

# Touch of green to patch TL's canopy

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

trees, how many were replacements of replacements — none of that is known. But back in 2000, an Urban Forest survey painted a grim picture: It counted 223 living trees, about half healthy and the rest just OK or struggling, plus six dead trees and nine empty plots. All told, that's less than half of the trees it had planted in the Tenderloin. The rest had died uncertain deaths.

Today, Pierce calculates that in the past 15 years, his organization has helped get 212 trees planted in the hood. Their mortality rate hasn't improved. Three or four of every 10 planted won't last three years.

Three years is a benchmark because Urban Forest follows up neighborhood plantings with an annual visit to each tree during those critical years. Most cared-for trees are established by then.

## A VOICE FOR TREES

Six years ago, John Nulty, former TL resident and activist who's been a voice for trees since the mid-1990s, surveyed the Tenderloin and found 20 dead or dying trees. This January, in preparation for the spring planting, he went out again and this time tallied 52 distressed tree plots — 18 were empty, 23 had stumps and the other 11 had been cemented over, their poles or grates were protecting bare ground, or they'd been beheaded, lopped off 5 or 6 feet above their base.

101 Hyde illustrates the problem. Nulty says the corner once had eight trees, four on each side of the Post Office. Back in 2004, Elaine Zamora, who would be named manager of the new Tenderloin CBD the next year, personally paid for five of them.

Only three of the eight are still standing.

"One was taken out so cars could see the street signs," Nulty says. "Then the police wanted another one taken out. Then two on the Hyde Street side were wrecked when they put up the scaffolding for the mural." One's fate is unknown.

Nulty heads up the Tenderloin Tree Campaign, formed 10 years ago with Zamora and TL resident David Baker when the ax fell on a huge Norfolk Island pine at 606 Ellis. The tree's other claim to fame is it had stood in front of one of the Tenderloin's last single-family homes (see The Extra's Issue No. 73). Efforts to save the Norfolk Island pine failed, but tree-lovers got the city to expand protection to landmark and significant trees citywide. Today, about three dozen trees around the city have landmark status, none in the central city.

Nulty in 2011 received kudos for 35 years of arbor and other activism from Friends of the Urban Forest and from Rep. Jackie Speier. Her certificate of recognition says, "You are a Johnny Appleseed of organizing; wherever you go, organizations sprout." John's brother, Michael, received a similar commendation at the event.

## URBAN FOREST PLAN PASSES

A City Planning consultant in 2012 surveyed publicly planted street trees in four neighborhoods — Bayview, North Beach, Outer Sunset and Western Addition — and used the 24,858 trees found there to extrapolate data about arbor health and benefits citywide.

Among the findings: 7% of the inventoried trees were in poor condition or dead, a little over half were in fair condition and a third were in good or very good condition.

The survey also found that for every \$1 spent on public trees, city residents get \$4.37 in physical, social and aesthetic benefits — numbers that prompted the Board of Supervisors to finally pass a years-in-the-making Urban

