City of Grants Pass
Urban Forestry Plan
for the City of Grants Pass and Urbanizing Area

Technical Memorandum #4:
Review of Existing Attitudes, Perceptions, Strengths,
Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats, Constraints, and Concerns

To: Urban Forestry Advisory Committee
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Introduction

This is the fourth of eleven Technical Memoranda that will comprise the Urban Forestry Plan for the City of Grants Pass and the Urbanizing Area. It identifies existing attitudes, perceptions, concerns, threats, opportunities, and constraints that will contribute to or constrain the development of alternatives and implementation of the Urban Forestry Plan.

Purpose

This memo contains two components:

1. **Part 1. Attitudes and Perceptions.** It provides an inventory that summarizes existing information about attitudes and perceptions associated with trees and the urban forest. The existing information is not complete, but is largely anecdotal.

2. **Part 2. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats, Constraints, and Concerns.** It provides an opportunity to identify issues that became apparent after reviewing Technical Memos 1, 2, 3, and 5. Awareness of these issues may be the result of learning from an individual document or better understanding the cause and effect relationships that illuminate why certain issues exist.

   This document provides for problem identification and ideas about how to start addressing these problems and taking advantage of opportunities. This document provides the opportunity to cross-analyze and synthesize the information in the other documents, which were primarily inventory or compilation documents. This document asks questions about the existing conditions. It should help provide a better understanding of positive or negative trends occurring by design or accident, and to get some baseline information as to how our objectives and management practices compare with other communities, particularly those considered to employ best practices. This document provides an opportunity to articulate what should change, what should be reinforced, and to develop ideas about what areas should be explored for effecting change.

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This document predominantly articulates the issues. Once the issues are identified, that lays the groundwork for developing policy to state how to go about resolving the issues. That will provide direction to focus on specific ways to achieve that policy through implementation.

By identifying the attitudes, perceptions, concerns, threats, opportunities, and constraints, this memo identifies the legal, financial, physical, practical, and value-based parameters that will help guide development of, and revisions to, policy and alternatives for implementing the urban forestry plan. Some of these items are fixed parameters, and alternatives must work within those constraints. Other items are flexible and can be changed to accomplish desired objectives. Some items may be fully under local control, while others may require action by other agencies or state or federal government.

In addition, this memo identifies how the urban forestry plan may be desirable or necessary to accomplish objectives of related plans. For example, trees are effective at accomplishing stormwater management objectives. The Urban Forestry Plan and the Stormwater Management Plan that will soon be adopted should complement one another. As another example, once DEQ has adopted final water quality standards for the Rogue River, it may be necessary to increase tree canopy along the tributaries of the Rogue River to meet temperature TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) standards for the Rogue River. In fact, shade provided by trees may be one of the few practical alternatives available to satisfy a legal mandate related to water quality.

Executive Summary

The work on the other Technical Memos has resulted in substantial staff education and awareness of issues. Many of these issues may already have been apparent to committee members. Some issues were previously apparent, but others have become obvious after reviewing the related documents. The work on those documents has led the ability to raise a substantial number of issues for consideration in this document. The inventory work and discussions that have occurred so far have already helped identify issues for inclusion in this document. This provides an excellent opportunity to articulate the wide variety of issues and begin to think about policy and implementing measures to address the issues. Technical Memo #5 has identified substantial guidance on desired planning approaches and practices, and it has also identified some key "next steps" that may be needed as part of this plan or as recommendations for next steps or future work to be accomplished upon completion of this plan. The individual issues summarized below are too extensive and diverse to make broad generalizations in this executive summary.

This draft is just a starting point to begin issue identification, and it is expected that the committee will add to this draft substantially for the final memo.

## Part 1. Review of Existing Attitudes and Perceptions.

There was no comprehensive survey conducted specific to this plan. This summary includes survey information specific to hillside trees, but other issues summarized are primarily based on anecdotal information. While Technical Memo 1 tells us that trees increase property values and indicate merchants should be able to recognize benefits through sales and pricing of

merchandise, anecdotal information tells a mixed story. In reinforces positive perceptions of trees, but also raises some questions about negative perceptions and attitudes when benefits of trees are balanced with other owner interests, such as maintenance, business visibility, or personal preferences.

