

# Los Angeles Urban Forest Equity Neighborhood Strategy: Sylmar

January 2024

Prepared by the Los Angeles Urban Forest Equity Collective

Sylmar community engagement led by: TreePeople



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## Land Acknowledgement

The Urban Forest Equity Collective (UFEC) acknowledges our presence in the ancestral territory of Tovaangar. This is unceded land. Their homes and livelihoods were destroyed. The Gabrieleño, Tongva, Kizh, and Fernandeano Tataviam peoples and nations are the traditional land caretakers, and we pay our respects to their Ancestors, Elders, and Relatives past, present, and emerging. Acknowledgement is a simple, powerful way of showing respect and a step toward correcting the stories and practices that erase Indigenous people's history and culture and toward inviting and honoring the truth.

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# 01 Introduction

## The Project

This report serves as one of five individual documents developed over the course of Phase II of the Urban Forest Equity Collective. This document provides an overview of the Sylmar pilot neighborhood assessment, engagement, and tree planting implementation process. It is intended to provide a transparent view into the decisions, points of analysis and key themes derived over the course of this phase.

## Los Angeles Urban Forest Equity Collective (UFEC)

The Urban Forest Equity Collective is a consortium of forestry experts, Los Angeles (LA) City staff, community-based organizations, researchers, and consultants. The UFEC project aims to create a holistic analysis and strategy to advance urban forest equity in LA's lowest-canopied neighborhoods and address decades of systemic disinvestment that have resulted in poor public health outcomes, limited access to green spaces, and a host of related consequences ranging from heat exposure and poor air quality, to food insecurity and reduced ecosystem services. This work is funded by Accelerate Resilience Los Angeles (ARLA) and the US Forest Service (USFS) through the Los Angeles Center for Urban Natural Resources Sustainability.

## UFEC Vision Statement

Los Angeles communities and leaders recognize the systemic causes and impacts of urban forest inequity and work together to dismantle the physical, political, and social barriers that perpetuate it. Los Angeles is actively growing, protecting, and prioritizing an accessible, inclusive, and adequately funded urban forest for all Angelenos. By advancing urban forest equity, Los Angeles will build climate resilience and enduring protection for our frontline communities.

## 02 Pilot Neighborhood Selection

### Decision-Making Framework

CAPA Strategies led the development of an urban forest equity decision-making framework to define and compare urban forest equity considerations across neighborhoods in Los Angeles. The framework includes three quantitative assessment steps at the census tract scale, followed by a qualitative feasibility assessment at the neighborhood council scale, which guided the selection of two pilot neighborhoods, including Central Alameda and Sylmar.

The four assessment steps in the framework are outlined in Table 1. The first step considers physical and economic need by assessing canopy coverage, impervious surface coverage and median household income relative to the city-wide averages (20%, 60%, and \$67,418 respectively as of 2019). Census tracts that met the required thresholds to move beyond Step 1 in the decision-making framework demonstrated lower than average canopy, higher than average impervious cover, and lower than average median household income.

The second step establishes need by establishing environmental exposure pathways. For environmental exposure, the scope was limited to those hazards which could be directly mitigated by the presence of trees; namely, heat and air pollution.<sup>1 2 3</sup> Census tracts selected in the second step displayed exposure within the upper 50th percentile (when compared against other tracts still under consideration) for heat and PM 2.5 or Diesel PM.<sup>4</sup> In other words, only tracts experiencing relatively high exposure to both heat and air pollution passed through this step.

The third step assesses socio-demographic conditions. The framework was not intended to identify vulnerable populations. Rather, the framework was designed to identify locations where tree canopy is lacking, and where historic and present-day disinvestment has led to systemic lack of economic resources, and in some cases, institutional political representation for residents, that would advance urban tree canopy cover. The chosen socio-demographic indicators are associated in case study literature with difficulty in accessing forestry-related resources (for more information on UFEC's methods and selection criteria, please read our report, 'LA Urban Forest Equity: Assessment, Tools, and Recommendations'). To meet the required thresholds for Step 3 and remain under consideration as a potential pilot community, census tracts were required to score within the upper 50th percentile (when compared against other tracts still under consideration) for at least four of the eight following socio-demographic indicators:<sup>5</sup>

•

- Percent of the population below the poverty line
- Percent of the adult population with less than a high school diploma
- Percent of the population that is non-white and/or Hispanic
- Percent of the population that speaks a language other than English at home
- Percent of the population that rents their home
- Percent of the population that has no home internet access.
- Population density
- Residence in an area that was formerly redlined with a grade of C or D (this indicator is exempt from the upper-50th-percentile threshold; any tract that was formerly redlined with a grade of C or D is considered passing in this category)

The final step considers qualitative factors impacting feasibility and community readiness with the goal of narrowing in on the extent to which projects in a specific area are likely to succeed. There is no specific numerical threshold for the final step. Instead, the following areas are considered: (1) Level of nonprofit or partner involvement, (2) Presence of suitable sites for intervention, (3) Community interest in being engaged, (4) Extent to which an area is utilized by residents.

**Table 1. The four steps of the decision-making framework**

	Qualification	Yes	No
<b>Step 1</b>	Does the tract meet Physical and Economic need conditions? <i>[Does the tract have &lt;=20% canopy AND &gt;=60% impervious surface cover AND median household income &lt;=\$67,418?]</i>	Move on to step 2.	Remove tract from further consideration.
<b>Step 2</b>	Does the tract experience high Environmental Exposure? <i>[Does the tract score in the upper 50th percentile (compared to other tracts under consideration in Step 2) for projected days over 90 degrees AND PM 2.5 AND/OR Diesel PM?]</i>	Move on to step 3.	Remove tract from further consideration.
<b>Step 3</b>	Does the tract exhibit relevant socio-demographic conditions? <i>[Does the tract score in the upper 50th percentile (compared to other tracts under consideration in Step 3) for AT LEAST four of eight indicators?]</i>	Move on to step 4.	Remove tract from further consideration.
<b>Step 4</b>	Does the neighborhood council representing the tract meet a qualitative threshold for feasibility?	Validate findings through community engagement or partner/professional consultation.	Consider if feasibility could be improved to prepare tracts for future projects.

<sup>1</sup> Nowak, D. J., Hirabayashi, S., Bodine, A., & Hoehn, R. (2013). Modeled PM2.5 removal by trees in ten U.S. cities and associated health effects. *Environmental Pollution*, 178, 395–402.

<sup>2</sup> Rahman, M. A., Stratopoulos, L., M. F., Moser-Reischl, A., Zölch, T., Häberle, K.-H., Rötzer, T., ... Pauleit, S. (2020). Traits of trees for cooling urban heat islands: A meta-analysis. *Building and Environment*, 170,

<sup>3</sup> Wang, H., Maher, B. A., Ahmed, I. A., & Davison, B. (2019). Efficient Removal of Ultrafine Particles from Diesel Exhaust by Selected Tree Species: Implications for Roadside Planting for Improving the Quality of Urban Air. *Environmental Science &*

<sup>4</sup> PM refers to particulate matter, a type of pollution. PM 2.5 is a fine particle type, with particles measuring 2.5 microns or less in diameter. This type is particularly harmful as it can get deep into the lungs and possibly the bloodstream. Diesel PM comes from the exhaust of trucks, trains, ships, and diesel-powered equipment and is common in urban environments near major roadways and ports.

<sup>5</sup> For all socio-demographic indicators (with the exception of formerly redlined areas) American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 data was used. This was the most recent year for which all needed datasets, including physical environment and exposure data, were available.

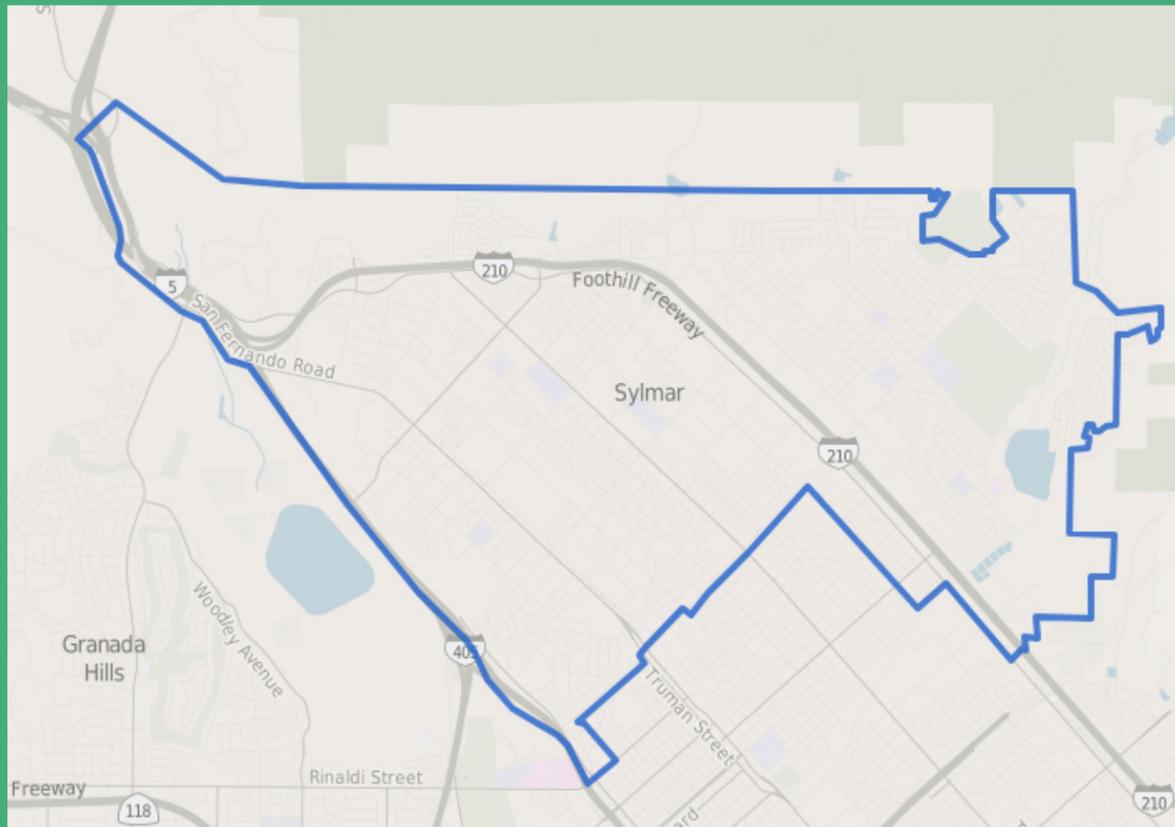


Figure 1. Map of the Sylmar Neighborhood  
Source: Los Angeles City Planning Department 2023

Los Angeles' 1,722 census tracts were evaluated using steps 1-3 of the framework. One hundred fifty-five (155) census tracts met the criteria, which translated into 30 neighborhoods. The UFEC community engagement team assessed those 30 neighborhoods using step 4, which involved consultation with community engagement partners TreePeople and North East Trees. The team ultimately selected Sylmar and Central Alameda as the two pilot neighborhoods.

