

To the Mayor and Members of the City Council

January 14, 2025

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**SUBJECT: FORESTRY HAZARD ABATEMENT PROGRAM**

The purpose of this Informal Report is to provide an update on the City's Forestry Hazard Abatement Program for tree and limb removal on city-owned properties including street rights-of-way (ROW).

Fort Worth's history with urban forestry is as old as the city itself. In 1873, Ordinance 19 declared it illegal to hitch a horse to a tree, or otherwise deface a tree, which is recognized as the earliest tree ordinance created in Texas and indicates tree planting was taking place before Fort Worth was incorporated. In 1926, the first City Forester and street tree pruning crews were hired. The street tree planting program was formally established in 1929. Fort Worth was the first community in Texas to earn Tree City USA status from the Arbor Day Foundation and has one of the most robust and respected municipal forestry programs in the state.

The PARD Forestry Section (Forestry) oversees activities delegated under Chapter 33 of the Code of Ordinances which assigns jurisdiction over trees on or affecting city-owned property including ROW. The Hazard Abatement Program's FY2025 Budget is \$2.4 million including 16 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs).

Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP)

Adopted on June 25, 2024 (M&C 24-4416), the UFMP established four initial goals for the City of Fort Worth. Two of the four goals are directly connected to the Forestry Hazard Abatement Program including: Goal #1 Continue to manage the urban forest as an asset using industry standards and best practices and adequate resources for sustainable management; and Goal #3 Strengthen urban forest programs through coordination, integration, professionalism, and funding to meet the needs of a growing city and urban forest.

I. Scope of Services and Priority Classifications

The Hazard Abatement Program's scope of work includes: clearing trees and related debris resulting from storms; removing dead and hazardous trees; removing broken trees and limbs; pruning trees and brush for street, sidewalk and path clearance; clearance for street lights; pruning to improve visibility of traffic signs and signals; pruning to improve visibility at intersections; and removing large, dead wood from tree canopies. The work performed by Hazard Abatement is demand-driven by service requests created through the call center (817-392-1234) and the MyFW app. All service requests are inspected by Forestry staff for additional details, the required scope of work for abatement, and assignment of a priority ranking which is based on the perceived risk to public safety.

Priority classifications and target response times are as follows:

- **Emergency – Immediate response/within 3 hours:** An immediate threat to person, property or commerce. Example: a fallen tree blocking all lanes of traffic on an arterial street.

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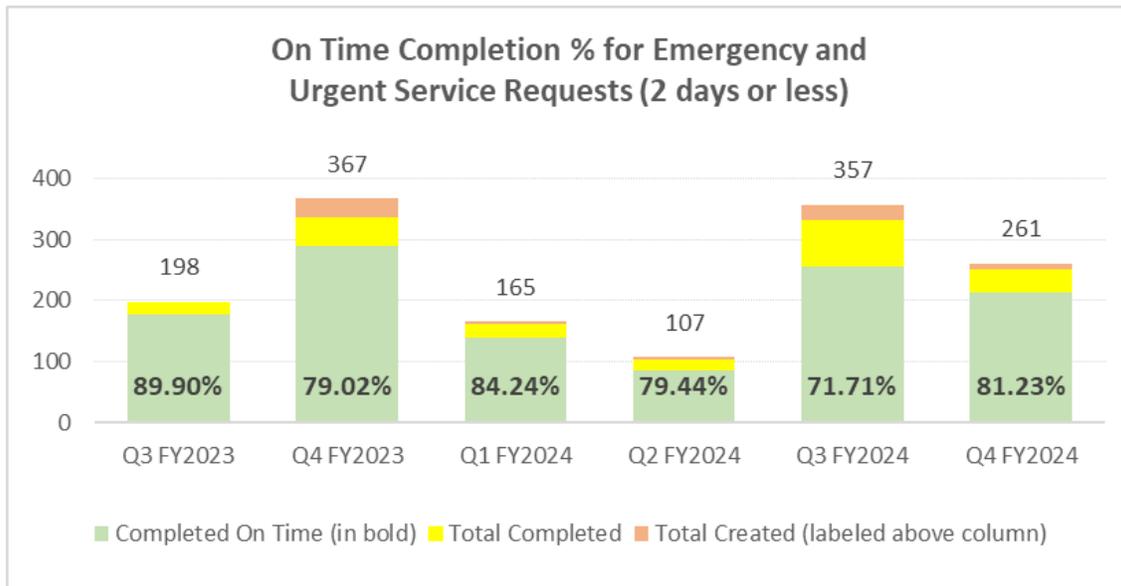
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- **Urgent – 24 hours:** A threat to life, property or commerce that can be barricaded and made safe until the risk can be mitigated. Example: a fallen tree blocking one entire lane of a street.
- **Priority #1 – 2 weeks:** Significant and obvious danger. Examples: Dead tree in poor condition at risk of failure, serious traffic hazard such as stop signs fully blocked, large broken limbs over lanes of travel or pedestrian areas, arterial lanes of travel partially blocked by vegetation.
- **Priority #2 – 3 months:** Hindrance or nuisance but not immediate danger. Example: Dead trees which are still solid, trimming of dead wood and low limbs over sidewalks, partial blockage of visibility on non-arterial streets.
- **Priority #3 – 6 months:** Routine maintenance that presents a low safety risk. Example: Minor trimming, limbs safely down on the ground, trunk removals in low use areas.

