



To: Downtown Mobility Authority (DMA) Board of Directors
From: Downtown Memphis Commission (DMC) Staff
Date: September 16, 2026
RE: Update & Funding Request – Main Street Mall Tree Inventory & Assessment

Background:

In September 2025, the Downtown Memphis Commission (DMC), in partnership with the City of Memphis, issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking qualified firms to complete a comprehensive inventory and condition assessment of street trees and their supporting infrastructure along the Main Street Pedestrian Mall, bordering Court Square Park, and within Civic Center Plaza.

The study area included all existing street trees and tree wells on both sides of the Main Street Pedestrian Mall from Exchange Avenue to Peabody Place, as well as the trees and tree wells bordering Court Square Park and inside of Civic Center Plaza between Poplar Avenue and Adams Avenue.

The study was designed to achieve five primary objectives:

1. Evaluate the health and condition of the existing street trees.
2. Determine the number of missing trees and unhealthy trees requiring replacement.
3. Assess the condition of tree wells, irrigation systems, and other supporting infrastructure.
4. Estimate the cost of replacing trees and repairing associated infrastructure, if needed.
5. Establish priorities for future investments to enhance & maintain the urban tree canopy.

Following a competitive selection process, Downtown Memphis-based Ritchie Smith Associates (RSA) was selected to lead the project, with urban forestry consultant Wes Hopper serving as a key project partner. Field work began in late 2025, and the final report was completed during the third quarter of 2026. The inventory provides the DMC and the City of Memphis with the first comprehensive baseline of the Main Street Mall urban tree canopy in 14 years. The report will be used to prioritize future capital investments, guide annual maintenance activities, and support funding requests for tree replacement and infrastructure improvements that will enhance the Main Street Pedestrian Mall as a premier public space, retail corridor, and pedestrian armature Downtown.

Assessment Results:

The assessment evaluated all 247 tree wells within the project area. Each tree was inventoried, measured, and evaluated for species, size, health, and overall condition. The project also produced detailed GIS-based site plans documenting the location and condition of every tree and tree well.

Key findings from the final report include:

- 73% of the 247 tree wells contain trees that are in good or fair condition, representing a strong foundation for the long-term health of the Downtown tree canopy.

- Trees rated in fair condition are generally considered recoverable with proactive maintenance and are expected to return to good health with appropriate care. Recommended maintenance includes:
 - Deep-root fertilization for 81 trees
 - Limb pruning for 50 trees
 - Resetting or removing tree well grates for 24 trees
 - Trimming or pruning errant roots on 19 trees
- 27 tree wells are currently vacant and require new tree plantings.
- 38 existing trees are in poor condition and should be removed and replaced with new trees.

Project Budget:

The total estimated project budget is \$144,100. While this estimate was developed by the project team based on current market pricing and industry experience, no portion of the project has been competitively bid. As a result, the final project cost will not be known until bids are received. In addition, further final design plans, project management, and construction administration services from RSA will be required to prepare the design plans and finalize tree species selections before installation of replacement trees can begin.

DMC Staff recommends that this project be jointly funded by DMA and its affiliate, the Center City Development Corporation (CCDC). The budget below summarizes the anticipated costs associated with implementing the recommendations identified in the Main Street Tree Inventory & Assessment. Final project costs will be established following a competitive bidding process.

SOURCES

DMA Funding	\$72,050	(50%)
CCDC Funding	\$72,050	(50%)
City of Memphis (In-kind contribution)*	N/A	
Total Sources	\$144,100	(100%)

USES

Tree repair & replacement	\$97,050	(84%)
Tree wells, grates, & surface	\$17,950	(16%)
Subtotal	\$115,000	(100%)
Contingency – 10%	\$11,500	
Project management, design, & construction admin.	\$17,600	
Total Uses	\$144,100	

**Pending final approval, it is anticipated that the City of Memphis Division of General Services may be able to perform certain preparatory site work, including resetting uplifted brick and concrete pavers, repairing broken pavers, and expanding up to four tree wells to accommodate future tree growth.*

Project Timeline:

The project timeline was developed in close partnership with RSA and is based largely on scheduling tree installation, trimming, and root-pruning activities during the portions of the tree cycle that offer the greatest likelihood of success while minimizing risks to tree growth and successful establishment.

