentation regarding potential next steps for programmatic development.

Council direction on key policy considerations as developed within the STMP will be instructive to further developing a proposed funding structure.

Streetlighting

While Cities in California do not have a requirement to light public streets, public entities can elect to fund streetlighting projects and there has been an expressed interest in improving streetlighting throughout the City.

In February 2024, the City completed the Citywide Streetlighting Evaluation (Evaluation, CIP Project No. 25008). This Evaluation, similar to the STMP, inventoried and analyzed the streetlighting distribution in Albany, and recommended a series of immediate actions, general best practices, and potential systemwide improvements and prioritization thereof. The analysis also produced design guidelines for use in enhancements to the system and fixture specifications for use in replacements as well as enhancements.

DISCUSSION

This report focuses on the opportunity to fund increased City services for street trees and street lights. Updates on other areas of need and potential funding mechanisms will continue to be brought forward as they are further analyzed over the next couple of months.

Street Trees

The STMP includes a key policy recommendation to change the City's approach to maintaining street trees. Currently, street tree maintenance is shared between the adjacent property owner and the City, creating ambiguity in the division of authority and responsibility for each party. The STMP recommendation is to address this ambiguity by shifting the balance of shared maintenance towards the City.

Accomplishing this shift in a responsible and sustainable manner, as well as in a manner that does not create undue liability on the part of the City (and the taxpayers who ultimately bear the costs of liability), will take three actions which must be completed in unison:

- Clarify City authority and responsibility for street tree maintenance in the municipal code;
- Development of a proactive Street Tree Management Program, and;
- Establishment of a stable and ongoing funding source to support the proactive program.

The current division of responsibilities between property owners and the City limits the full scope of recommendations in the STMP.

The existing approach to street tree maintenance consists of pruning and removals in response to requests, complaints, and other issues that may arise, in addition to an annual street tree planting project and limited young tree maintenance. The budget supporting this reactive program is approximately \$380,000 per year and is funded through a combination of Measure M, LLAD 88-1, and General Fund revenues. Resident requests for street tree planting have increased since the Council authorized the waiver of street tree planting fees, which are funded with Measure DD General Fund revenues.

The estimated budget range for a fully developed Street Tree Program is detailed in the following table and includes activities such as systematic pruning, increased plantings, comprehensive young tree care, public engagement and regular assessment of the overall street tree inventory and more detailed assessments of mature trees or trees of concern such as liquidambar trees. The funding sources supporting the existing program are currently not sufficient to support this more developed approach.

Service	Estimated Annual Cost
Pruning	\$165,000-175,000
Planting & Maintenance	\$140,000-160,000
Removals (no change)	\$25,000
Consulting Services, Public Outreach, & Program Administration	\$260,000-\$275,000
Estimated Program Cost	\$590,000 - \$635,000

Streetlighting

Throughout the development of the Evaluation and continuing through the current update to the Active Transportation Plan (ATP), the community has expressed an interest in improvements to streetlighting. As demonstrated during the Evaluation, improvements to streetlighting can be achieved by adjusting and changing existing lights to increase visibility and reduce glare as well as through projects to add more lighting. A number of improvement efforts are already in process or proposed, and there is potential to develop programming and associated funding to continue to drive progress in this area.

Programmatic improvements to streetlighting fall into three main categories:

- Addressing the backlog of failed lights to restore lighting within existing infrastructure.
- Improving systematic renewal with a focus on proactive replacement before failures.
- Capital improvements to further develop the City's streetlighting facilities.

Since completion of the Evaluation, Public Works has been working to replace the backlog of failed and failing street lights using the new light fixture specifications. To date, two rounds of replacement have been completed totaling 77 lights. A third round of replacements, consisting of the balance of the failed and failing lights (91 lights), is in progress with completion expected before the end of the calendar year. These expenditures have been absorbed into the existing Public Works Public Right-of-Way Maintenance Program, and future street light failures are expected to be within the program budget.

Ideally, the remaining streetlights, which are at or near the end of their service life, would be systematically renewed using the current lighting specifications prior to failure, much like the other capital renewal and rehabilitation efforts the City invests into annually. The City's five year Capital Improvement Project (CIP) Plan, adopted by the City Council in July 2025, included the Citywide Streetlighting Renewal project (CIP No. 24016), which is estimated to cost approximately \$800,000, and is not currently funded. It's likely this project would not be competitive for grant funding, but would be appropriate for financing. Repayment costs would range from **\$65,000 - \$85,000 annually** over a period of 15 years, dependent on interest rates.

Both the Evaluation and the current ATP update also recommend additional capital improvements, either added into major projects as opportunities arise (similar to the Marin Phase 2 project) or designed as standalone projects. An investment of **\$150,000 - \$250,000 annually** would support project development and implementation. These enhancement projects may be more appealing for outside funding, and local match funding would add to the competitiveness of grant applications.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Street trees are a key part of the City's urban landscape. Trees provide shade, help mitigate air pollution, create beautiful and relaxing places, reduce stormwater runoff, and support wildlife. Expanding the tree canopy with attention to biodiversity and maintaining street trees holistically improves forest resilience and protection against climate change-related impacts. Increasing and improving management of the City's trees is discussed in detail in the Street Tree Management Plan (2025) and is included as Goal Con-2 in Albany's 2035 General Plan. Increasing urban canopy cover is also highlighted as part of Goal 4.1 in the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (2019).

Improvements in streetlighting encourage the use of non-motorized travel and public transit. Reduction of motorized travel and related air emissions is highlighted as a priority in the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (2019).

SOCIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY CONSIDERATIONS

The STMP included an equity analysis of Albany's street tree canopy coverage, which is expected to assist and inform future planting projects. Additionally, moving down the pathway of comprehensive City-run street tree maintenance would allow the City to allocate street tree care more equitably through comprehensive coverage rather than on a case by case basis.

Improving streetlighting can help increase visibility and potentially reduce collisions and other right of way issues, making active transportation and use of public transit more accessible and comfortable for all.

CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVES

Program improvements and funding for delivery of services related to street trees and streetlights supports the following City Council Strategic Plan goals:

- GOAL 1: Reduce Greenhouse Gas Pollution and Adapt to Climate Change
OBJECTIVE: Identify opportunities to enhance management of the urban forest
- GOAL 3: Promote Streets That Support Safety, Transportation, & Mobility Options
OBJECTIVE: Support development of a City program for increasing streetlighting

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Street Trees

Additional funding would be needed to implement the recommendations outlined in the STMP. As listed above, it is roughly estimated that program costs would be approximately \$590,000 - \$635,000.

Streetlighting

Additional funding, estimated to be in the range of \$215,000 to \$335,000 annually, would be need to fund capital renewal and enhancement as described above.

NEXT STEPS

Pending Council direction, staff will continue moving the street tree and streetlighting programming forward as follows:

Street Trees

A municipal code update will be drafted for Council consideration to modernize the policy framework for the street tree program and the City's responsibilities for street trees. Staff will also retain the services of a financial consultant to draft tax measure options for Council consideration for the November 2026 election.

Streetlighting

Staff will further investigate financing options for the street light renewal project and associated expected repayment costs. Staff will retain the services of a financial consultant to draft tax measure options for the November 2026 election to cover loan repayment and future capital needs.

It is envisioned that the tax measure noted above will be a single measure, specific to street trees, and potentially also incorporating funding for streetlighting pending further analysis of the overall tax structure and formula.