## Sylmar Context and Background

The selection of Sylmar reflects the results of the decision-making framework, out of which two census tracts in Sylmar emerged as high priority. Selection of Sylmar also took into account practical considerations and recommendations from involved stakeholders. Considerations of implementation feasibility were influenced by TreePeople's history of engagement and established network in the neighborhood. In addition, the presence of a considerable number of community volunteers living in Sylmar who support TreePeople's tree planting, maintenance and care in the Northeast San Fernando Valley played a role.

The northernmost neighborhood in the City of Los Angeles, Sylmar (Figure 1) is located in the San Fernando Valley and measures 12.46 square miles. Sylmar has a population of 81,628<sup>6</sup> who are represented by LA City Council District 7 and the Sylmar Neighborhood Council.

The Urban Forest Equity Decision-making Framework process resulted in the selection of two high-priority census tracts in Sylmar (Figure 2). Table 2 contains the average of the two selected census tracts in Sylmar for each indicator noted.

<sup>6</sup> City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning 2019

Table 2. Sylmar high-priority census tract indicators

Factor	Indicator	Sylmar (Avg. of high-priority tracts)
Physical & Economic Factors	Urban Tree Canopy Cover	17%
	Impervious Surface	70%
	Median Household Income	\$47,263
Environmental Exposure Factors	Days Projected Over 90F	110 days / year
	Number of Excess Emergency Room Visits (per day, per zip code)	24
	Number of Emergency Room Visits Due to Extreme Heat	14,877
	Ozone	0.067 ppm
	PM 2.5	~11 µg/m <sup>3</sup>
	Diesel PM	0.35 Tons/year
Socio-Demographic Factors	Poverty %	26%
	Non-English Speaking %	76%
	Population Density	0.016 people/square meter
	No Internet Access %	21%
	High School or Equivalent	67%
	Redlining HOLC Grade	Not Graded
	Renter Population	79% renters
Land Use Breakdown by Neighborhood Council	Multi-Family	59%
	Single Family	49%
	Open Space	2%
	Commercial	17%
	Industrial	0%
	Public Facilities	7%
Tree Growth Factors & Site Conditions	Sunset Climate Zone	Zone 22
	Soil Condition / Type	Sandy
	Average Precipitation	11 inches (average for 1998 - 2021)

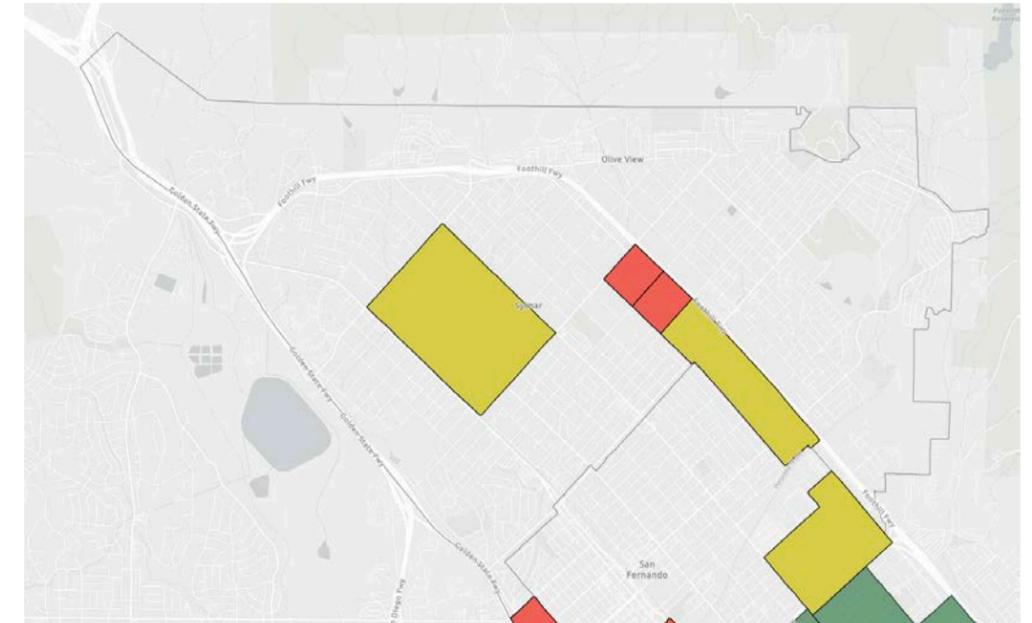


Figure 2. Sylmar census tracts identified by the Urban Forest Equity Decision-Making Framework  
Source: Los Angeles Urban Forestry Equity Prioritization Map

## 03 Sylmar Site Conditions & Study Area

In order to ground truth and begin to explore the biggest physical challenges in Sylmar's landscape to advance urban forest equity, in the fall of 2022 the UFEC community engagement team walked the streets of Sylmar to assess and document site conditions in the neighborhood. The team identified several challenges explored in more detail below.

**Reverse Parkways** (Figure 3), public spaces between the sidewalk and private property, are common in Sylmar. Planting in reverse parkways is possible, yet requires negotiation of space in the public right-of-way to accommodate new tree plantings. Before trees can be planted in reverse parkways an assessor needs to be consulted to identify the public and private property lines.

Tree well-related challenges include lack of tree wells on many corridors, **tree well obstructions** such as agriperms filler (Figure 4), and **insufficient tree well size** (Figure 5). Some existing tree wells in Sylmar's parkways are filled in with concrete and rebar, or covered over by other obstructions. Removing that covering is a relatively straightforward solution to reclaiming community space for tree canopy. In other instances, existing tree wells are insufficient for the parkway tree currently planted. In this case, expanding tree wells to accommodate large shade-producing trees can support increased tree canopy and shading and cooling benefits for decades to come.

**Overhead power lines** (Figure 3) and above-ground utilities and poles present an obvious challenge to tree planting in Sylmar as these lines exist across residential neighborhoods and commercial/industrial areas of the community. These features prove challenging in accommodating any species other than small-stature trees, as overhead power lines can present a conflict as a tree grows. Medium and large trees offer greater benefits than smaller trees, including shade, but overhead power lines present a significant challenge. In many cases, City of Los Angeles Street Tree Spacing Guidelines preclude medium or large trees from being planted where overhead power lines are present.



Figure 3. Reverse parkways are prevalent in Sylmar

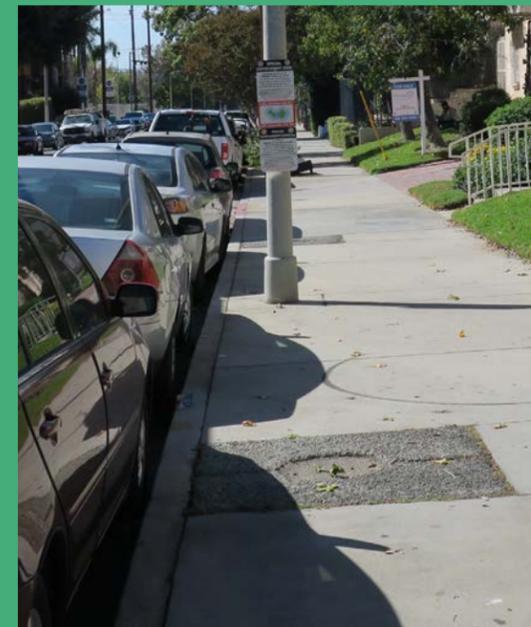


Figure 4. Tree well obstruction



Figure 5. Insufficient tree well size



Figure 6. Non-existent parkway



Figure 7. Intersection of Foothill Blvd and Roxford Street

Some streets in Sylmar have **non-existent parkways**, as in the sidewalk pictured in Figure 6 near a school property. In situations such as this, more involved solutions are necessary in order to reallocate space in the public right-of-way to create tree planting opportunities. In Sylmar, as in many areas throughout Los Angeles, significant reallocation of public space for trees involves negotiation with competing public priorities such as transportation infrastructure and parking. Sylmar has a large equestrian community which adds some complexity on some streets and intersections. For the most part, these areas are near Sylmar's open spaces, at the northeastern area of the community where there is access to trails and Stetson Ranch Park. At the intersection of Foothill Blvd and Roxford Street (Figure 7), some areas have been designed to accommodate both pedestrians and horse riders, but this requires additional space. Sylmar has a mix of paved and unpaved "sidewalks" that serve multiple transportation needs. Horse traffic requires added space and visibility at intersections, a need that can conflict with the foliage and shading that come with added parkway trees. Additional challenges include a lack of street trees, insufficient stormwater management infrastructure, and inaccessible sidewalks. The addition of a curb cut, an opening in a curb that slopes down to the level of the road, would allow for wheeled travel between the sidewalk and the road. The intersecting challenges presented here also provide an opportunity to implement multi-benefit solutions that can address a network of community needs at once. In this instance, a beneficial potential solution would consider increased planting space, planting trees in the right-of-way, managing stormwater, and introducing curb cuts to improve sidewalk accessibility.

# 04 Community Engagement Objectives & Strategy

## Community Engagement Objectives

The community engagement strategy cultivated and implemented in Sylmar grew out of a months-long process in which the UFEC community engagement team explored goals and potential actions. Central to this process was the development of core objectives.

### Core Community Engagement Objectives

The following core objectives were developed by UFEC and underpinned all community engagement activities:

1. Serve as a source of support for community members in ongoing and future urban greening work, including work with newly planted and existing mature trees
2. Uplift a culture of care and stewardship for newly planted and existing mature trees in our communities
3. Listen to and identify the primary issues of concern in each pilot community via surveys and community workshops
4. Understand if and how trees fit into the community's vision for their neighborhood
5. Learn what attitudes, values, and knowledge residents have toward or about trees
6. Raise awareness of how urban forest equity issues impact the neighborhood and how UFEC's Tiered Planting Framework<sup>7</sup> can be a tool to address those issues
7. Co-design and re-envision select neighborhood areas within two pilot neighborhoods, driven by community members with lived experience and expertise
8. Serve as a bridge and translator, communicating community needs to city decision-makers

<sup>7</sup> In an earlier project phase, UFEC introduced a 3-tiered system to assess different levels of investment and effort required for tree planting. Tier 1 focuses on planting opportunities in existing spaces, such as tree wells, parkways, and private backyards, requiring minimal intervention. Tier 2 involves minor modifications to the public right of way, like widening tree wells or addressing obstructions. Tier 3 encompasses more significant changes or reallocation of public roadway space for planting, including planted curb extensions and roundabouts. For more information, see the Los Angeles Urban Forest Equity Streets Guidebook (Appendix).