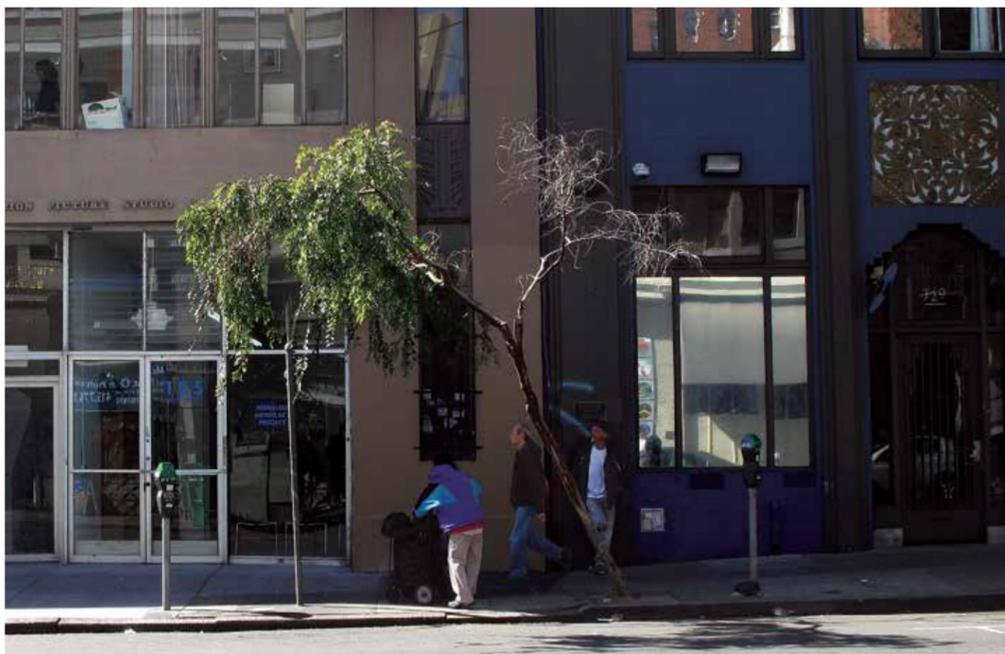


PHOTO LISE STAMPFELI

More dead than alive, this tree on Hyde Street near Golden Gate Avenue reflects the neglect common in the neighborhood.

**"Tree care is the key to the Urban Forest Plan's success — DPW could be out maintaining trees every three years, not every 12 years like it does now."**

Phil Pierce

FRIENDS OF THE URBAN FOREST

Forest Plan.

Their unanimous approval of the plan Feb. 10 says they're all in favor of planting 50,000 more street trees citywide in the next 20 years and setting a goal for canopy coverage that will give us some street cred, tree-wise.

The plan's other major goal is to change who's responsible for tree care. Right now, the onus is on property owners who opt to put in a street tree, while DPW tends those it plants. The plan makes the city responsible for all existing and projected 150,000 street trees, not just those it plants.

Nice idea, but the supes didn't allocate any of the maybe \$20 million needed to back it up. Voters may be asked next year to approve an annual parcel tax of \$60 to \$80, Supervisor Scott Weiner, who introduced the legislation, told the Chronicle.

Trees aren't cheap to buy, but the big-ticket item is maintaining them, and property owners don't always do due diligence.

"If an owner hires someone who doesn't use good arbor practices, trees not only are unlikely to thrive but it can create really hazardous conditions," says Ray Moritz, certified forester and owner of Urban Forest Associates who works with businesses, residents and government entities all over the Bay Area. "The city's plan to take over maintenance will be a game-changer if the

money can be raised."

When Friends of the Urban Forest sponsors plantings, it helps with annual inspections and provides lots of tips for keeping trees healthy. The Tenderloin CBD went that one better: When it was established in 2005, it included an annual budget line item for tree maintenance.

"That's gone now," confirmed David Seward, Hastings CFO and current CBD treasurer. "We're having some financial challenges and our budget is barebones — sidewalk-cleaning and graffiti-removal are about all we can afford. Still, I'm sure it will be put back, maybe in a year or so."

The plan's call to add 50,000 trees sounds like big jump, but it isn't. Over 20 years, that's only 2,500 a year, though it's 40% more than San Francisco plants each year now. Friends of the Urban Forest, working neighborhood by neighborhood, puts in 1,200 and DPW the rest. The city's Urban Forest Plan cops to the fact that the 50,000 trees also include "a portion" of replacements for removed or dying trees, thus it "does not represent a significant increase in forest canopy."

Pierce says the plan "may change how we do business but we'll still be planting trees in the central city every couple of years. Tree care is the key to the plan's success — DPW could be out maintaining trees every three years, not every 12 years like it does now."

## THE SPRING PLANTING

Concurrent with the upcoming neighborhood planting is a long-planned greening around Hastings, part of an almost \$2.5 million project that will stretch along both sides of McAllister between Leavenworth and Larkin streets. The county Transportation Authority put in \$1.8 million and Hastings \$640,000 for the streetscape changes: corner bulb-outs to improve pedestrian safety, lighting, sidewalk widening and replacement — and 18 ginkgos, those hardy, deciduous trees whose origins go back 250 million years. Planting them will be the kickoff for the community event.

To be a part of it, you must be a building owner and ante up \$135 for each tree you want to plant on your property. Friends of the Urban Forest



COURTESY COLIN HUSSEY, 2011

**Doug Lybeck, Friends of the Urban Forest community outreach manager, left, presents John Nulty with a certificate recognizing his work in the TL.**

consults with owners about the kinds of trees that work best in this unforgiving environment. But, basically it gets down to ginkgos and Brisbane box. And these trees will be larger than most of those planted in other neighborhoods, Pierce says, the better to withstand potential vandalism.