Survey

Each year the City conducts a survey of City residents. Each year, some of the same questions are asked, but a few questions target specific issues. In the 2001 survey, the survey included targeted questions about hillside development. The survey asked four questions about hillside development. One asked whether hillside development made Grants Pass a better place to live. Another asked about allowing removal of dirt from hillsides, another asked about allowing trees from hillsides, and another asked about allowing homes built on hillsides. Respondents were most strongly opposed to removal of trees from hillsides. Only 4% said more trees should be allowed to be removed, while 43% said fewer trees should be removed, and 29% would prohibit tree removal entirely.

"It is being proposed that the rules for building roads and homes on hillsides be changed. I would like your opinion on three proposals related to hillsides…Second, trees are removed from hillsides. Would you allow more trees to be removed, allow fewer trees to be removed, keep the rules the way they are currently, or prohibit the removal of trees from hillsides?"
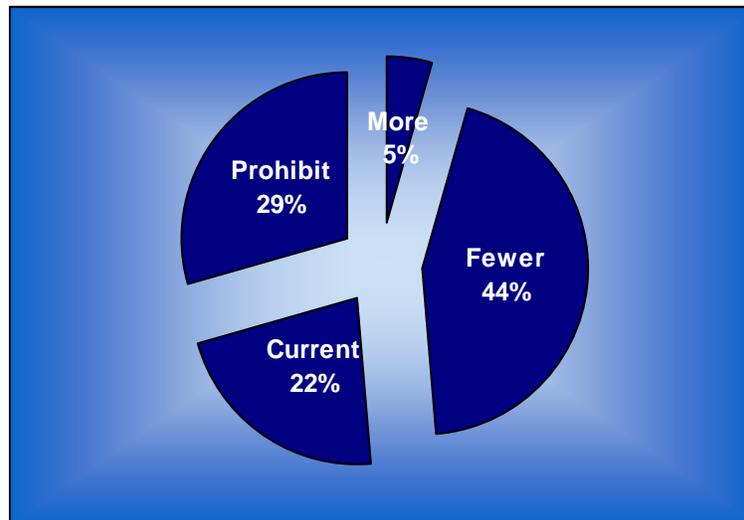
Source: 2001 City of Grants Pass Community Survey

Anecdotal Information

1. Some merchants express concerns that trees obscure visibility of the business and visibility of signs, even going so far as to remove mature trees they are concerned block signs.
2. Some residents have been disinterested in having trees under powerlines replaced when the previous trees were removed. Therefore, owners may not be committed to caring for

these trees. The trees may not be maintained when young and this may result in a high mortality rate for those trees.

3. Anecdotal information suggests some residential owners dislike the cost and effort that goes into maintenance of trees, and while they may like trees, they don't want to take care of them. Some people don't want to invest time or effort into pruning and cleaning up leaves. Some people are at stages in their life where they are unable to handle the maintenance themselves and do not want to spend money for someone to do the maintenance work.

Part 2. Identification of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats, Constraints, and Concerns. The issues are organized below by the Technical Memo where the issues were identified. Some items may not be a clean fit under any one document, and that shouldn't be a concern. The most important aspect of this document is the identification of issues, and if specific causes or known, these are also noted. For example, an item observed in the field inventory may be an issues associated with the Development Code. It could be included in either section, but the intent is for the issue to be included where it was observed.

TM1. Benefits and Functions of Urban Trees and the Urban Forest

1. Root zone conditions beneficial to rainfall infiltration, such as retention of leaf litter and organic materials, are not often used in suburban landscape conditions, where a more manicured look is often desired.
2. There are numerous locations where revegetation efforts can focus on public properties, including public right-of-way and school properties.

TM2. Inventory of Existing Conditions

Field "Thumbnail" Inventory

1. Some trees appear to be smaller than the minimum caliper size required by the Development Code. This indicates need for enforcement, where the final inspection should not be approved when trees are less than the required size. Ongoing maintenance may also be lacking in some areas, and additional enforcement may be required.

2. After looking for a good example of a commercial parking lot with large, shade trees, it became apparent that almost no commercial parking lots have shade trees or large trees. Retail uses were especially lacking. Generally, but not always, banks, offices, health care providers, churches, and City parking lots tended to have more large trees than retail sales properties.

3. While smaller ornamental trees provide a desirable aesthetic effect from the ground for commercial properties and residential subdivisions, aerial photography dramatically shows the lack of canopy cover on commercial properties and some residential areas.

4. Overhead utilities pose a significant constraint to the planting of large desirable trees. The overhead utilities are often located directly over planter strip areas. While new developments are required to underground utilities, this requirement has been applied to *new* utilities. Therefore, existing overhead utilities continue to exist along street frontages of new developments as well as existing developments.

5. In many areas where overhead utilities exist, large trees planted in front yards rather than in planter strips are able to achieve many of the desired benefits, while avoiding the overhead obstacle.

6. There are areas where larger trees have been planted in narrow planter strips or tree wells and appear to be thriving, in some cases without creating problems related to sidewalks and utilities. These conditions should be researched to determine why trees appear to be thriving in these conditions, when we are told to avoid these situations. In some cases, the trees may only appear to be healthy, but could have unseen health problems. In other cases, the trees may have pre-dated the road and sidewalk installations and the detrimental effects of these items may not be seen.

7. There is increasing development in hillside areas, which can be visible throughout the community from across the valley.

8. Landscaping, irrigation, and maintenance of planter strips are the responsibility of adjoining property owners. On street projects with planter strips installed along the frontage of properties that are vacant or previously developed, usually by the City through an LID or AFD or by a developer through an AFD, there hasn't always been provision for maintenance and irrigation of the planter strips. The city has experimented with different models for this situation. In some cases, landscaping has been installed with irrigation with the City agreeing to an initial maintenance period before the obligation is turned over to owners. When the Grants Pass Parkway was installed, the City had agreements to maintain and irrigate the landscaping for the first several years, and then that would become the responsibility of the property owners. The system was set up with master meters that made it difficult to disaggregate the responsibility to different owners.   Landscaping has been installed without irrigation in some cases, with the owner responsible for maintaining and watering. In other cases, the planter strip has been provided, but only bark mulch is provided adjacent to the vacant or previously developed properties. Examples are Grandview Avenue, West Harbeck Road, and Union Avenue. Since these areas are to be maintained by property owners, maintenance is addressed on an enforcement only basis. There may be other alternatives that allow for initial planting and survival of trees that might be less successful for other landscaping. For example, when irrigation is not present, irrigation by the city for the initial two years should allow trees to become established. Use of irrigation bags around new trees may help ensure tree health through good watering practices.

9. There appears to be a need to better address tree health issues where trees have been retained, but their surroundings altered in a manner that they adapted to site conditions that changes and created a problem, vs. those where a tree planted in the same setting has developed in that setting and has thrived. This is important to ensure that mature trees which are retained survive the site alterations and possible shock that occur during construction and once development has been completed.

Examples are:

    a. Trees that developed in stands that are retained, but the surrounding trees have been removed, and trees that were within a forested area now at the edge of the forested areas. Root and branch development interior to and together with other trees may leave the retained trees susceptible to wind and sun damage.

    b. Trees that are retained may have drainage altered or inappropriate irrigation so that the area they adapted in has become too dry or too wet.

    c. Trees may have soil disturbed during construction where soil has been place over the roots, suffocating the tree.

    d. During construction, heavy equipment may have been used within the drip line compacting soils and/or damaging roots, leading to mortality.

10. The controversial issue of managing parks that have large trees and a history of community events may be best left to parks management Plans and recommendations from the Urban Tree Advisory Committee, rather than through this plan. These issues also provide lessons that should applied to new parks development. This plan need not address specific management issues for individual parks. This plan may include recommendations for accomplishing forestry objectives for parks on a more general way.