Additional tree-related grant opportunities will be pursued as they are identified. While future phases could include additional work related to tree replacement and tree well design, the primary focus of this funding request is implementing the key recommendations identified through the Tree Inventory and Assessment. The proposed timeline below reflects that focus.

ESTIMATED PROJECT TIMELINE

September 16, 2026	DMA & CCDC consider funding request
Mid Sept. – Mid Oct. 2026	RSA completes final design plans
Mid Oct. – Early Nov. 2026	Bidding process underway
Mid Nov. 2026	Contractors & subcontractors selected
Early Dec. 2026	Pre-construction & coordination meetings held
Early Dec. 2026 – Early Feb. 2027*	Tree removal & installation of new trees
Late Feb. 2027*	Final inspection
May 2027*	Tree limbing performed

**Exact dates for tree installation and maintenance are weather dependent and will be adjusted, if required*

Staff Recommendation:

The Main Street Mall’s tree canopy is more than just a landscaping feature. It is a critical piece of Downtown infrastructure that contributes to property values, business activity, pedestrian comfort, and the special character of Downtown Memphis. Research has consistently demonstrated that healthy urban street trees can generate measurable economic benefits. Studies have found that a dense urban tree canopy can increase adjacent property values by approximately 5% to 15%, while research on commercial districts has found that consumers are willing to pay more and spend more time in areas with attractive, well-maintained streetscapes and trees.

The Main Street Mall represents one of Downtown’s most important public spaces and a significant pedestrian and retail corridor. It also plays an important role in advancing the DMA’s goals of improving walkability and increasing mobility options throughout Downtown. A comfortable, attractive, and well-maintained pedestrian environment is fundamental to the “park once” concept, which encourages visitors to park their vehicle once and then conveniently walk between multiple businesses, restaurants, attractions, and public spaces rather than moving their vehicle from one destination to another. The Main Street Mall is a critical link in this pedestrian network, and maintaining a healthy tree canopy helps make walking Downtown more comfortable, inviting, and practical. This is particularly important given that the majority of the DMA’s parking assets are located along Main Street or within a short walk of this pedestrian spine, which connects so many origins and destinations in the Downtown Core.

The existing tree canopy includes hundreds of mature trees that provide substantial value today, but the Tree Inventory & Assessment also identified declining trees, gaps in the canopy, and maintenance needs that require timely attention. Addressing these issues now will help protect the public investment already represented by the Mall’s mature trees while ensuring that new trees are planted and established in locations where they can contribute to the canopy for decades to come. In this way, investment in the Mall’s tree canopy directly supports the pedestrian infrastructure needed to maximize the value and

effectiveness of the DMA's parking assets and make the park once approach to Downtown mobility successful.

This request is not simply an investment in replacing trees. It is an investment in preserving and strengthening the character and sense of place for one of Downtown Memphis's most important public assets and pedestrian corridors, while also supporting the DMA's broader mobility objectives. By implementing the recommendations of the Tree Inventory and Assessment, CCDC and DMA can proactively address existing deficiencies, reduce the risk of further tree loss, improve the pedestrian environment, encourage walking between Downtown destinations, and establish a more sustainable approach to managing the Main Street Mall's urban tree canopy. Investing in the Mall's tree canopy directly supports a Downtown where people can park once, leave their vehicles behind for a period of time, and comfortably access more of Downtown on foot.

DMC Staff recommends that DMA approve a Special Grant in an amount up to \$72,050 to fund one half of the costs associated with implementing the key recommendations of the Tree Inventory and Assessment, contingent upon approval by the CCDC of a corresponding request to fund the remaining one half of the project costs.