

City tree planting fund runs out, putting Friends of the Urban Forest in jeopardy

Woodward, desk clerk at the Cadillac Hotel. "I'll be sure to water it." Woodward said. "Kathy and Leroy Looper are very supportive of the trees."

Altogether, Friends of the Urban Forest has planted or replanted 523 trees in the Tenderloin since its first planting in May 1982. Survival of the newly planted trees is always a concern. Shea cited a recent FUF survey indicating that 70% of the trees they planted throughout the city from five to 10 years ago have survived. She figures this is pretty good, considering the urban environment and the varying degree of care the trees receive.

Although no similar figures are available for trees planted in the Tenderloin, it's a good bet that the survival rate is lower than 70%. Over the



Veteran tree planter Tess Manalo-Ventresca favors the Brisbane box

around the trunks," she said. "I don't take it out because I think a nice clean tree is vandalized more often." Dennis doesn't care for the fancy ornamental trees. "Sometimes plain trees end

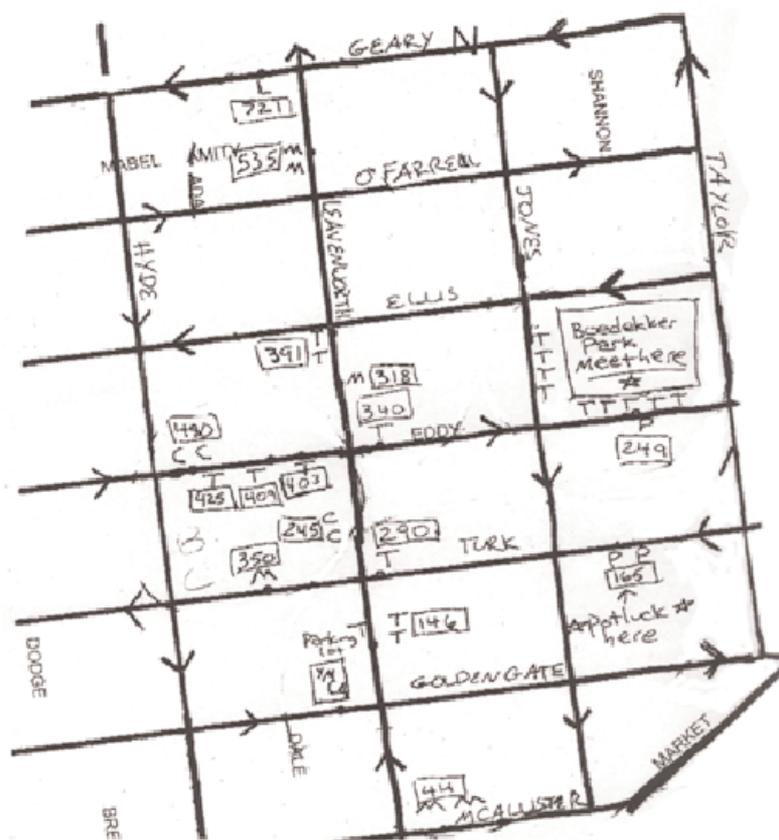
19 followed by Indian laurel figs (*Rhaphiolepis indica* "Majestic Beauty") with 13 in the doing-well column.

Tess Manalo-Ventresca, neighborhood coordinator of the replantings, has been involved in Tenderloin tree plantings since the first one. She favors the Brisbane box tree. "I call it the Tenderloin tree," Manalo-Ventresca said, "because it can stand all the abuse."

Friends of the Urban Forest organizes 47 separate plantings each year and, on average, helps San Francisco residents plant 2,000 new trees annually. Since its founding in 1981 following funding cuts in the city's tree planting program, Friends of the Urban Forest has planted 33,000 trees, about one-third of all the street trees in the city.

Future plantings may not be as extensive, however. Paul Sacamano, DPW program manager for urban forestry, said that the approximately \$1 million allocated to plant new trees is in question for the next fiscal year. The money, allocated to the street tree planting program by the Board of Supervisors, acting in their capacity as San Francisco Transportation Authority commissioners, comes from the half-percent sales tax that voters approved in 1989. The tax, approved for 20 years, was expected to generate \$902 million. Add in state, federal and regional money, and San Francisco was expected to have nearly \$2.2 billion for transit and street improvements. Of this, \$12 million was set aside for street trees, an average of \$600,000 a year.

But, according to Sacamano, that \$12 million was



This map of the Sept. 23 plantings was done by Ellyn Shea of Friends of the Urban Forest.

spent by the end of June 2000 because of the pressing needs of the street tree program. In fact, this year's \$1 million is a special allocation from the transportation authority.