## Community Engagement Approach

The UFEC community engagement team in Sylmar, led by TreePeople, developed an engagement strategy and core objectives for working with the Sylmar community. The planned engagement period spanned from March to June 2023. TreePeople staff members from the urban forestry, community engagement, and policy and research teams collaborated to conduct successful engagements. Key activities included: tabling at high-traffic community events and community hubs, disseminating visually engaging bilingual flyers, developing deeper engagement with local leaders, implementing a community survey (with a target of at least 100 completed responses), distributing native plants and shade trees to honor community participation, and holding two participatory workshops with a monetary incentive for residents.

## Community Survey

The community survey served as an instrumental initial outreach strategy for the UFEC team. The survey was developed by UFEC and informed by resources relevant to the setting and topic (Appendix). The survey was designed to understand: (1) what neighborhood-specific attitudes and values impact the planting and stewardship of trees; (2) how residents prioritize values and issues in their neighborhoods around which trees may provide a solution; and (3) attitudes and perceptions related to the reallocation of neighborhood space (such as reduced parking) that may be required for Tier 3 interventions. After pilot testing and revisions for content and length, the final survey consisted of six questions and took an average of five minutes to complete. The survey was offered in both Spanish and English.

TreePeople organized five survey collection events from March to May 2023 in the Sylmar neighborhood, with the goal of collecting 100 or more completed surveys. Additionally, the survey was distributed electronically via an email blast to targeted constituents, and TreePeople collaborated with City Councilmember Monica Rodriguez's office (7th Council District) and the Sylmar Neighborhood Council to distribute the survey through their contacts. TreePeople also collected surveys in person at a range of highly trafficked community spaces and events, including a local farmers' market, a local park opening, an open mic night, and the public library. In exchange for completion of the survey in person via tablet or on paper, community members were offered a potted native plant to take home. Each native plant came with care instructions and QR code linking them to the plant's profile on calscape.org. Packets of native seeds were also given out to people who approached the table but did not qualify for the survey (in-person surveys were only administered to Sylmar residents).



### Tier 1 - Available

No site modification is needed. Tree canopy goals can be achieved by planting vacant existing vacant locations.



### Tier 2 - Moderate

Minimal site modifications needed. Tree canopy goals can be achieved with additional financial resources and possible site modifications within current City and County standards.



### Tier 3 - Hard

Drastic site modifications needed. Significant tree canopy increase cannot be achieved with existing infrastructure and policy modifications are needed to reach canopy equity and public health targets.

## Community Survey Results

Over three months of outreach, TreePeople collected 234 surveys (31 in Spanish and 203 in English), and distributed 150 native plants for community member participation. The number of plants distributed does not match the number of surveys completed because not all survey-takers chose to take home a native plant. Eighty percent of respondents live in the neighborhood, and 46% have lived there more than 15 years. Most live in Sylmar, 24% reported that they work in Sylmar, and 5% reported that they attend school in the neighborhood.

Results show trees are valued among Sylmar residents. Over two-thirds of respondents agree that trees are good for the neighborhood, will encourage people to be outside more, and are beautiful to look at. The most highly valued benefits of trees among survey respondents were improved air quality, cooling, and beautifying the neighborhood (Figure 8). When asked where they would like to see more trees planted in Sylmar, respondents showed a strong preference for residential streets (73%) and parks (67%), with common areas in multi-family housing (60%) and schools (50%) also receiving strong support. Least popular locations for new trees included commercial properties (40%), private yards (34%), and alleys (8%) (Figure 9).

Key challenges facing the urban forest in Sylmar include tree care and maintenance. More than three quarters (77%) of respondents believe it is the city's responsibility to care for street trees and 44% feel the trees in their neighborhood are poorly maintained. However, the majority of respondents did not express strong concern about trees causing a mess or property damage, indicating that the perception of trees causing problems of this sort is not a significant barrier in Sylmar.

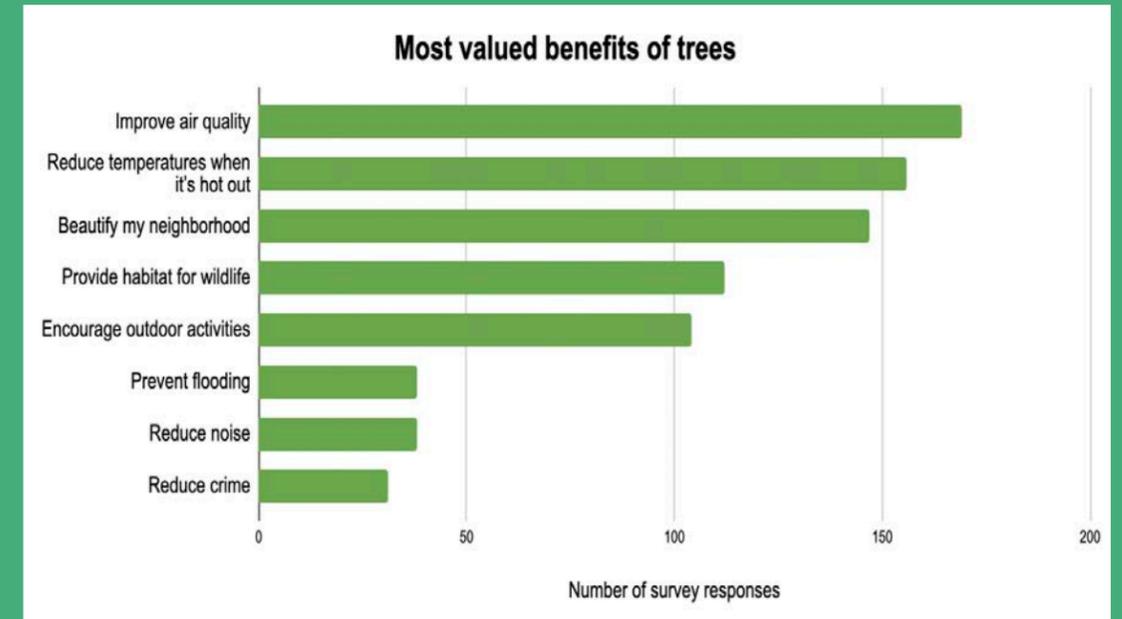


Figure 8. Most valued benefits of trees

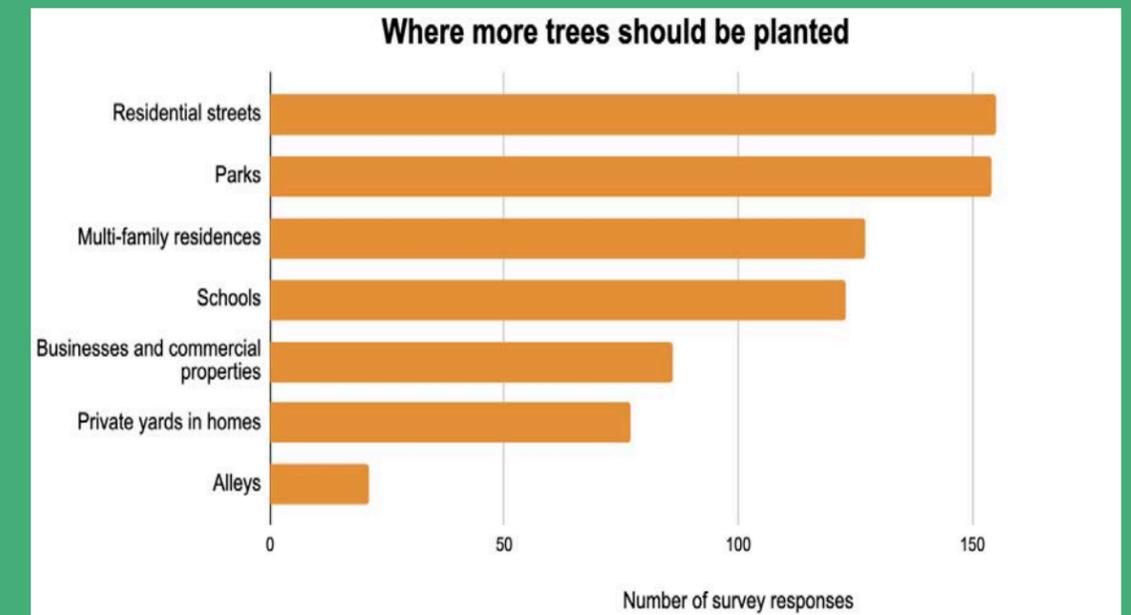


Figure 9. Desired tree planting locations

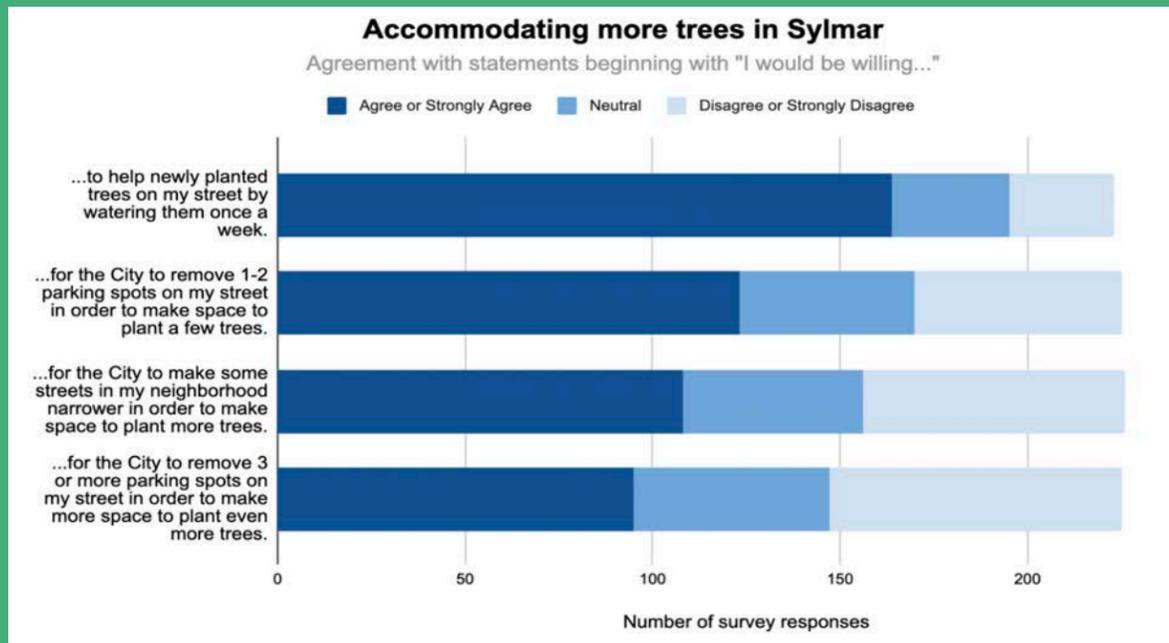


Figure 10. Willingness to accommodate more trees

Questions regarding the strategies for Sylmar to accommodate more trees produced mixed responses (Figure 10). The majority of respondents (84%) want more trees in the neighborhood, but only about two-thirds expressed a desire for trees in their home (68%). More than half (54%) would be willing to give up one to two parking spaces on their street to make room for trees, but significantly less than half (40%) would be willing to give up three or more spaces. Nearly half (47%) would be open to the city narrowing some streets to make room for more trees.



