



League of Women Voters of Portland

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Date: April 1, 2022
To: Portland Bureau of Transportation
From: League of Women Voters of Portland
Debbie Kaye, President
Debbie Aiona, Action Chair
Re: Portland Pedestrian Design Guide

The League of Women Voters of Portland believes climate change is a serious threat facing our nation and the planet. We support comprehensive long-range planning and believe that wise decision-making requires consideration of environmental, public health, and the social and economic impacts of proposed plans and actions. Special attention should be given to maintaining and improving the environmental quality of urban communities.

The recent Portland Parks and Recreation 2022 tree canopy report should be a wake-up call to the city. We need more trees and especially large shade-providing trees. In addition to climate and environmental concerns, this is an equity and environmental justice issue. A 2020 Portland State University research [project](#) found that formerly redlined neighborhoods tended to be hotter than wealthier and shadier areas. Of the cities they studied, Portland had the greatest temperature differences. The 60 deaths that occurred when temperatures soared last summer underscore the urgency of increasing our tree canopy.

Portland’s planning efforts should aim to protect the health and well-being of all its residents and avoid the consequences of a city with fewer and fewer trees and higher and higher temperatures. The Pedestrian Design Guide must ensure that more large trees are required and a priority. The Guide as written values businesses moving out onto the sidewalks at the expense of tree cover, and that is short-sighted.

We recommend that the Guide require space for large street trees in the furnishing zones by expanding the minimum width to six feet. In the rare instance when this 6-foot width cannot be met by creative building design, then the guidelines should require developers to implement alternatives by planting large trees in curb extensions, traffic islands, etc.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, shade trees can reduce surrounding air temperatures as much as six degrees, reduce the consumption of heating and cooling energy, and conserve water – all critical elements of successfully adjusting to climate change and protecting Portlanders from the ill effects of excessive heat. We recommend that the guidelines mandate increases in the large tree canopy as development occurs. Large trees that provide shade and carbon sequestration are critical elements in a healthy city and must not be optional. In the long run, this requirement will support a better business environment and a better quality of life for Portlanders.

League of Women Voters of Portland:

To promote political responsibility through informed and active participation in government.