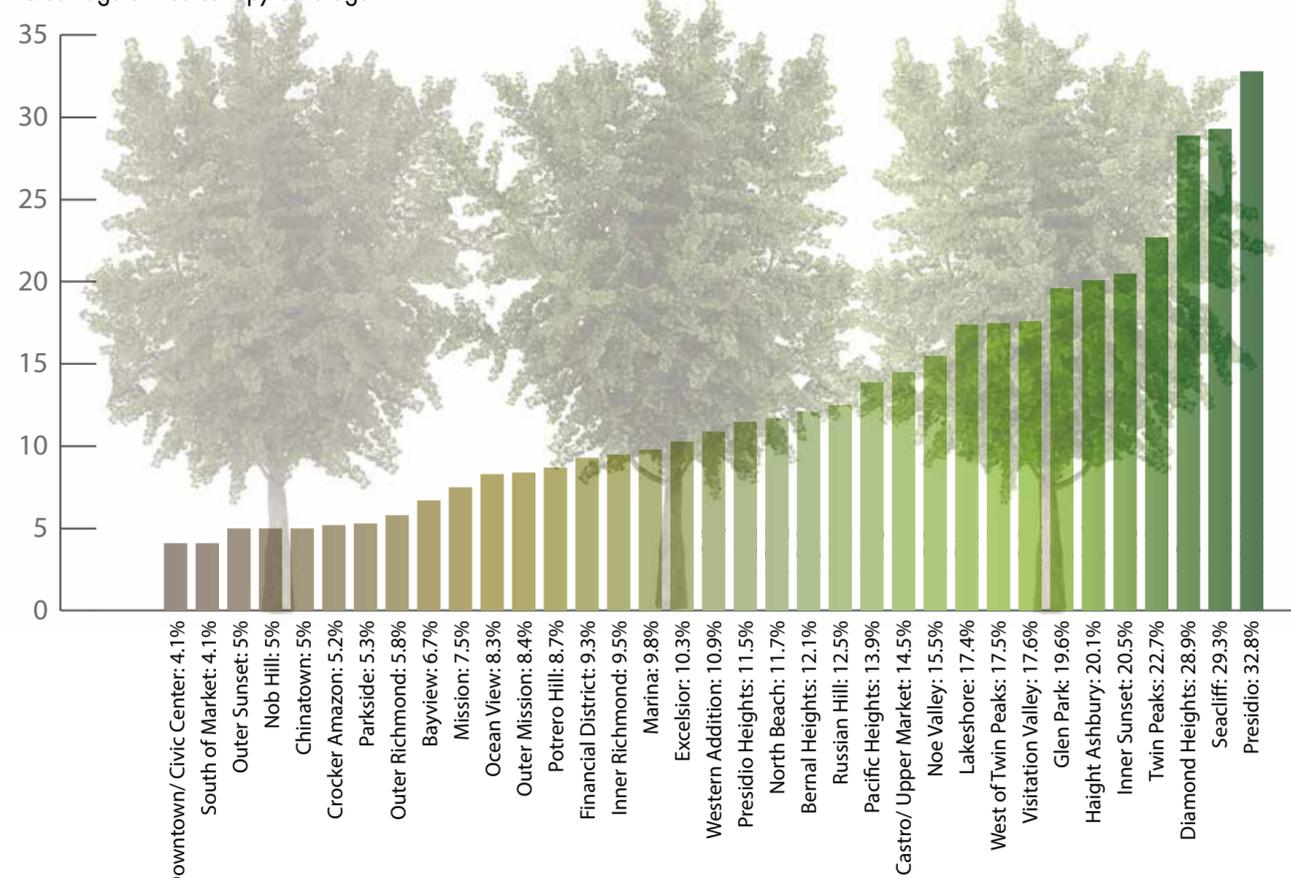
At that size, they can retail for up to \$550 each, but, as always, Friends of the Urban Forest subsidizes them. So for \$135, you get a more mature tree, cement removal, permitting and the three years of follow-up care. Volunteers and a cadre of neighbors get the fun of planting day, with all tools supplied, coffee and pastries in the morning and a potluck lunch when all the trees are in.