Figure 11. Workshop participants indicated where they live as they arrived at the workshop



Figure 12. Workshop participants worked on mapping activities in small groups

## Workshops

Survey results guided UFEC in planning and developing two community workshops, and results of the surveys were shared during the workshop presentation. Knowing air quality and cooling are the most highly valued benefits of trees guided workshop facilitators to discuss exposure to air pollution and extreme heat in Sylmar in the narrative portion of the workshop. By framing the benefits of urban trees as tangible solutions to community concerns, facilitators were able to speak directly to community members' hopes for their neighborhood. Evidence that a vast majority of survey respondents want to see more trees in Sylmar built a solid foundation for the workshops and allowed facilitators to build on that enthusiasm when introducing the tiered planting framework. Additionally, understanding perceptions of challenges around tree care and maintenance allowed facilitators to come prepared to discuss related challenges.

Two workshops were held at the Sylmar Neighborhood Council Office in May and June 2023. Workshop recruitment was conducted by TreePeople at highly trafficked community events/locations, including several of the survey collection events. Attendees were asked to RSVP in advance and verify their residence in Sylmar. Due to space limitations, sign-ups were capped at 25 for the first workshop and 30 for the second. Each workshop was scheduled for two hours. Lunch and a \$50 gift card were provided to attendees at each workshop to demonstrate appreciation for their time and participation. At the first workshop TreePeople hosted a fruit and shade tree distribution of 48 five-gallon trees, courtesy of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and City Plants. Eligible households were able to take home up to seven trees to plant on their private property. The workshops were well attended, with 19 residents attending the first workshop, and 30 attending the second. Twelve residents attended both workshops.

## Workshop #1

The UFEC community engagement team set the following objectives for the first workshop: support community-building among participants; introduce the Los Angeles Urban Forest Equity Collective and the tiered framework; and invite community participants to identify priority streets, block segments, and other neighborhood areas where they would like to see more trees. The format of the workshop consisted of a welcome segment and initial introductions, an icebreaker activity for attendees, and dialogue with attendees was followed by overviewing UFEC and the pilot neighborhood project, and an interactive, discussion-based activity that rotated attendees across varied topic-based stations. The presentation delivery and materials were presented in both Spanish and English.

**Resident perspectives on tree benefits shared in the workshop:**

*“I live adjacent to 210 freeway, and the micro particles...we need trees.”*

*“For me, it’s about anxiety.”*

*“Reducing energy need because trees bring shade.”*

*“... it brings the kids out into nature, they’re always on screens and trees get the kids out.”*

In the first half of the workshop, facilitators provided context around UFEC, TreePeople, the benefits of urban trees, and preliminary takeaways from the community survey (Figures 11 & 12). Next, facilitators and participants discussed environmental exposures in Sylmar, including extreme heat days/year and air pollution. Facilitators introduced the UFEC tiered planting framework and used photographs from a recent walking tour of Sylmar to illustrate infrastructure challenges to planting more trees in the neighborhood.

In the second half of the workshop, residents rotated in small groups through three stations, using stickers, pushpins and thread to indicate their responses on printed large format maps of Sylmar (Figures 13 & 14). UFEC created a map of Sylmar for the workshop to contextualize opportunities for canopy expansion with current site conditions and relevant city plans for streetscape improvements. The map included existing canopy coverage, vacant tree wells, High Injury networks (identified in the Los Angeles Vision Zero Plan), and Pedestrian, Bicyclist and Transit Enhanced Networks (identified in the LA 2035 Mobility Plan).

In each station, participants responded to the following prompts:

Station 1: Indicate three streets you walk regularly. What streets do you avoid, and why? (Figure 15)

Station 2: What are three places in the community where you spend the most time? (Figure 16)

Station 3: What areas in your neighborhood do you think might need more trees? (Figure 17)

Community members offered an abundance of insights, wisdom, experiences, and ideas to the discussion. In addition to feedback gathered in the mapping stations, overall takeaways from the first workshop were positive. Community members responded to questions with expert-level guidance and knowledge in many cases and shared stories of their experiences with and relationships to trees. In addition to expressing general enthusiasm about the idea of more trees in Sylmar, an overwhelming majority of community members highlighted the value of their local parks. Participants connected with each other, many for the first time, and built off of each other’s ideas. Many spoke of challenges unique to Sylmar, including the lack of parkway planting strips and sidewalks. They also discussed the presence of “reverse parkways” (public space between the sidewalk and property line) on many streets. The UFEC tiered planting framework appeared to resonate with many participants. While reviewing photographs of street conditions from the Sylmar site visit as a group, participants informally voted by a show of hands to indicate their opinion on the appropriate tier designation for different street scenarios.



Figure 13. Workshop participants used green string to indicate streets they walk regularly, and red string to indicate those streets they avoid



Figure 14. Workshop participants indicated with star stickers where they spend the most time in Sylmar



Figure 15. Station 1 map: participants indicated streets they walk regularly with green string, and streets they avoid with red string



Figure 17. Station 3 map: participants indicated locations where they would like more trees planted with green dot stickers



Figure 16. Station 2 map: participants indicated places in Sylmar where they spend the most time with star stickers



Figure 18. On average, each community member took home three trees from the workshop.

Mapping activity stations yielded clear feedback about where interventions could be most impactful and supportive of community needs. In the first station, several central corridors were noted as both highly utilized and often avoided, suggesting improvements would have high impact. The map created in the second station revealed residents spend the majority of their time in local parks, both in and adjacent to Sylmar. Participants indicated a desire for more trees across the entire neighborhood in Station 3, suggesting a general enthusiasm for a more robust urban forest across land use types.

In the final 10 minutes of the workshop, facilitators passed out an evaluation asking participants to share something they learned or appreciated, a question or concern, and if they planned to attend the second workshop a month later. Responses to the first question fell into three categories: appreciation for learning about the tiered framework, enthusiasm for more trees in Sylmar, and appreciation for new information learned about trees in their neighborhood and the benefits they provide. The majority of concerns were focused on availability of funding and space to plant and care for trees in Sylmar. A few participants asked how to get more involved, and one asked for more clarity around the concept of “tree equity.” Seventeen completed evaluation forms were collected, and 100% of participants indicated that they planned to attend the second workshop.

At the close of the workshop, participants were invited to take home up to seven fruit and shade trees per household to plant on their private property. On average, each participant took home three trees (Figure 18).

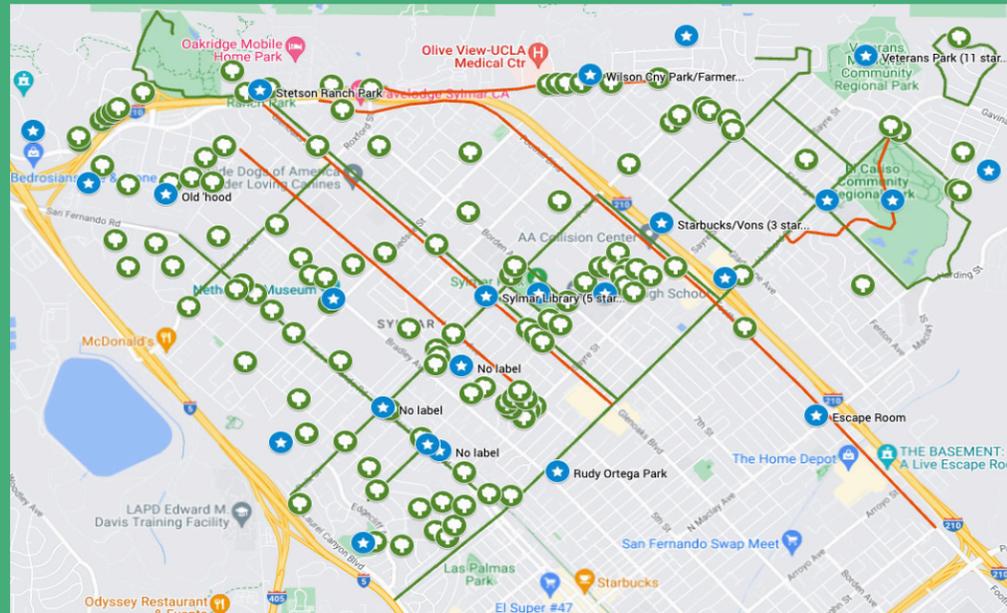


Figure 19. Synthesized feedback from workshop #1: Tree icons indicate where residents would like to see more trees planted. Red lines are streets residents indicated they avoid, green lines are those streets they walk regularly. Blue stars are locations in the community where residents indicated they spend the most time.