II. Current Conditions

As of November 30, 2024, there were 788 open service requests awaiting completion by in-house crews. Of those service requests, 269 were Priority #1, 405 were Priority #2 and 114 were Priority #3. Attachment 1 provides a map depicting open service request locations.

Both Emergency and Urgent prioritizations are performed as quickly as possible to minimize risk and ensure public safety. Crews will redeploy from their current work, if lower in priority, to complete these service requests. As a result of the immediate response, these two prioritizations generally do not show up in the backlog of pending service requests. The chart below shows the clearance rate for Emergency and Urgent prioritizations over the last 6 quarters:



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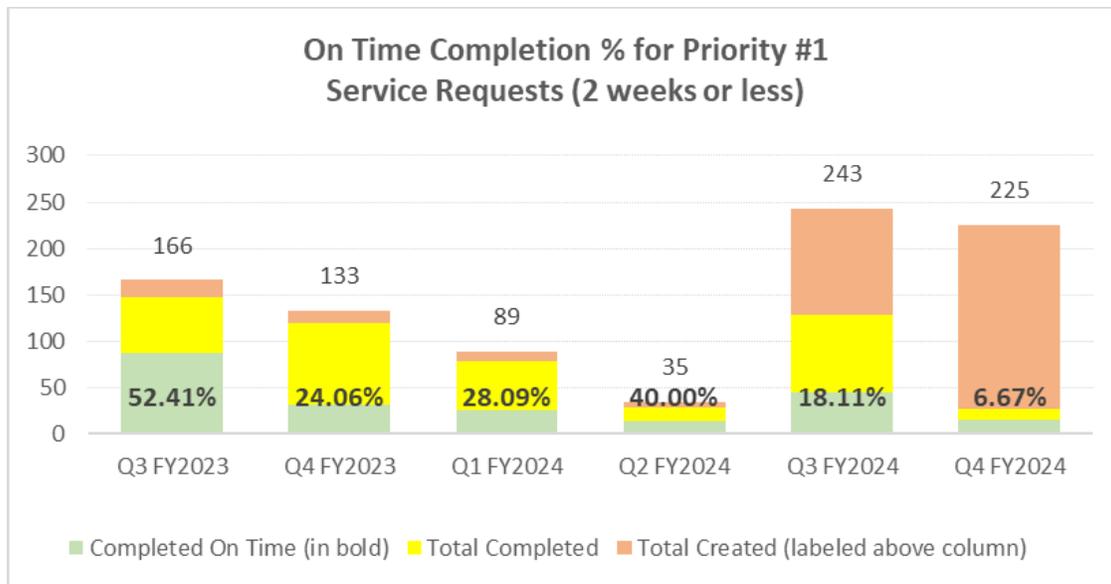
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While the target completion time for Priority #1 service requests is 2 weeks, the current lead time is averaging 5 months with the oldest requests awaiting completion dating back to late June 2024. The delayed response is primarily the result of the high volume of Emergency and Urgent requests that have an immediate need for completion.

Since the third quarter of FY2023, 28.22% of Priority #1 requests have been completed within the target time of 2 weeks.



Priority #2 requests are more routine in nature with a lower potential risk to public safety and thus carry a longer timeline for response at 3 months and Priority #3 requests are low in potential risk and volume and have a timeline of 6 months for completion. *Attachment 2* provides charts for these priority levels.

Contract Augmentation

To help supplement in-house crews and expand capacity, Forestry utilizes 3 approved vendors to address Urgent, Priority #1, and Priority #2 service requests. As of November 30, 2024, the contractors collectively had a backlog of 197 service requests with 180 requests to be assigned.

