

April 8, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20200



Dear President Biden,

As mayors and county officials committed to a better future for our communities, we thank you for advancing actions and policies that prioritize climate change and economic recovery with a strong focus on equity. As part of that commitment, we recognize the critical importance of city and community trees to economic vitality, public health, environmental justice, and effective climate action. Our urban and community forests are vital to combating climate change, creating good paying jobs, and building more equitable communities. For these nature-based solutions to flourish and for their much-needed economic and climate benefits to be realized by neighborhoods in greatest need, a decisive new approach is required. We write today to urge you to work with us to develop a robust whole-of-government partnership with the renewed federal resolve and increased Fiscal Year 2022 resources this effort will require to meet your recovery, climate, and equity goals in our jurisdictions.

The COVID pandemic is shining a spotlight on the economic, climate, public health, and environmental justice disparities across our communities, and timely federal action to rectify these imbalances is a moral imperative. Investing in urban and community forests is a bipartisan, actionable step your Administration can take to address these inequities by creating and supporting jobs that pay a family supporting wage, ease energy costs for households most in need, reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions, and capture and store carbon.

The vital role urban and community trees play cannot be overstated. Trees are the most effective means of combating urban heat islands, preventing an estimated 1,200 heat-related deaths and countless heat-related illnesses each year. Trees in metropolitan areas and small towns across the country absorb 822,000 metric tons of air pollutants and prevent 575,000 cases of acute respiratory illnesses, such as asthma, annually. Our urban and community forests provide more than 15% of our country's total forest carbon sequestration benefits. At the same time, by providing shade in summer months and blocking wind during winter, trees reduce residential energy usage costs by nearly \$7.8 billion annually. City and community trees are also a major source of green jobs, with enormous potential for further local job creation in communities where it is needed most.

Expanding these outcomes in our cities and in communities across the country is a necessary strategy to achieve the climate change and economic responses you have outlined for America's recovery. At the same time, the enhanced investments required must be broadly distributed across agencies, programs, and geographies in order to meet on-the-ground needs while advancing your Administration's equity goals, including those detailed in your Justice40 initiative. Increased federal support for our urban and community forests is essential to bring tree equity to disadvantaged neighborhoods, and to realize the enormous potential for this green infrastructure to support healthy communities. We hope to work with your Administration to explore possible opportunities, immediate and longer-term, to take meaningful intergovernmental action.

We note that while there are at least some existing avenues for federal support, they lack the scale and vision to meet these local needs. Current funding levels, for example, for the only dedicated source of federal urban forestry assistance – USDA's Urban & Community Forestry (U&CF) program – are not sufficient support for the local need required to expand community tree cover. Without additional funding, communities with greatest economic and tree-equity needs are unable to secure trees and seedlings, to conduct on-the-ground tree-planting projects, and to address the broader structural community inequities that expanded urban and community forests can address.





As you prepare your budget for Fiscal Year 2022, we urge you to provide significant increases to the U&CF program, focused on developing new urban tree nurseries, enhancing workforce training opportunities and job creation, and facilitating tree plantings in areas with low tree equity. We also ask that you identify a lead contact and other appropriate White House, department, and/or agency staff to establish a dialogue with us on ways to establish a much broader partnership on urban forestry.

Local governments across America are leading the way in combating climate change, creating equitable communities and creating jobs. Appreciating your own stated commitments and priorities in these areas, and recognizing immediate and ongoing needs to invest in urban and community forests and increased tree canopy, we look forward to making great strides together.

Sincerely,

Steve Adler, Mayor, City of Austin, TX
Christopher Taylor, Mayor, City of Ann Arbor, MI
Esther Manheimer, Mayor, City of Asheville, NC
Leslie Hager-Smith, Mayor, Town of Blacksburg, VA
Lauren McLean, Mayor, City of Boise, ID
Sam Weaver, Mayor, City of Boulder, CO
Miro Weinberger, Mayor, City of Burlington, VT
Michael Hancock, Mayor, City and County of Denver, CO
Paul Deasy, Mayor, City of Flagstaff, AZ
Lily Mei, Mayor, City of Fremont, CA
Wade Troxell, Mayor, City of Ft. Collins, CO
Bruce Teague, Mayor, Iowa City, IA
Quinton Lucas, Mayor, City of Kansas City, MO
Adam Paul, Mayor, City of Lakewood, CO
Leirion Gaylor Baird, Mayor, City of Lincoln, NE
Nicholas Angelo, Mayor, Town of Lyons, CO
Jacob Frey, Mayor, City of Minneapolis, MN
William Peduto, Mayor, City of Pittsburgh, PA
Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor, City of Providence, RI
Erin Mendenhall, Mayor, Salt Lake City, UT
London N. Breed, Mayor, City and County of San Francisco, CA
Sam Liccardo, Mayor, City of San Jose, CA
Alan Webber, Mayor, City of Santa Fe, NM
Kate Stewart, Mayor, City of Takoma Park, MD
Jan Kuhlman, Mayor, City of Thornton, CO
Wade Kapszukiewicz, Mayor, City of Toledo, OH
Lindsey Horvath, Mayor, City of West Hollywood, CA
Ras J. Baraka, Mayor, City of Newark, NJ
Marion Greene, Chair, Hennepin County Board, MN
Anna Hansen, County Commissioner, Sante Fe County, NM
Marc Elrich, County Executive, Montgomery County, MD

Cc: Mr. Cedric Richmond, Director, White House Office of Public Engagement
Mr. Matt Lee-Ashley, Interim Chief of Staff, Council on Environmental Quality
Ms. Shalanda Young, Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget

