

Project Title: Los Angeles Valley College Urban Forest Master Plan

Project Location: Valley Glen, California

Category: Planning and Analysis

Purpose of Project:

Los Angeles Valley College (LAVC) has a diverse and mature urban forest that supports the education of students, and provides health and environmental benefits on campus. Founded in 1949, the Los Angeles Valley College Campus has a rich history during development and planting a multitude of diverse trees. These trees have served as an educational tool for the biology department and created an urban forest identity on the campus. This plan will preserve and enhance the ever-changing urban forest found on the 100 acre campus.

Role of Landscape Architect:

A multi-disciplined team, led by the Landscape Architect, developed a long-term Urban Forest Master Plan and guidebook for the campus' 1,632 trees and 84 different species. The Project Team included Architects, College President, Faculty, Staff, Students, Certified Arborist, Licensed Surveyor and the campus Project Management group. The community was involved through a series of Town Hall meetings at critical junctures in the process to ensure all voices were heard. To better understand the role that the urban forest has played at the college, an historic landscape architect researched the campus history by reviewing archived historic photos. These were analyzed to determine the extent and character of vegetation existing during significant development periods. Under the direction of the Landscape Architect, a comprehensive survey was conducted by a Certified Arborist through numerous site visits. It was observed that 92.8% of the trees on campus are fully mature, as many were planted during significant construction phases from 1951 through 1964. Since the majority of trees on campus were planted within the same decade, there is a need to begin planting new groupings of trees to create a multi-generational forest. The campus instituted a 1:1 tree replacement policy. This includes trees removed during routine maintenance and campus safety and also trees removed due to expansion of the campus through new construction. If trees are to be removed, the plan emphasizes using wood from the felled trees for new construction, landscape maintenance, and/or art projects.

By planting multiple generations when a tree dies, the urban forest will continue to thrive and keep a mature aesthetic. Retaining and maintaining defining characteristics of the urban forest, this includes a balance of trees large in stature to trees small in stature; distribution of shaded spaces; and balance of broadleaf evergreen trees, conifers, deciduous, and flowering trees.

Significance:

The current diversity of trees, 1,632 trees from 84 different species, is attributed to the Biology Department's desires and efforts to create a global Arboretum in the Bungalow District. In this area there are several individual specimens from around the world that were planted. Later development on campus contains allées of a single species. Each development period on the campus showed a separate approach to the landscape planting. This research has become instrumental in educating the campus community and informed best practices for future plantings. From these studies, it was determined that implementing the recommendations of the Master Plan could dramatically impact the use of potable water, alleviate stress on the nearby Tujunga Wash, combat urban heat island effects, improve air quality and enhance ecological diversity. With an increase of 300 trees planted from the date of the original study (for a total of 1,900 trees), the urban heat island would decrease surface temperatures by 5-10 degrees Fahrenheit. The urban forest would annually produce 200 metric-tons of oxygen, sequester 40 metric-tons of carbon dioxide and filter 100 metric tons of pollutants.

Special Factors:

Following the creation of the Urban Forest Master Plan, the College has received the national designation of a "Tree Campus USA" by the Arbor Day Foundation—A designation unique to LAVC from all other community colleges in California and higher education campuses in Los Angeles. The Urban Forest Master Plan has become a catalyst for sustainable awareness and has inspired clubs to host community tree planting events, Earth Day celebrations, and Arbor Day festivals as well as the creation of a Tree Advisory Committee.