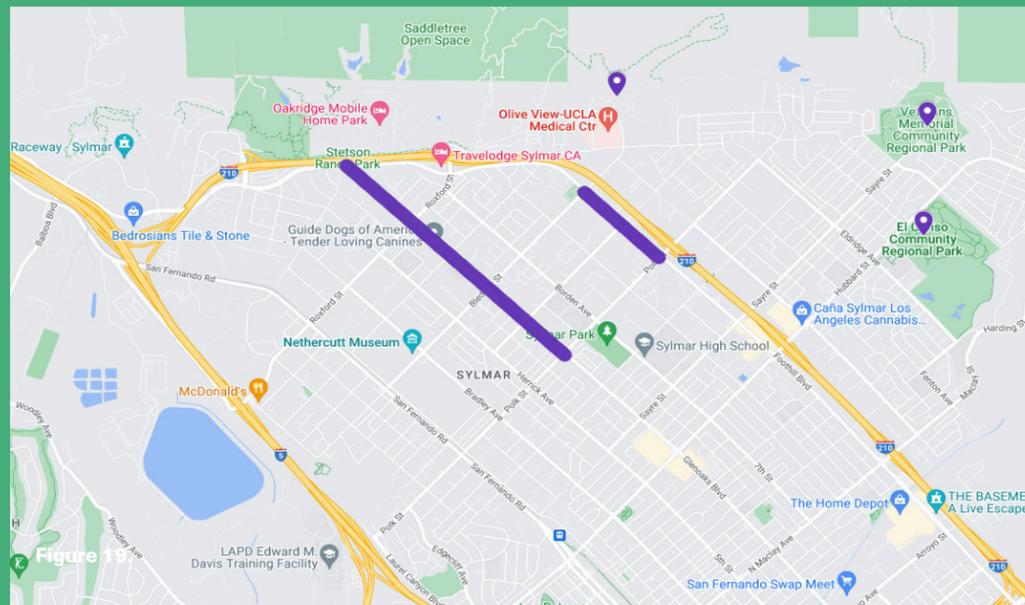


Figure 20. Street segments and parks indicated in purple were selected for focus in workshop #2

## Workshop #2

Planning for the second workshop involved reviewing the maps, notes, and evaluations gathered from the first. Feedback recorded in the map stations was synthesized into one map (Figure 19).

Two street segments and three local parks which residents highlighted as important community hubs were selected for deeper consideration in workshop 2 (Figure 20). The two street segments, on Foothill Boulevard and Glenoaks Boulevard, were selected in part because residents indicated they both use and avoid these corridors. Being highly trafficked, these segments are considered likely to yield significant benefit from more trees and represent fruitful scenarios for modeling Tier 3 interventions. Additional selection criteria included feasibility of intervention implementation and additional equity considerations represented in a spatial analysis conducted by partners at University of Southern California Urban Tree Initiative (Appendix).

In addition to using community feedback to select sites for intervention, the community engagement team set guiding objectives for the second workshop. Those objectives included: reflecting back results from the first workshop and orienting first time attendees; further solidifying community understanding of the three UFEC tiered framework; and determining possible interventions in identified areas. Additionally, facilitators planned to continue fostering community within the group and setting realistic expectations for progress resulting from this pilot project. Noting the attrition rate for the first workshop (25 RSVPs and 19 attendees), the team set a target of 30 RSVPs for the second. RSVPs revealed 50% of planned attendees (15 of 30) would be new to the material, having not attended the first workshop. This prompted the team to include a review of core concepts presented in the first workshop to support new attendees with foundational knowledge for the planned activities.

Formatted similarly to the first, the second workshop included a dialogue/presentation segment presented in English with simultaneous Spanish interpretation, followed by a participatory activity. The first portion reviewed exposure to extreme heat and air pollution in Sylmar, urban tree benefits, and UFEC's working definition of equity as it relates to local urban tree canopy, which a participant of the first workshop indicated confusion around in their post-workshop evaluation survey. This was followed by a continued discussion of the tiered framework and an introduction to the Los Angeles Urban Forest Equity Design Guidebook (Appendix).

In the second half of the workshop, residents chose from three possible activity stations. Each station allowed residents to consider the benefits and tradeoffs of implementing solutions from the Urban Forest Equity Design Guidebook in one of the locations identified in workshop 1: Foothill Blvd., Glenoaks Blvd., and community parks. Participants reviewed the design guide containing visual renderings of potential tier 3 interventions and reference maps on laptop and iPad screens. Reference maps included Google Maps/street view of the street segment in addition to the Equity Map from USC (Appendix).

Each of the three small groups yielded key feedback to inform next steps. The parks group shared that Sylmar does not currently have enough parks to accommodate community needs. They also discussed a desire for more trees in the parks that do exist, and the importance of protecting existing trees.

The Foothill Boulevard group expressed a desire to use trees to increase shade and cooling, improve air quality, provide beautification, and help with traffic control (Figure 21). Participants selected several interventions outlined in the guidebook as potential solutions including: a landscaped roundabout, a landscaped center median, planted bulb-outs in areas with ample parking, and a crossing island to help with dangerous left turns near frequented commercial centers. In addition, they noted a desire to augment existing tree wells to accommodate larger trees.

In the Glenoaks Boulevard station, residents expressed a desire for more trees planted along the parkways and support for curb extensions. They emphasized a desire to plant all existing wells and create more. In addition, several attendees voiced desires for drought-tolerant and native plants. Also, participants emphasized the need for mobilizing resident support for tree planting and care.

Feedback from the second workshop was captured by notetakers and recorded by residents on sticky notes, which were photographed by facilitators (Figure 22). After the workshop, the community engagement team reviewed the data and concluded the needs and preferences highlighted by participants would be best served by focusing on segments on Foothill and Glenoaks Boulevards for renderings. Renderings of potential interventions on those street segments, rather than park spaces, would accommodate community members' desire to visualize solutions such as planted medians, parkways, roundabouts and crossing islands on busy corridors in their neighborhood. Specific design solutions residents selected as well as their desire for improved air quality, shading, beauty, drought-tolerance and mitigation of traffic concerns was shared with design firm Stoss Landscape Urbanism to inform their designs.



Figure 21. Participants discussed potential solutions for Glenoaks and Foothill Boulevard in small groups



Figure 22. Participant feedback for Foothill Boulevard gathered during the workshop

## 05 Community-Informed Designs

The design development process began with a review and synthesis of feedback from the community surveys, community workshops, local site conditions, and the components layered within the community outreach map. The UFEC community engagement team worked closely with partnering firm Stoss Landscape Urbanism to settle on two street sections that speak to community concerns and provide the opportunity to demonstrate Tier 3 intervention possibilities: Foothill Boulevard near Astoria Street and Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street.

Stoss Landscape Urbanism followed community feedback to develop site-specific designs for the selected street sections on Foothill Boulevard and Glenoaks Boulevard, which they shared with the UFEC community engagement team for several rounds of review and revision.

UFEC also engaged in a feedback process with the Los Angeles Streets Working Group in June of 2023 to assess the feasibility of implementing interventions along street segments, according to land use, zoning, and roadway designations. In engaging with the streets working group, UFEC shared current and projected canopy analysis in Sylmar as well as synthesized feedback from the community survey and workshops. They presented the selected Foothill Boulevard segment and potential design elements to the working group.

The working group shared feedback on framing for community engagements, feasibility, and process considerations. They advised that highly trafficked pedestrian areas would be more likely to be prioritized for Tier 3 interventions, and a mix of land uses within a corridor would also improve likelihood of prioritization. The working group also noted that road width changes would necessitate involvement of the Department of Transportation in the process, and expressed support for framing community engagements around values including travel speed/vehicle capacity, community safety, and greening.

### Designs for Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street

Proposed designs for Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street address site specific challenges and opportunities identified by community members, the UFEC team, and conversations with the Los Angeles Streets Working Group (Figure 23). Challenges include overhead utility lines that restrict tree size, trash bin loading areas that conflict with the bicycle lane and parking spaces, and heat-exposed sidewalks. The design responds to these challenges and capitalizes on the opportunities presented by underutilized traffic and turning lanes. A bird's-eye view of the street segment (Figure 24) illustrates the sparse existing tree canopy and available planting space along this section of Foothill Boulevard.

Diagrams related to two proposed designs are presented here: the first includes Tier 1 and 2 interventions (Figures 25 & 26) and the second includes Tier 3 (Figures 27 & 28). In the Tier 1 and Tier 2 design diagram, small trees are proposed for planting in existing planting spaces, existing trees are designated for protection and maintenance, and vehicular traffic lanes remain unchanged. The Tier 3 design diagram proposes a curb extension planted with small trees to manage stormwater, a protected bike lane, relocated parking in both directions, reduction of traffic from two to one lane in each direction, a planted median, and sidewalk enhancements including bike racks and seating. Figure 29 imagines the proposed Tier 3 design with mature plantings and a proposed native plant palette.

# Challenges and Opportunities

Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street



Figure 23. Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street, challenges and opportunities  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism

# Existing Condition

Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street



Figure 24. Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street, existing conditions  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism

# Proposed Design Diagram - Tier 1+2

Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street

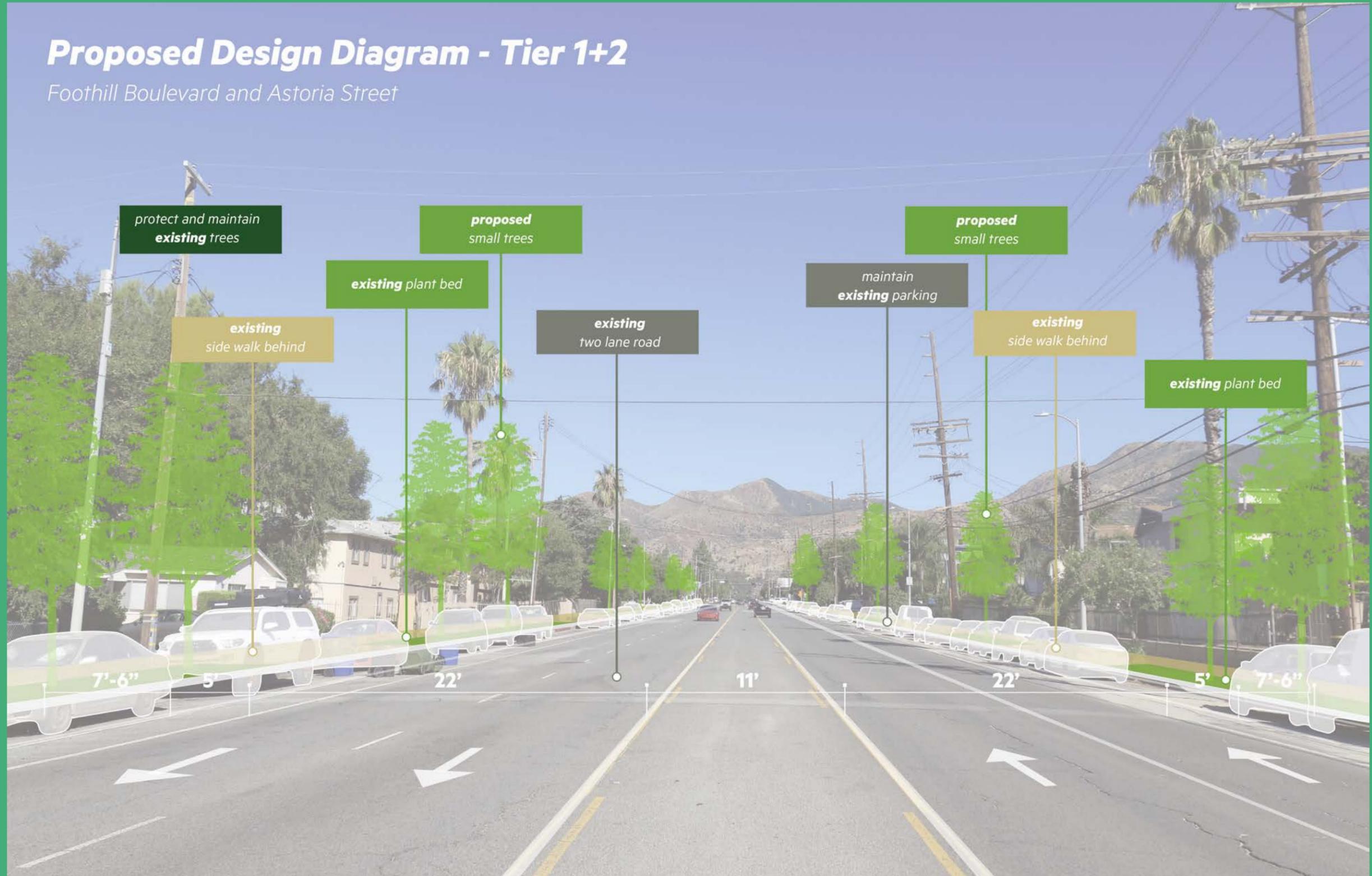


Figure 25. Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street, proposed design diagram, Tier 1 and Tier 2  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism

# Proposed Plan - Tier 1 + Tier 2

Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street



### Legend

-  **Proposed Small Trees**
-  **Existing Trees**
-  **Existing Plant Bed**

Figure 26. Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street, proposed Tier 1 and Tier 2 plan  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism

# Proposed Design Diagram - Tier 3

Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street

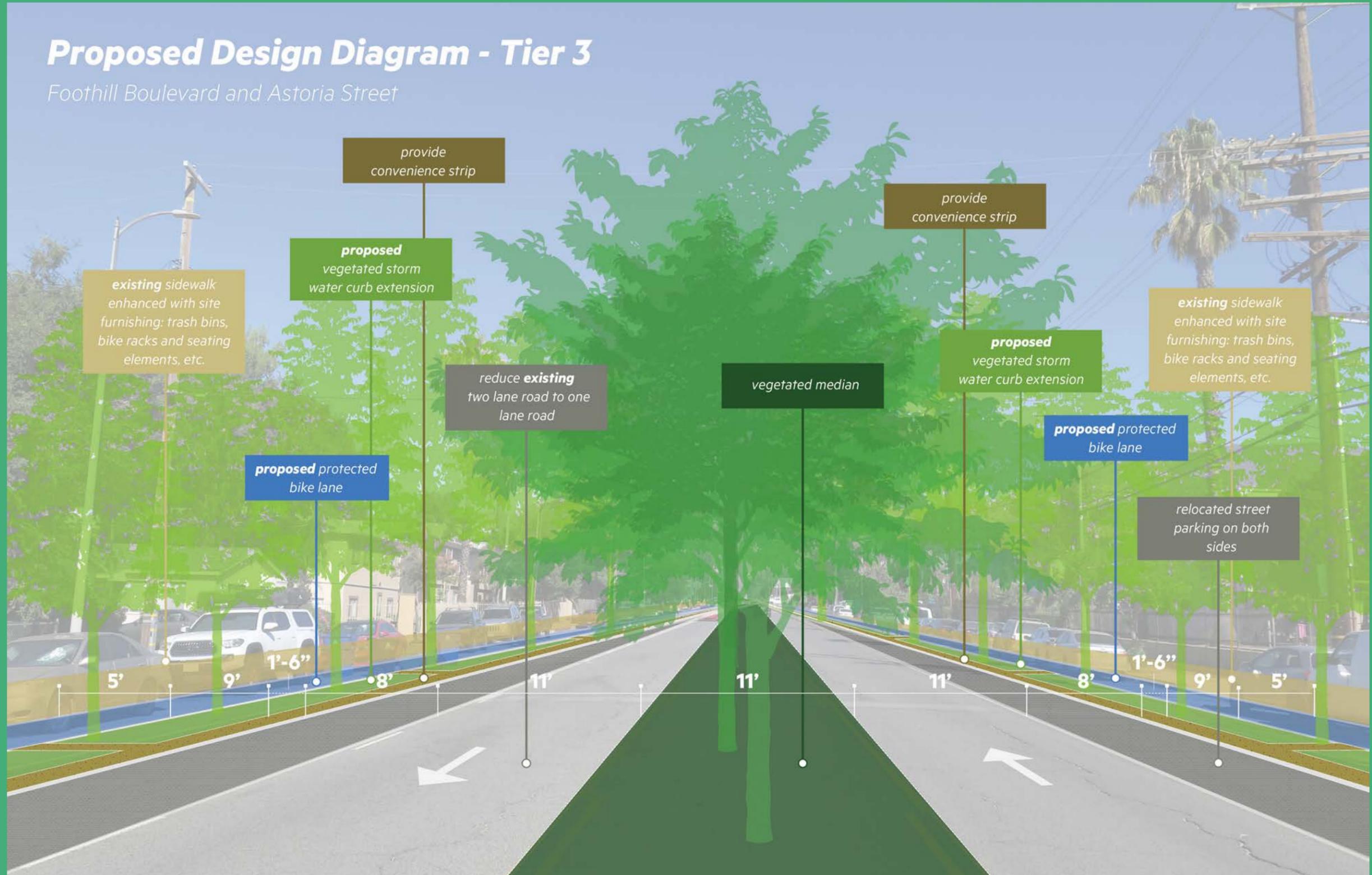


Figure 27. Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street, proposed design diagram, Tier 3  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanis

# Proposed Plan - Tier 3

Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street



Figure 28. Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street, proposed Tier 3 plan  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism

# Proposed Perspectival Section - Tier 3

Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street



Figure 29. Foothill Boulevard and Astoria Street, proposed design, Tier 3  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism

## Designs for Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street

Proposed designs for Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street address site specific challenges and opportunities identified by community members, the UFEC team, and the Los Angeles Streets Working Group (Figure 30). Challenges include overhead utility lines and heat-exposed sidewalks, and opportunities lie in the underutilized parking lanes and an underutilized central turning lane. A bird's-eye view of the street segment (Figure 31) illustrates the existing unplanted space and current tree canopy in the public right away along the Boulevard.

Diagrams related to two proposed designs are presented here: the first includes Tier 1 and 2 interventions (Figure 32) and the second includes Tier 3 (Figures 34 & 35). In the Tier 1 and Tier 2 design diagram, small trees are proposed for planting in existing planting spaces, existing trees are designated for protection and maintenance, and vehicular traffic lanes remain unchanged. The Tier 3 design diagram proposes bulbout planters to accommodate street parking, increase green space and manage stormwater, a planted median with large trees, a bike lane, and reduction of traffic from two to one lane in low traffic areas. Additional suggestions include sidewalk enhancements such as bike racks and seating. Figure 36 imagines the proposed Tier 3 design with mature plantings and a proposed native plant palette.



# Challenges and Opportunities

Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street



Figure 30. Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street, challenges and opportunities  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism



Figure 31. Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street, existing conditions  
 Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism

# Proposed Design Diagram - Tier 1+2

Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street

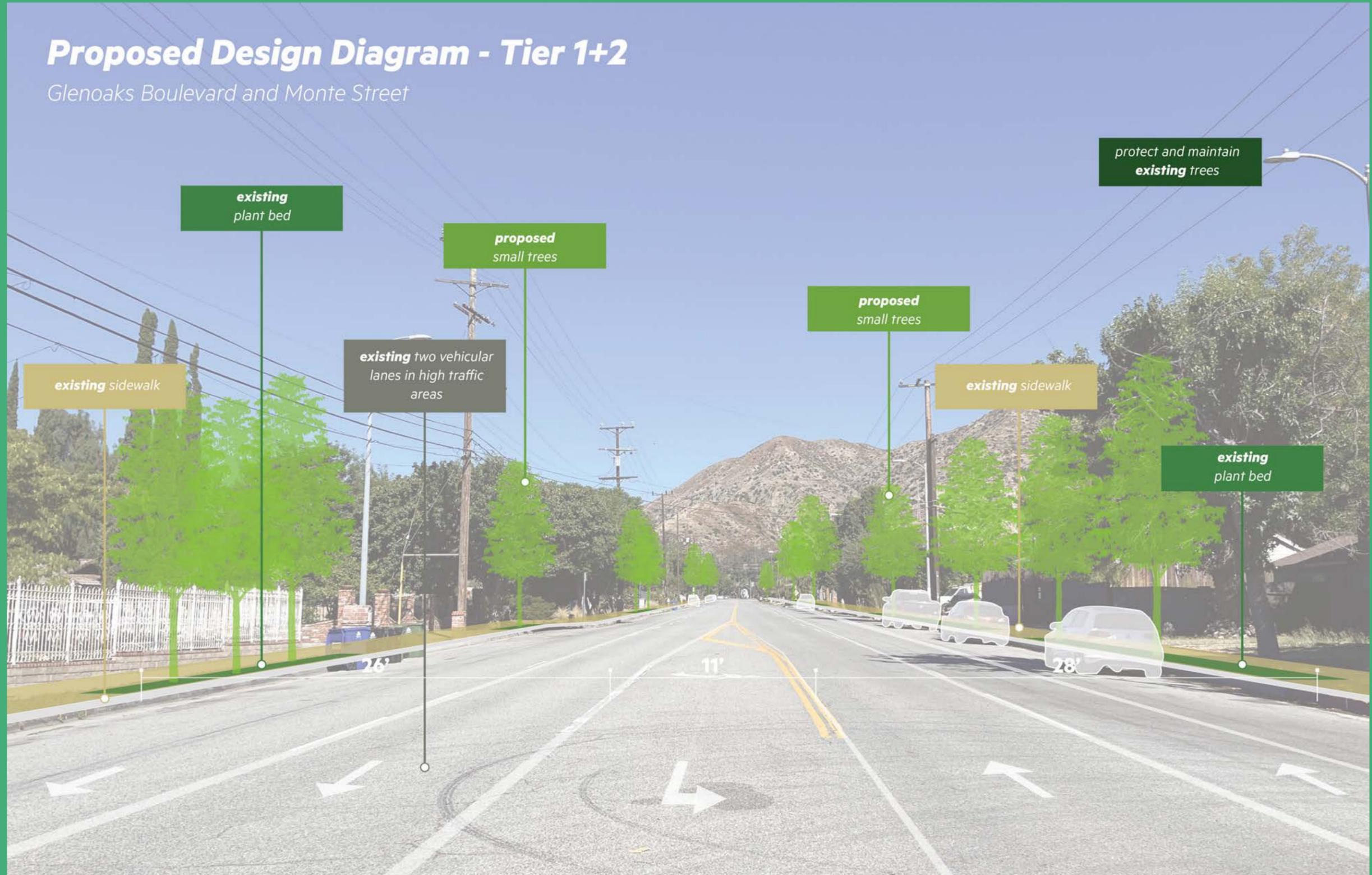


Figure 32. Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street, proposed design diagram, Tier 1 and Tier 2  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism



Figure 33. Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street, proposed Tier 1 and Tier 2 plan  
Landscape Urbanism

Credit: Stoss

# Proposed Design Diagram - Tier 3

Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street

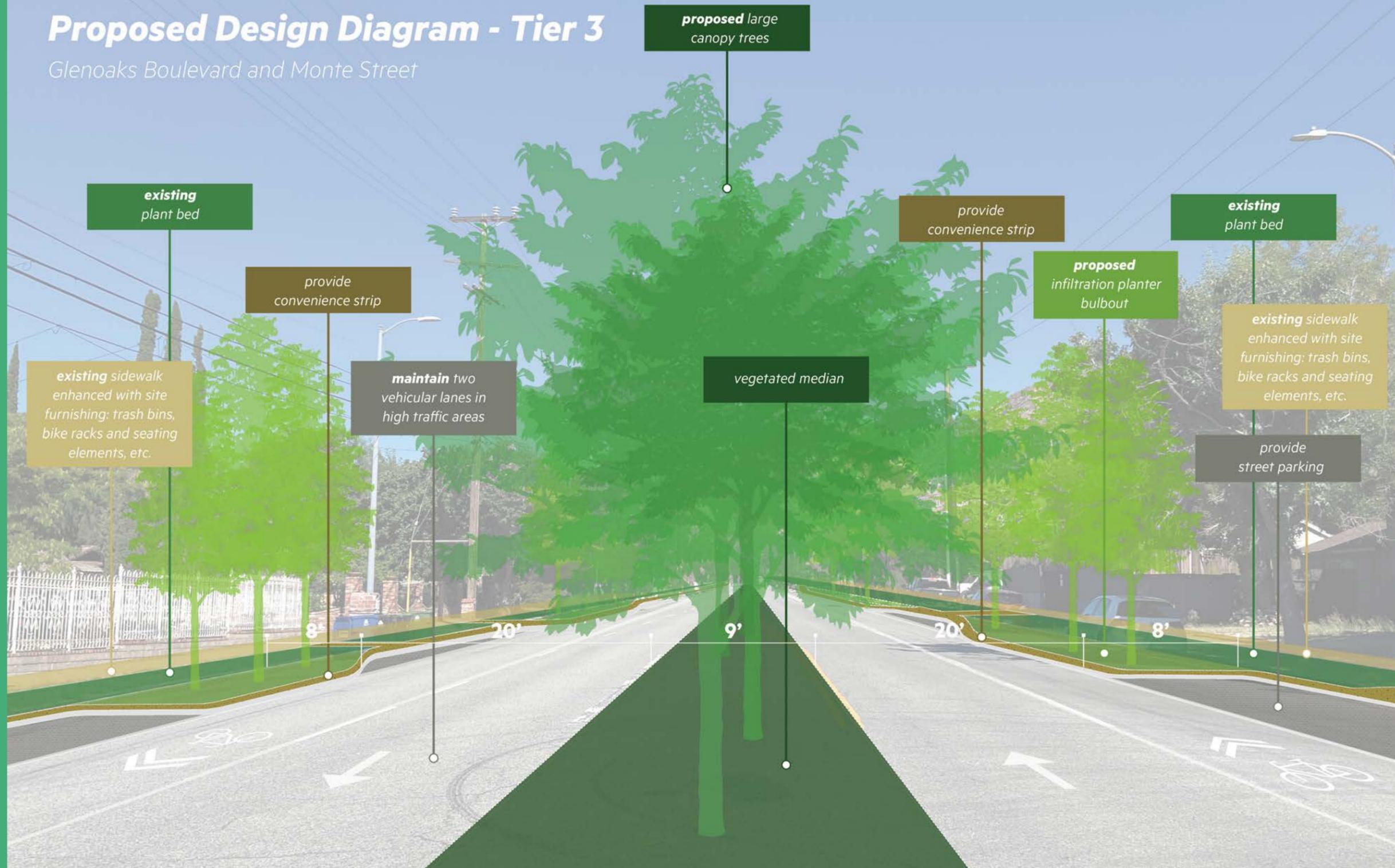


Figure 34. Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street, proposed design diagram, Tier 3  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism

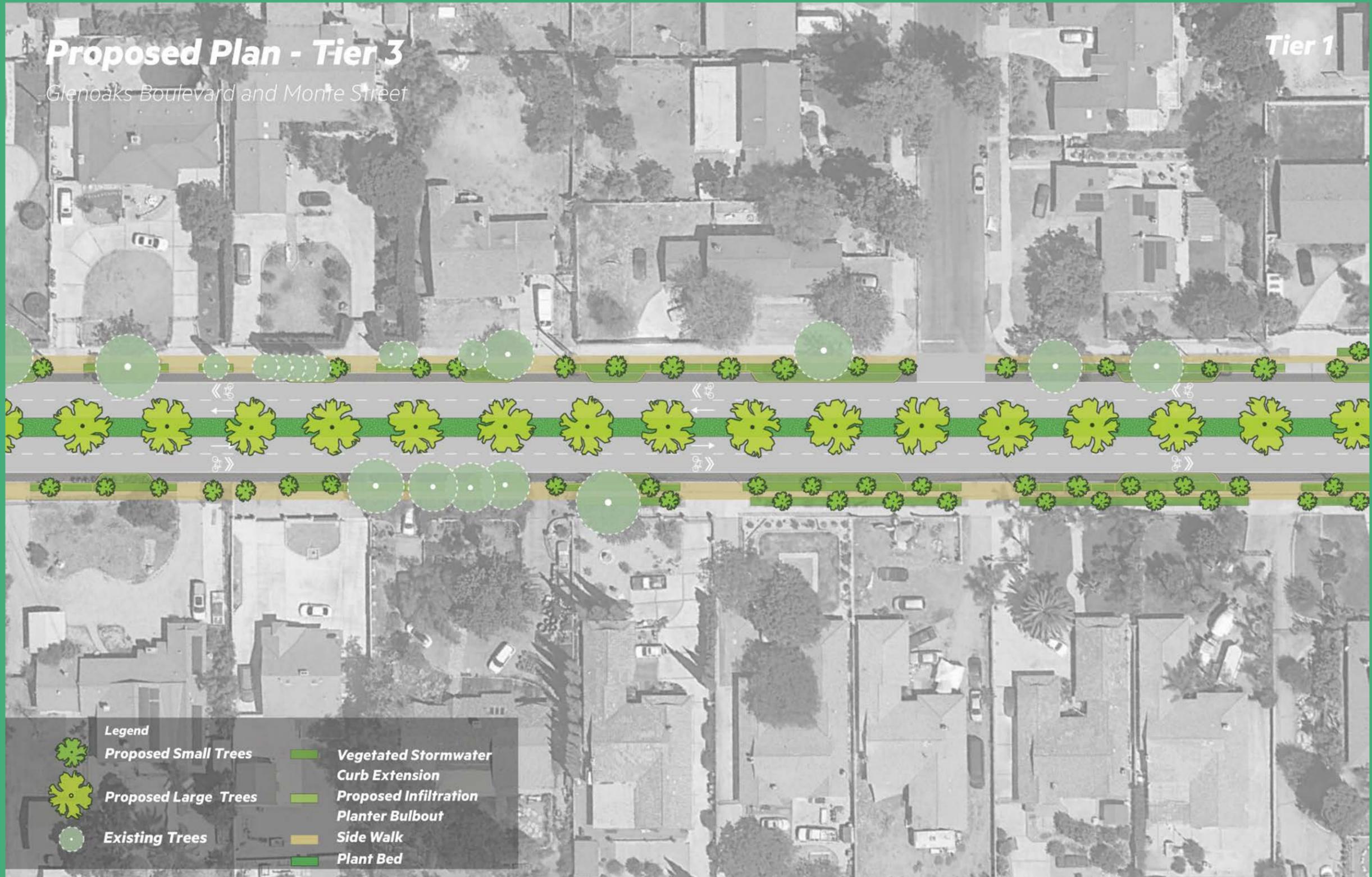


Figure 35. Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street, proposed Tier 3 plan  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism

# Proposed Perspectival Section - Tier 3

Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte Street

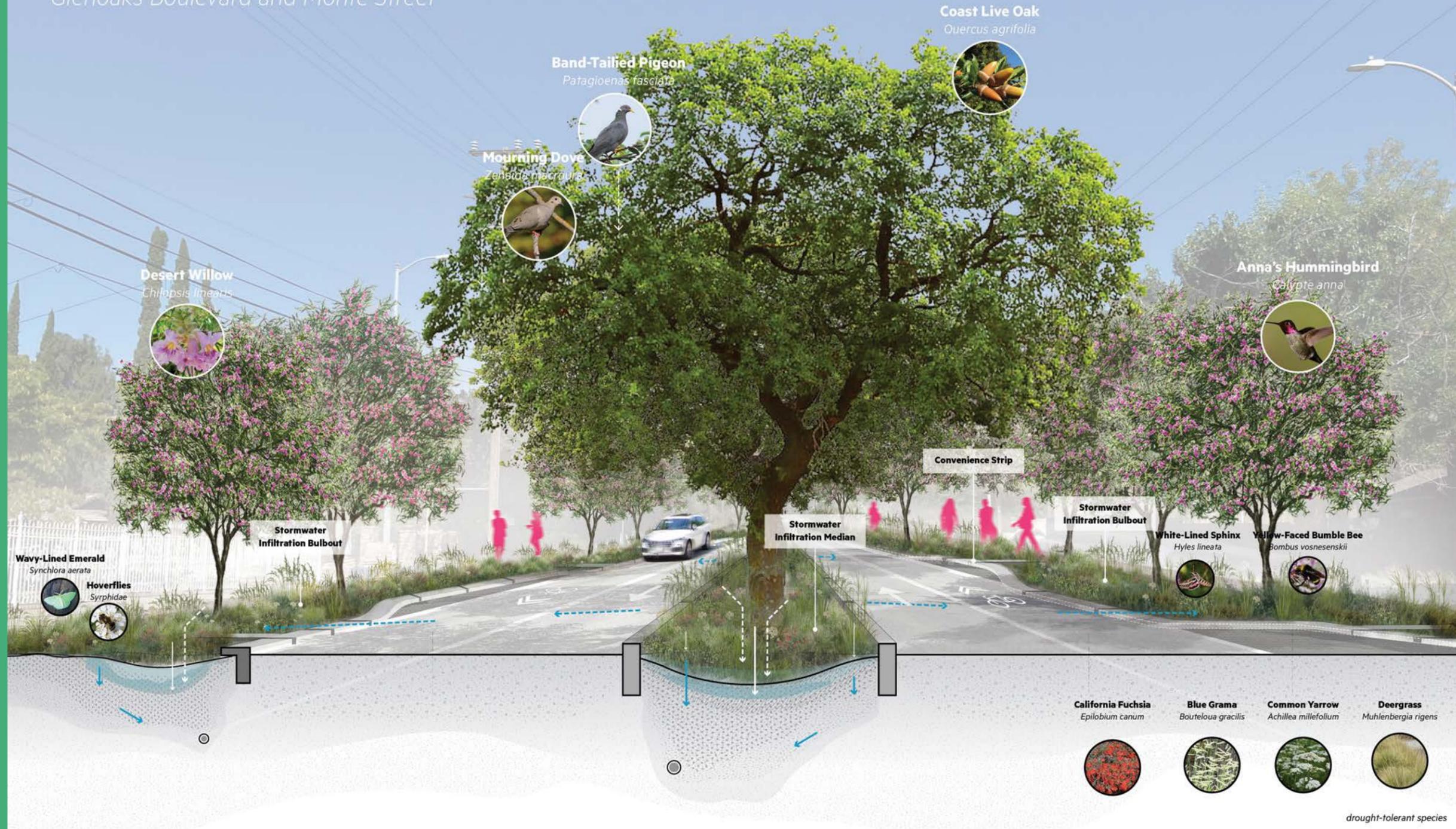


Figure 36. Glenoaks Boulevard and Monte, proposed design, Tier 3  
Credit: Stoss Landscape Urbanism

## 06 Looking Ahead: Next Steps for Implementation

The engagements and design process conducted in Sylmar centered community voices and invited residents to shape the future growth of their urban forest. Moving forward, the community engagement team recommends an adaptive approach grounded in transparency and equity with built-in flexibility to respond to community needs. The following recommendations may be considered for future implementation efforts:

- An outreach strategy that engages trusted community organizations and leaders, and focuses on in-person engagement in commonly visited community spaces such as libraries, public institutions, cultural centers and recreation spaces and helps bridge technological barriers and facilitates broad participation.
- Providing dual language Spanish and English materials and presentations and prioritizing employment of bilingual staff where appropriate facilitates relationship building and allows community members to choose their preferred language for engagement.
- Continuing to distribute trees for private planting through outreach efforts has an important role in future canopy expansion. UFEC's analysis of available Tier 1 tree planting space in Sylmar found approximately 12 times the amount of available private planting space compared to public planting space (Appendix), a reality that is common across Los Angeles. Offering fruit trees in addition to shade trees in tree distribution outreach strategies can serve canopy expansion goals while also increasing access to fresh produce in residential neighborhoods.
- Implementing workforce development initiatives to complement volunteer plantings can provide local economic opportunities and on-the-job training in green infrastructure career pathways. A volunteer-driven planting model has many benefits, including grounding tree canopy expansion efforts in community contribution, creating a direct channel for feedback, and broadening public support for urban forestry. An equity centered perspective also recognizes the capacity and resources required to volunteer time and labor to plant trees. In some instances, a combined approach may best fit the community.
- A workforce development initiative may effectively address identified challenges with establishment tree care, irrigation, and planting and maintaining widely dispersed vacant planting sites efficiently. Los Angeles residents are responsible for watering trees planted in the right-of-way in front of their property. Investing time, attention, and water in young trees during the establishment period can present an undue burden.

Tree care can also be a struggle in commercial and industrial corridors, areas which typically have low canopy and few local residents to care for young trees. In some cases, securing funding to install irrigation may be the most effective strategy.

### Tier 1 Implementation Opportunities

#### **Planting Trees in the Public Right-of-Way and on Private Property**

– In 2023, TreePeople received Inflation Reduction Act funding to plant 500 trees in the public-right-of-way and distribute trees for private planting in Sylmar. This represents the first grant-funded public planting project in the Sylmar neighborhood for TreePeople. Though this particular funding covers Tier 1 planting, in recognition of community guidance outlined here, TreePeople plans to consider vacant sites and priority census tract areas identified by UFEC, community identified areas of high need for trees, and the City of LA's tree inventory to create a planting plan. Additionally, this project will build on the community trust building and engagements conducted through the UFEC pilot project work and may strengthen the foundation for Tier 2 and 3 community-guided projects in the future.

**Planting Trees in Existing Parks** – Sylmar residents indicated public parks are a highly utilized and valued community resource where they would like to see more trees planted. The existing public parks in Sylmar could accommodate more trees, an opportunity TreePeople may pursue using existing funding through volunteer events. Leveraging TreePeople's existing corporate tree planting program, Teams for Trees, may also be an effective strategy to increase public park tree canopy.

### Tier 2 and 3 Implementation Opportunities

#### **Existing Tree Well Modifications, Site Enhancements, & Dead Tree Removal**

– UFEC documented many obstructed and empty tree wells while walking Sylmar's streets, an issue raised by community members in the workshops as well. In the workshops, community members also expressed concerns about the need for more tree care and maintenance services in their neighborhood. These services include tree trimming, tree care and watering, removal of dead tree stumps in existing tree wells, and removal of other objects such as metal poles or concrete debris in existing tree wells. If the City were able to remove such obstacles from existing tree wells, many new planting spaces would be available near school routes and on commercial corridors as well as in some residential areas in Sylmar.

**Planting Trees on School Campuses** – Some of the schools in the Sylmar neighborhood include Sylmar Elementary School, Herrick Avenue Elementary School, and Olive Vista Middle School. School greening has become a high priority at the state level, and was one of a few line items to be preserved amidst a \$30 billion state budget cut for FY 23/24. Funding opportunities to plant trees on these campuses through both private and public funding sources are becoming increasingly available. For example, CAL FIRE awarded over \$117 million in school greening grants in 2023 alone. TreePeople was awarded \$15.6 million in 2023 to plan and implement school greening projects on 17 Los Angeles County campuses. With this historic funding, TreePeople will develop best practices for planning and implementation of school greening infrastructure projects that can be applied to transforming school campuses in Sylmar in the future.

**Reconfiguring Roadways and Greening Reverse Parkways** – Sylmar has many heat-exposed reverse parkways on residential streets, near schools and on some major corridors. The mix of stakeholders currently using those parkways, from residents parking cars, to pedestrians and the large equestrian community, add complexity to the green infrastructure conversation. As the proposed designs demonstrate, in some situations multiple vehicular lane thoroughfares can be reduced to one lane in each direction, a modification that can open up space for planting strips along the right-of-way, create shaded parking spaces, and bring stormwater management benefits and cooling shade for property owners, pedestrians, and equestrians. Continuing to dialogue with community members around Tier 3 possibilities and how they align with their needs, values and priorities will be key to designing and seeking funding for the many unshaded reverse parkways found in Sylmar. With planting activities and private tree distributions planned in the near future, TreePeople is uniquely positioned to continue the conversation about green infrastructure planning and implementation with Sylmar community members.

<sup>8</sup> Office of Mayor Eric Garcetti (2019). L.A.'s Green New Deal. [https://plan.lamayor.org/sites/default/files/pLAn\\_2019\\_final.pdf](https://plan.lamayor.org/sites/default/files/pLAn_2019_final.pdf)

As previously mentioned, UFEC's Tier 1 planting projections found the vast majority of available planting space in Sylmar is located on private property (Appendix). Filling all currently available public planting space will not achieve the City's Green New Deal target of a 50% canopy increase in areas with the least shade.<sup>8</sup> Making new space for shade trees in the urban landscape will require urban forest professionals, community based organizations, municipalities, industry partners and urban forest advocates to think creatively, collaborate, and pilot new strategies for implementing Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

Building strategic partnerships and seeking funding for reallocation of public space for trees will be key strategies to pursue. Project proposals incorporating stormwater management elements can attract strong funding support and collaboration with municipal partners. Another important pathway will be continuing to advocate for sustained local, state, and federal green infrastructure investment. Advocacy that frames urban greening as an essential community service on par with core utility services may prove effective, especially as communities like Sylmar face disproportionate risk of escalating exposure to extreme heat and extreme-weather events in the decades to come.

Community-identified opportunities for green infrastructure interventions explored here demonstrate the possibilities for multiple community benefits including stormwater capture, native trees and plant landscapes, bicycle lanes, and enhanced pedestrian connections. Ongoing investment in community partnership is essential to ensure infrastructure investments are driven by community needs from initial planning phases through implementation and evaluation. The strategies shared here are offered as a resource for future community and urban forestry efforts in communities with similar tree canopy equity challenges and unique opportunities for green infrastructure implementation.

## 07 Acknowledgements

We are grateful to our two primary funders, Accelerate Resilience Los Angeles (ARLA), a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, and the USDA Forest Service, via the LA Urban Center for Natural Resource Sustainability, for providing City Plants with the grant funding that allowed this work to blossom.



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## 09 Appendix

The following Appendices are available online at  
<https://www.cityplants.org/urban-forest-equity-collective/>

- Community Action Toolkit:  
includes the survey instrument and workshop agenda used in Sylmar
- USC Sylmar Equity Map
- UFEC Tier 1 Planting Projections
- Los Angeles Urban Forest Equity Streets Guidebook
- Los Angeles Urban Forest Equity Design Guidebook