The deadline for signing up for a tree during the general Tenderloin planting will be in early April, but there's no need to wait. To apply or volunteer: [fuf.net/eform](http://fuf.net/eform) or call 268-0773.

For more tree stories, see those by Eric Eldon, editor in chief at *Hoodline*, *The Extra's* new neighborhood journalism partner: [bit.ly/1uf8rFG](http://bit.ly/1uf8rFG) and [bit.ly/1LTkV6k](http://bit.ly/1LTkV6k).

# How green are San Francisco's neighborhoods?

Percentage of tree canopy coverage



SOURCE: S.F. PLANNING DEPARTMENT, 2012 DATA. DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION: LISE STAMPFELI

The Tenderloin, and even the rest of District 6, has the least greenery of all S.F. neighborhoods at 4.1%. The most, not surprisingly, is the Presidio with nearly a third of it covered. The life expectancy of a tree in the Tenderloin is also the lowest in the city with more than a third dead or dying within three years of planting.

## Why cabbie went to Lyft

*Details ease of hire by e-ride firm vs. rigorous training, background checks*

What it takes to be a cabbie is a lot more than what a Lyft driver goes through to get his pink mustache.

Cornelio Greer has been both cabbie and ride-share operator. He told The Extra what was required before he could get behind the wheel in both capacities and the regulations that pertain to each. Here's what we found the public surrenders for the convenience of a Lyft or Uber ride:

Training to become a taxi driver, Greer told The Extra, "was real intense, and there's a lot of steps to it."

To begin with, he had to write a 10-sentence essay for the S.F. Municipal Transportation Agency, telling what he typically does on weekends. It "didn't seem relevant and still doesn't now," he told The Extra.

Robert Lyles, SFMTA deputy spokesman, said the essay is the second part of a two-step process to verify drivers' English-language skills.

Greer then needed to provide SFMTA with a 10-year DMV printout and get a live-scan background check through a federal database. After that, he was required to sign up for a weeklong training course at one of four cab companies. The first day, he said, was on how to use maps, plus the fare meter, the dispatch radio and taxi console.

He was also trained in paratransit safety driving and had to pass a final test on all the material covered. Once he'd cleared those hurdles, he said, he was approved to take a Scantron test of 60 to 80 questions following a full-day SFMTA taxi operator course led by either a retired cop or a taxi investigator. Finally, two weeks after beginning the course work, he was ready to go.

"I've had physical jobs," Greer, 26, said, but "after driving in a cab for eight to 10 hours," he was so exhausted "I didn't want to eat or cook."

After paying the "gate fee" of \$80 per day to rent the medallion and fuel the cab, he said, "You would have \$10 days and you would have \$100 days." He worked about a week for DeSoto.

A friend suggested he consider working for one of the companies that are driving taxis out of business. "I spent two days researching the hell out of it," Greer said, and decided to try working for Lyft. "Uber seemed a little more uppity and fussy."

"I downloaded the app and signed up online. It took about three days for them to respond, then finally they send a Lyft driver to examine your car, take pictures so people know it's your car, and go for a ride-along for maybe



MARK HEDIN

**Cornelio Greer, ex-taxi driver, at the wheel, pink Lyft mustache on dash.**

10 minutes. It was really nonchalant," Greer said. His 2011 Ford Fusion easily passed the requirement that a driver's car be less than 8 years old.

The Lyft driver told him, "You seem safe, know the streets and stay focused," even while talking with his passenger, something Lyft encourages its drivers to do, along with fist-bumping.

"In another two days," the native San Franciscan said, "a box came" with supplies for the job, including the familiar pink mustache for the grille, which, he said, the company doesn't require its drivers to use.

"I don't really know what kind of background check they did," he said. "They did ask for insurance," but not for "DMV (driving record printout) or a live scan," he said.

"I'm not 100% sure," he said about his insurance coverage, "but I think they do cover us, but only when we're driving with a passenger."

So far, Greer said, he's enthusiastic about working for Lyft. Instead of the exhausting eight-hour shifts at the wheel of a cab, he can switch the app on and off at his convenience. When his girlfriend tells him that she needs more time at the office before being picked up, for instance, he picks up a fare or two to pass the time. "It's cool," he said.

Greer said he typically works from 7 a.m. to noon and from 4 to 8 or 9 p.m. "I haven't picked up anyone from the airport, but I've dropped people off there."

— Mark Hedlin