11. The issue of sun damage to new trees needs to be addressed.

12. It is possible that some native species are susceptible to stress or death when residential planting and irrigation occur. These may pose some difficulties in working to retain or plant some native trees that are adapted to the local climate but not the changes that may occur on individual lots.

13. In some instances, trees may appear healthy but may be susceptible to structural failure, such as loss of limbs or falling trees. It will be important to determine ways to identify these issues.

Tree-by-Tree Inventory

1. At this stage, a detailed tree by tree inventory has not been conducted. See Technical Memo 5 for discussion about this type of inventory. Limited information is available about street tree health, age, and species diversity for street trees. Some inventory work has been done in parks.

2. Without this type of tree inventory, we don't have an overall idea of the mix of street trees, and may be unaware of issues that need to be addressed.

Canopy Inventory

1. At this stage, a canopy inventory has not been conducted. See Technical Memo 5 for discussion about this type of inventory. Limited information is available about the existing canopy cover in Grants Pass and the Urbanizing area.

2. Aerial photography provides a rough indicator of the amount of canopy cover present overall and in specific areas.

3. Aerial photos and the field inventory show a dramatic lack of large shade trees within commercial parking lots.

TM3. Review of Existing Plans, Policies, Regulations, and Programs

1. The Development Code contains requirements for minimum numbers of trees to be planted in front yards and parking lots and specifies the minimum caliper size of trees at time of planting. It identifies small, medium, and large trees as choices, and specifies the recommended spacing of these trees, but there is no requirement that any trees be a large species.

2. Staff may need additional training or have documentation from a professional at the time of final inspection for development to ensure the adequate health of landscape materials. If there are more specific requirements regarding tree species, staff may need additional training.

3. Depending on zoning, the Development Code provides that initial stock must be a minimum of 1", 1-1/2", or 2". The inventory identified an issue with sun damage to smaller stock trees that damages the tree at an early age and this continues to be a problem over the life of the tree. If this issue can be mitigated by requiring an initial larger caliper size, this could be addressed through the code. Other solutions to that problem should also be investigated. Situations where that problem has not occurred should be identified to determine how this problem can be prevented.

4. There is an opportunity to use the City newsletter for a regular educational or information article about the benefits of urban forestry and to keep the community informed of the status of the plan.

5. The street tree list in the Development Code is overly restrictive and poses an obstacle to species diversity. Greater diversity of species should be permitted (and probably encouraged or required).

6. The Development Code requires that front yard trees and parking lot trees be selected from the street tree list. This appears to be overly restrictive. Some trees that are prohibited or discouraged as street trees may be suitable for planting in other locations. Some trees are prohibited as street trees due to proximity and conflicts with sidewalks, utilities, etc. These conflicts don't necessarily exist for trees planted in front yards, etc. The street tree list almost entirely prohibits conifers and evergreens that may be desirable either as street trees or as trees in other locations.

7. The Development Code does not identify "shade trees" as a distinct category, and providing shade may be the objective of some code provisions such as parking lot trees. A separate category or sub-listing of shade trees may be desirable. A tree list could also be useful in identifying species that are especially well-suited for providing other benefits.

8. The tree retention provisions of the Development Code provide a "per tree" fee for removal of significant-sized trees ($350 per tree). However, there is a cap that provides a maximum fee for removal of significant-sized trees ($2,000). Therefore, if six

significant-sized trees are removed, there is no fee for removal of additional significant-sized trees. This doesn't appear to be a substantial disincentive to tree removal. *(NOTE: There is currently a draft amendment which includes these provisions, which will clarify some provisions related to subdivisions. It will also provide clarity about requirements for trees removed at the time of subdivision vs. trees removed when individual lots are developed).*

9. There is some overlap between the street tree provisions in the Municipal Code and Development Code, and these should be better coordinated.
    a. Prohibited trees are listed in both ordinances.
    b. It is unclear whether trees being planted in planter strips in new developments that receive land use approval require the tree permits required by the Municipal Code.

