

# WORKING WITH LOCAL PLANNERS

An in-depth look into the intersection of planning and urban forestry



California ReLeaf is working to better understand how urban forest priorities mesh with the priorities, concerns, and perspectives of planners and other urban design professionals. We sent complementary surveys to the ReLeaf network and the California Chapter of the American Planning Association to gain insights. A portion of the APA survey results is shared here.

We are also putting together a collection of resources for Urban Forestry advocates looking to dive deeper into the world of planning, which will soon be available on our website at [californiareleaf.org/resources/plan4urbantrees](http://californiareleaf.org/resources/plan4urbantrees). We hope this will be useful to you in your efforts to work with planners, so that together we can create healthier, more sustainable and appealing urban neighborhoods!

“ It would be great to have [urban forestry nonprofits] team up on projects where urban forestry plays a role, even if it is small. Urban Heat Island projects, active transportation corridor plans, etc., could all have a role for [urban forestry] professionals.”

—Senior Planner in the Greater Sacramento Region

## Early Survey Results:

- 109 planning professionals filled out our survey, sharing their priorities and experiences.
- 15+ different positions are represented, including city and county planners, nonprofits, and the private sector.
- 9 regions of California are represented by the survey respondents, spanning across the state.
- 65% of respondents ranked shade trees as a “very important” consideration in their plans.

## Planner Priorities

We asked planners what they value about urban trees. Their top three answers were:

- 1. Beautification:** Planners work to make their communities visually appealing. We know that trees can offer this, and so much more.
- 2. Urban Heat Island Effect:** Cities can be over twenty degrees warmer at night than their rural neighbors, impacting health and the environment. Trees provide cooling to combat heat retention.
- 3. Human Health:** Planners strive to create a built environment that supports health and healthy habits. Trees contribute to air and water quality as well as increased activity.

## Tips for Collaboration

These themes were mentioned 5+ times by survey respondents

- Come prepared with specific tree species and how they are best suited for the local environment and infrastructure.
- Engage planners early in your project and collaborate with them along the way.
- Attend public meetings of planners and elected officials, and invite them to attend yours.
- Provide specific, quantitative information about how trees positively affect planning priorities.
- Familiarize yourself with local city/county guidelines and infrastructure constraints.



Empowering grassroots efforts and building strategic partnerships that **preserve, protect and enhance** California's urban and community forests.

# QUICK PEEK INTO UPCOMING RESOURCES

Equipping you with tools and terms to work more closely with planners

### 3 Twitter Feeds to Follow:

- Jeff Speck, writer & city planner: @JeffSpeckAICP
- American Planning Association, CA Chapter: @APA\_California
- UCLA Planning Department: @uclaurbnplanning

### 3 Websites to Explore:

- CityLab by The Atlantic: [www.citylab.com](http://www.citylab.com)
- Congress for New Urbanism: [www.cnu.org](http://www.cnu.org)
- Planetizen: [www.planetizen.com](http://www.planetizen.com)

### 3 Podcasts to Listen to:

- “Placemakers” by Slate
- “How to Make a City” by The Anchor Institute
- “Talking Headways” by Streetsblog USA

### 3 Books to Read:

- *Walkable City Rules* by Jeff Speck
- *Guide to California Planning* by William Fulton
- *Great Streets* by Allan B. Jacobs

### 3 Terms to Know:

- **Green Infrastructure** is a term commonly used to describe the use of natural systems for stormwater management (an alternative to man-made materials of Grey Infrastructure). The American Society of Landscape Architects describes green infrastructure as when “nature is harnessed by people and used as an infrastructural system” and that “while it’s often closely associated with green stormwater management systems, which are smart and cost-effective, it’s really bigger than that,” including wildlife protection, parks and urban forests, and transportation systems.
- **Complete Streets** are multi-modal, providing options for safe travel by foot, bike, transit, and other transportation options. According to Smart Growth America, “by adopting a Complete Streets policy, communities direct their transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation.” This can include considerations such as sidewalks, protected bike lanes, and adequate transit stops, all of which can be benefited by street trees.
- **General Plan:** Every city and county must adopt “a comprehensive, long-term general plan” (Gov. Code § 65300). The purpose of a general plan is to guide land use planning decisions and zoning regulations. Under state law, subdivisions, capital improvements, development agreements, and many other land use actions must be consistent with the adopted general plan. Recent legislation mandates that upcoming general plan revisions must include environmental justice policies (SB 1000) and climate adaptation and resiliency strategies (SB 379).

### One Thing to Remember

Trees make everything better. Public health, transportation, air and water quality, safety, climate change, and the local economy are all positively impacted by trees. The cost of maintenance is a common concern for planners, so reminding them of the long-term savings that trees provide can be helpful in your work.



Franklin Blvd Proposed Protected Bike Lane (City of Sac)

“Put street trees almost everywhere. There is no better use of public funds.”

—Jeff Speck,  
*Walkable City Rules*