DPW works with Tree Corps, which employs former San Francisco jail inmates, to plant about 800 trees each year, mostly on major streets such as Market and Mission. DPW also is responsible for maintaining already planted trees.

"More money is needed for maintenance, too," said Sacamano. "Now we can only visit trees once every seven years. We should be checking every three years."

Nearly half of the \$1 million annual tree planting budget is

passed on to Friends of the Urban Forest to support its programs. Milton Marks III, executive director of FUF, said the transit tax money comprises about one-half of FUF's annual budget. "There was never enough money to do the job properly," Marks said, and he agrees with Sacamano that more maintenance is needed.

"The mayor and supervisors need to get involved," Marks said. "It was made clear that no more transit money will be forthcoming. Money will need to come from the general fund."

Marjorie Beggs and Geoff Link provided research for this report.

A gift of green

Tracing the roots of the recent tree planting leads directly to Tenderloin property owner Charles Mosser whose donation enabled the purchase of 35 trees planted in September.

"Trees," Mosser said, "give a flourish to the neighborhood. They make it seem more residential than commercial. I'm impressed with the old buildings, and it's easier to get people to plant trees than to paint their buildings."

Mosser is co-founder of Adopt-A-Block, the nonprofit that worked with Friends of the Urban Forest to set up the planting by contacting property owners and securing their pledge to care for the new trees.

"We started by sending out letters to property owners in November 1999," said Adopt-A-Block Executive Director Ana B. Arguello. "Mr. Mosser loves trees. He thinks everyone deserves to live in a pleasant neighborhood."

— by Stan Hutton

years since Tenderloin plantings began, 32 addresses have received replacement trees.

The fact that young trees are challenged to survive in the city is not surprising. The land on which San Francisco sits has never been blessed with trees. Even when the Ohlone Indians were the sole residents, only willow trees and coast live oaks could be found. The cool, foggy climate coupled with auto emissions, vandalism and neglect make life hard for trees in the city.

Vandalism may be the biggest threat to young trees in the Tenderloin. George Drake, a TNDC staff member who has volunteered at a number of tree plantings, said good staking and screening helps to thwart vandalism. "Sometimes the tree is just broken off at the stump," Drake said. "It's just malicious vandalism."

Margo Dennis, who lives at the Iroquois Residence at 835 O'Farrell, believes cars are the worst enemies of trees. "People just back over them without looking," Dennis said. She has been watching over several trees on her block for 3 1/2 years.

"They collect garbage

up being the good trees," she said. "I always talk to them when I'm walking down the street."

Trees do survive in the Tenderloin, however. The Lower Eddy/Leavenworth Task Force gave a grant to Friends of the Urban Forest earlier this year to assess and prune the street trees within the perimeter of Market, McAllister, Hyde, Ellis and Mason streets, a total of 66 blocks when you count both sidewalks on a street. The assessment showed 19 trees needed to be replanted, and LE/LTF's grant funded those trees.

Thirty-five blocks within this area have one or more trees, and on 13 of these blocks all of the trees are healthy. On 16 blocks are trees that the FUF arborist judged as "just OK" or struggling, and on 12 blocks there are dead trees or empty tree basins.

Altogether this area has 97 healthy trees and 45 trees that are OK or struggling.

What kind of tree does best? In this area, the New Zealand Christmas Tree (*Metrosideros excelsus*) edged out the ever popular Brisbane box (*Tristania conferta*), 26 to 22 in the healthy tree category. Silk oaks (*Grevillea robusta*) did well with

Most abused trees in the Tenderloin

PHOTOS: CARL ANGEL

The most abused trees in the Tenderloin have got to be the ones in front of 476 and 478 Eddy, the only trees on that side of the block. Planted originally in 1993 by Friends of the Urban Forest, they were replanted in 1997, again in 1999 and yet again on Sept. 23.

No species has been able to survive here. Brisbane box trees were planted first, followed by silk oaks, then Indian hawthornes. This year, two lemon bottlebrush were planted.

People are saying that this time the Sidewalk Improvement Program's regular street cleanings and the Neighborhood Watch group on the block will make a difference.

Ana B. Arguello, project director of Adopt-A-Block, reported at the October Lower Eddy/Leavenworth Task Force meeting: "The 400 block of Eddy looks good, feels good, and is safe." Time will tell.

— by Geoff Link



This tree in front of 478 Eddy is the fourth to be planted there in seven years.