10. Species diversity is desirable, and the Development Code has no mechanism of ensuring species diversity. (See TM2. There is a lack of species diversity in new developments, with the same one or two species being the predominant selection). Better coordination between the Development Code and Municipal Code, or changes to the Development Code could improve tree selection in a manner that ensures species diversity.

11. There is currently no mechanism to track new species of trees planted in development to begin an inventory of tree species and age.

12. The Development Code needs to be clearer about requirements for irrigation of planter strips for single-family homes. Also, there is no specific requirement for automatic irrigation to be installed in front yards for new single-family homes. This is a policy question to explore.

13. The Development Code allows for a planting area of 16 square feet in parking lots, which would only provide a 4'x4' planting area for trees. This may be too small. The Development Code allows for some compact parking spaces, which provides the opportunity to require larger planting areas for trees without reducing the number of parking spaces. An 8'x8' planting area would provide for a planting area about the width one parking space with compact spaces on each side of the planter.

14. The Development Code was amended within the past year and specifies maximum spacing between trees in parking lots. It also now explicitly requires landscaped end islands at the end of parking rows, with a dimensional requirement that should be large enough for some tree species.

15. The Development Code requires living ground cover in front yards and planting areas. These needs to be evaluated to determine if any refinements are needed for the root zones of trees to ensure tree health. There may be some situations where certain groundcovers shouldn't be planted, or where mulch might be acceptable.

16. The Development Code includes regulations pertaining to riparian zones and retention of riparian vegetation, but doesn't contain provisions for planting trees in riparian zones. This is something to explore. However, there may be owner concerns about river views. On the other hand, this may be a way to improve water quality and riparian habitat without further restricting development close to the river. Another approach to balancing these issues may be to allow a higher percentage of the riverfront frontage width to be developed as you get further back from the river, rather than having a more substantial setback that entirely restricts development. This would also allow more area for tree plantings.

17. The widths of planter strips required adjacent to new streets is of limited width to keep right-of-way widths from becoming wider. The Development Code recommends that smaller trees are to be planted in smaller planter areas. The same is true for street trees in tree wells in areas such as downtown. There may some larger trees that work well in these areas, or it may be necessary to determine whether the code should require wider planter strips.

18. The Municipal Code addresses removal of street trees, but the Development Code has no specific restriction dealing with removal of front yard or parking lot trees, as long as minimums are maintained and a tree is replaced. Currently, a mature large species tree could be removed and replaced with a younger tree that could be also be a smaller species tree. Commercial owners have removed more mature trees and planted smaller trees due to visibility of signs. This is an area that needs to be addressed in the Development Code, so mature trees or large trees that are approved through site plan review are not removed unless they pose a health/safety issue. Sign locations need to be considered in relation to landscaping at time of original site plan approval.

19. Neither the Development Code nor Municipal Code has any provisions governing the removal of trees (except street trees) before a land use application is filed. This poses a loophole, whereby owners are removing trees prior to filing an application and avoiding the tree retention provisions that apply when a land use application is submitted.

20. There may be opportunities to better coordinate the Development Code and Municipal Code.

21. Outdoor retail areas are not considered parking lots, and are not subject to the parking lot tree standards. This can result in substantial paved area with no trees present. The most glaring example is retail car sales lots.

22. There is a need for better awareness of the requirements for permits to substantially prune or even remove street trees in the public right-of-way. Awareness of public/private ownership and maintenance requirements for these trees may not be clear to property owners.

23. While there was initially some thought that state regulations governing forestry and urban-wildland interface might restrict some options available to the city, there appear to be no substantial conflicts.

24. There is a tree deposit and replanting requirement that applies in steep slope areas that doesn't apply in other areas. (Tree retention provisions apply in all areas for new subdivisions).

25. There may be better opportunities for "land use compatibility statements" between ODF and City to ensure requirements of both agencies are being satisfied.

