

Highlights

Why We Did This Audit

In the last three years, City Council has declared a climate and ecological emergency, approved the Urban Forest Master Plan and approved the Climate Protection and Resiliency Plan. The two approved plans provide policy direction for the city to actively address climate change.

The city's trees are in decline due to age, disease, and weather. It is important to focus efforts on tree preservation and expansion immediately and remain consistent with these efforts.

Conserving and restoring city trees through active management is one strategy to address climate change. Successful department coordination of tree removal and planting impacts the city's ability to achieve its climate and tree canopy goals.

Objective

Do departments remove and replace city trees in a way that supports the city's goal to increase the tree canopy?

Background

The Parks and Recreation Department manages all city trees.

City trees are assets that provide significant benefits to residents such as reducing air and water pollution, moderating high temperatures and increasing property values.

Maximum benefits from trees are not realized until trees are mature and significantly add to the tree canopy. Measuring the tree canopy is a common way to estimate changes in benefits from trees such as impacts on air pollution. The city's tree canopy is made up of city trees and privately owned trees.

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PERFORMANCE AUDIT – March 2023

Implement City Tree Management Regulation to Help Achieve City Tree Canopy Goal

What We Found

In March 2021, the city manager issued Administrative Regulation 5-7, Tree Canopy Preservation and Expansion.

The new city tree management regulation applies to all departments

when removing and replacing city trees. The regulation was established to ensure city tree management contributes to the overall tree canopy.



The city tree management regulation has not been implemented. The Parks and Recreation Department did not create a permit process to manage city departments' removal and replacement of trees as outlined in the regulation. Replacement rates for trees in the right-of-way remain at lower levels than required by the regulation.

The regulation includes a calculation where in lieu of replanting city trees as part of a project, the project can pay into the Tree Replacement Fund. However, project funding sources (e.g., bonds or PIAC) could limit projects' abilities to put money into the tree fund. Without clarification on the use of project funds in the tree fund, the monies may not be made available or properly segregated to track project funds.

The regulation does not include procedures, such as permitting and planting specifications, for city departments to follow when planting new trees that do not first involve tree removals. Adding these requirements helps ensure species restrictions, locations, and planting methods are followed and new trees are added to the city tree inventory.

Parks and Recreation does not maintain a complete city tree inventory or always updates the city tree inventory when they make changes. A complete inventory of city trees will help manage the city's tree canopy.

What We Recommend (full list on back)

We make recommendations to implement the city tree management regulation, assign responsibility and authority for implementation within the Parks and Recreation Department, determine and report staffing needs, clarify use of the Tree Replacement Fund, add provisions for new tree plantings to the regulation, communicate the regulation to all departments, and maintain a tree inventory.

Management agreed with two and agreed in part with seven of the nine recommendations.



**KANSAS CITY
MISSOURI**

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Recommendations	Management Agreement
1. The director of the parks and recreation department should ensure staff implement a permit process in accordance with Administrative Regulation 5-7.	Agree In Part
2. The director of the parks and recreation department should require the tree replacement rates, defined in Administrative Regulation 5-7, are consistently followed.	Agree
3. The director of the parks and recreation department should review Administrative Regulation 5-7 with each department to communicate Parks and Recreation’s responsibility to manage all city trees; and departments’ responsibilities related to required tree permits; tree replacement rates; and tree replacement costs.	Agree In Part
4. The director of parks and recreation should clarify whether bond funds can be placed in the tree replacement fund and determine how money can be segregated to ensure they are spent according to their funding source restrictions.	Agree In Part
5. The director of parks and recreation should propose to the city manager revisions to Administrative Regulation 5-7 including adding permitting and planting specifications for planting city trees which do not involve a prior tree removal.	Agree In Part
6. The director of parks and recreation should develop a written process for staff to maintain the existing tree inventory data and ensure tree removals and plantings of all city trees are added.	Agree In Part
7. The director of parks and recreation should work with the Office of Environmental Quality to submit a grant application to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Healthy Streets Program when the Federal government opens the grant application period for these funds.	Agree In Part
8. The director of Parks and Recreation should assign the responsibility and authority within the Parks and Recreation Department for the implementation of Administrative Regulation 5-7 and the maintenance of the city tree inventory.	Agree In Part
9. The director of parks and recreation should evaluate staffing needs based on increased workload related to managing all city trees and provide that information to the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners and the City Council for budget consideration.	Agree

