



ENVIRONMENT

# TREES OF LIFE

A new plan for the urban forest aims to keep the capital city green

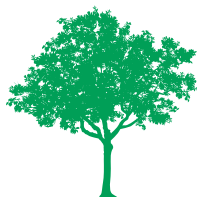
**W**hen people say Austin is “an oasis” in Texas, they’re usually talking about politics. But for many residents, oasis means the city’s abundant natural beauty, much of which can be credited to our healthy urban forest. Now, there’s a strategy under way to protect the more than 7.3 million trees located in public spaces so that future generations can benefit from them.

Last March, the city council approved the Urban Forest Plan, a city code requirement that has been about 25 years in the making. Under the guidance of former urban forester Angela Hanson and staff members from the Planning and Development Review Department (PDRD) and the Urban Forestry Program, a master plan was devised that serves as a guide for the management and preservation of vegetation on city-owned lands, including places like public libraries and Zilker Park. With the council’s go-ahead, Austin is now one of the first municipalities in the nation to have such a master plan.

Why the long wait? According to Emily King, the environmen-

tal program coordinator with the PDRD, previous attempts focused on operational and tactical procedures for municipal departments. “That becomes very hard to apply at a citywide level,” she says. “You have many different departments that all have different priorities and goals for how they manage the land.” Meaning, what works for Austin Water doesn’t necessarily work for Austin Energy and so on. Each department needs to develop its own operational procedures, says King, “to align goals with the objectives that are spelled out in the umbrella plan.”

With increased urban development, drought, severe heat, disease and other major concerns, sustaining the urban forest is more important than ever. To combat any threats, steps include making sure trees have space to grow and that there’s geographic diversity of species. Of course, the ultimate goal is to preserve our quality of life. “The social and environment benefits that all of us get from having a well-managed forest are phenomenal,” says King. “This master plan for public property is simply one chapter.” —S. THURMOND



**1992**  
YEAR THE CITY CODE REQUIRED A COMPREHENSIVE URBAN FOREST PLAN BE CREATED

**38%**  
AMOUNT OF THE CITY’S LAND AREA THAT IS COVERED BY TREE CANOPY

**7,300,000**  
TREES ON PUBLIC LANDS IN AUSTIN



PERFORMANCE ARTS

## BRANCHING OUT

Forklift Danceworks’ new project finds arboreal inspiration

Having previously choreographed performances with the City of Austin’s sanitation and energy departments, Forklift Danceworks founder Allison Orr is known for casting utility workers in her unique dance projects. Usually, she’s the one approaching the city for these collaborations, which help to heighten public awareness of these somewhat thankless jobs. But for her latest project, it was the city that went out on a limb. “I got an email with the subject line, ‘Interested in Trees?’” she says. That simple question sprouted *Trees of Govalle*, a dance piece featuring the Urban Forestry Program that premieres April 11 at the Fusebox Festival (for more about the annual

event, turn to page 184). With this new production, 20 employees who work various positions, from pruning to planting, move among the trees in Govalle Park, turning everyday tasks of their job into art. Along with the creative challenges she faces, Orr says she enjoys teaming up with city utility departments because there are no divas. “Every work group has its own culture,” she explains. “The dominating feature of these folks is just their wholehearted love of trees, and in this way they’re quiet and humble.” That, you could say, is barking up the right tree.

—KIMYA KAVEHKAR

URBAN FOREST WORKER PHOTO COURTESY FORKLIFT DANCEWORKS. PARK AND BARK BACKGROUND PHOTOS FROM SHUTTERSTOCK.

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