26. The Oregon Department of Forestry has an Urban and Community Forestry Program. The budget has been cut considerably. To the extent possible, it would be desirable to educate the legislature on the substantial benefits of the urban forest and encourage greater funding of this program. There is a grant program and technical assistance is available. However, the grant program could use additional resources.   In addition, the technical assistance program could be expanded to provide more direct "how-to" or model plans and ordinances for communities undertaking this type of urban forestry work.   Much of the focus is currently on public trees such as street trees and park trees. The Forest Service has developed documents for watershed-based urban forestry, and closer integration with this work would be desirable, including inclusion of reference materials and other links on the website.

27. Large trees will be a critical element in the new stormwater master plan for the stormwater management benefits they provide.

28. There are opportunities to address stormwater, water quality, and air quality issues that Grants Pass faces. Maintaining canopy cover as the City grows may be necessary to keep up with those needs.

29. The City is in the process of evaluating the Urban Growth Boundary. This provides an opportunity to establish new standards before additional lands are brought into the UGB.

30. The plan provides an opportunity for the City to define and articulate public tree planting objectives.

31. From a tree retention perspective, in some cases, it may be more desirable in the long-term to preserve a stand or grove of several smaller trees than to preserve a single larger tree. This should be further investigated.

32. It may be desirable to have a process than is more simplified than the PUD process to allow more flexible lot arrangement to simplify preservation of trees and natural resources.

TM4 Part 1. Perceptions and Attitudes

1. The community survey (although from 2001) identified substantial community support for preservation of trees on hillsides.
2. Good hillside development practices may minimize community concerns about growth if the community feels the growth is being well managed.
3. There is a need to better understand why some people and businesses have not planted trees and do not want to plant trees. Some possibilities are:
    a. inadequate recognition of benefits of urban trees
    b. people don't like dealing with leaf litter and maintenance
    c. liability concerns
    d. cultural differences and personal preferences (also true for conditions that may support tree and watershed health, such as retention of organic matter)
    e. different values related to some benefits (some people may want to attract some types of wildlife, while others may not)
    f. poor quality forest edges can lead to concerns about illegal dumping, etc.
4. People don't always want to replace problem trees that have been removed from under powerlines. This also needs to be better understood.

TM5. Plans from Other Communities, Best Practices, and Statistical Information

1. The Forest Service manual appears to provide an excellent model and guidelines for development of an urban forestry plan. It is a three part document that helps identify objectives and measurable targets for canopy cover as well as issues to be addressed in implementing programs, with recommendations for best practices.

2. Ashland's tree planting guide provides an excellent model that might be useful in revising or replacing the street tree list in the Development Code.

3. There are opportunities for Grants Pass to start new programs that may have been discussed, but not yet initiated. There are examples from other communities, including Heritage Tree programs, etc.

4. Trees in back yards on private lots may not provide the same public aesthetic benefits as streets trees and they might not provide canopy over impervious areas, but they provide excellent opportunities for planting large canopy trees and contributing other benefits. These would likely be addressed through voluntary programs, as regulation of trees in back yards can pose regulatory concerns and make enforcement difficult. A heritage tree program may be one regulatory approach for very important trees.

5. Some communities specify that trees in the public right-of-way are publicly owned and maintained. They have control over the planting and maintenance of these trees. There is cost and liability associated with this approach. A tree-by-tree inventory is frequently a useful management tool for these communities to establish a maintenance cycle and to assess health, age diversity, and species diversity and plan for planting and replanting based on this information.

The City of Grants Pass provides that these trees are privately owned trees in public or semi-public areas. Property owners are required to maintain the trees and have liability for these trees. Permits are required for planting, removal, and some pruning of these trees. The City has some control over tree species and removal(?), but is unable to establish a routine maintenance cycle, as this is the responsibility of the homeowners, and is handled on a code compliance basis.

6. **Negative Aspects of Some Trees.** Some species of trees produce VOCs (volatile organic compounds) and may contribute to the formation of smog or by themselves be toxic (See p 67 BVOCs in *Western Washington and Oregon Community Tree Guide: Benefits, Costs, and Strategic Planting*). Certain species may need to be evaluated to determine if the positive effects outweigh the negative effects.

Other

1. It may be desirable to contact local nurseries to ensure they are aware of any new requirements and can have available stock of sufficient size and species.