Additional utilization of contractors has been necessary to help respond to emergencies and large-scale pruning projects requiring extensive traffic control. The expanded contractor utilization has helped to maintain public safety but at higher costs. In FY2023, one new authorized position was added to exclusively administer these contracts. Responsibilities include inspection, contract procurement, and bill payment.

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Further contractor utilization will require adding additional vendors as the current contractors are at capacity for their available resources. Increased funding for additional contractual services will require additional contract inspection services.

III. Growth and Challenges

In FY2010, a budget reduction package eliminated one Hazard Abatement crew (four authorized positions). Since that time, Fort Worth's population has increased by 233,616 residents (31.3% increase). 53 parks totaling 1,466 acres have been acquired and added into the system. Also, more than 20 square miles of full-purpose city limits and over 50 linear miles of rights-of-way were added through annexation and growth. According to the Urban Forest Master Plan, the City of Fort Worth contains approximately 350,000 street trees and likely more than 1 million trees across 305 parks and city owned properties.

Since FY2010, the Hazard Abatement Program's average volume of annual service requests has increased by 46.6% with a current average of 4,246 service requests received per year. During that same span, Fort Worth has endured two of the three hottest summers in recorded history, multi-year droughts, two of the wettest years in recorded history and one of the coldest winters on record. *Attachment 3* provides additional details and charts related to growth and weather data.

In FY2010, to compensate for the loss of an in-house crew, the Forestry scope of work was adjusted to only address hazards, eliminating aesthetics and structural pruning work.

A digital work order tracking system was implemented which increased efficiencies in work order creation, inspection and resolution process, and enhanced reporting, mapping and tracking of service requests.

Mapping capabilities allowed service requests to be visualized by location, priority, and type of equipment required, enabling more efficient routing of in-house crews. These enhancements helped bridge the deficiencies caused by the elimination of an in-house crew in FY2010.

In FY2019, the service request reporting system employed by Forestry was migrated into the Motorola CSR customer relationship management software developed by the Communications & Public Engagement Department. As a result, Forestry's service requests were included in the citywide call center (817-392-1234) and the MyFW app. This enhancement allowed for more real-time, in-the-field updates creating greater efficiency for staff, but has also resulted in a 36.2% increase in service requests created annually. The higher volume of service requests is not only indicative of growth, it also reflects greater ease for the public to report tree issues.

Also, in FY2019, Forestry was successful in working with Human Resources (HR) to obtain an Auto-Reclassification Program (ARP) for the positions of Arborist I, Arborist II and Senior Arborist. This process improvement allows for employees to achieve new roles and responsibilities with an

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increase in pay as they grow their skills and gain experience. The ARP and the growth potential for employees is a vital tool for employee retention.

IV. Response to Current Challenges**Modifications and Improvements**

The FY2023 Budget included an additional \$100,000 for preventative structural pruning of young trees, one authorized position and associated equipment to exclusively oversee contractor utilization.

The FY2024 Budget included an additional \$100,000 allotted to contractual work for the specific targeting of aesthetic pruning around high visibility areas of the central city. See *Attachment 4* for a graph depicting annual expenditures and key milestones.

Decision Package Request

In line with the goals of the UFMP, a decision package was submitted in the proposed FY2025 Budget (\$1.5M, 8 FTEs) recommending the addition of two new crews along with the necessary capital and minor equipment to address the increasing backlog of tree-work requests. The purpose of this proposal was to scale up operations in order to meet the needs of a growing city, improve response times to enhance public safety, reduce dependency on contractors, and contribute to the overall livability of Fort Worth. Due to resource limitations, this request was not funded.

V. Recommended Actions

The PARD remains committed to continuous improvement and efficiency. Currently, the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Hazard Abatement Program are focused on work order clearance rates. Moving forward, staff will collaborate with the FWLab to review and assess these KPIs, evaluating the effectiveness of current measures. In addition, the department will submit a Lean Six Sigma project request for a comprehensive review of contract procurement and work order assignment processes. This review aims to identify opportunities to streamline operations, reduce inefficiencies, and enhance the overall responsiveness and effectiveness of the program. As part of the FY2026 Budget, the PARD anticipates submitting the Decision Package to fund two new crews, equipment, and supplies again.

For questions regarding this Informal Report, please contact Park & Recreation Department Director Richard Zavala at richard.zavala@fortworthtexas.gov.

David Cooke
City Manager

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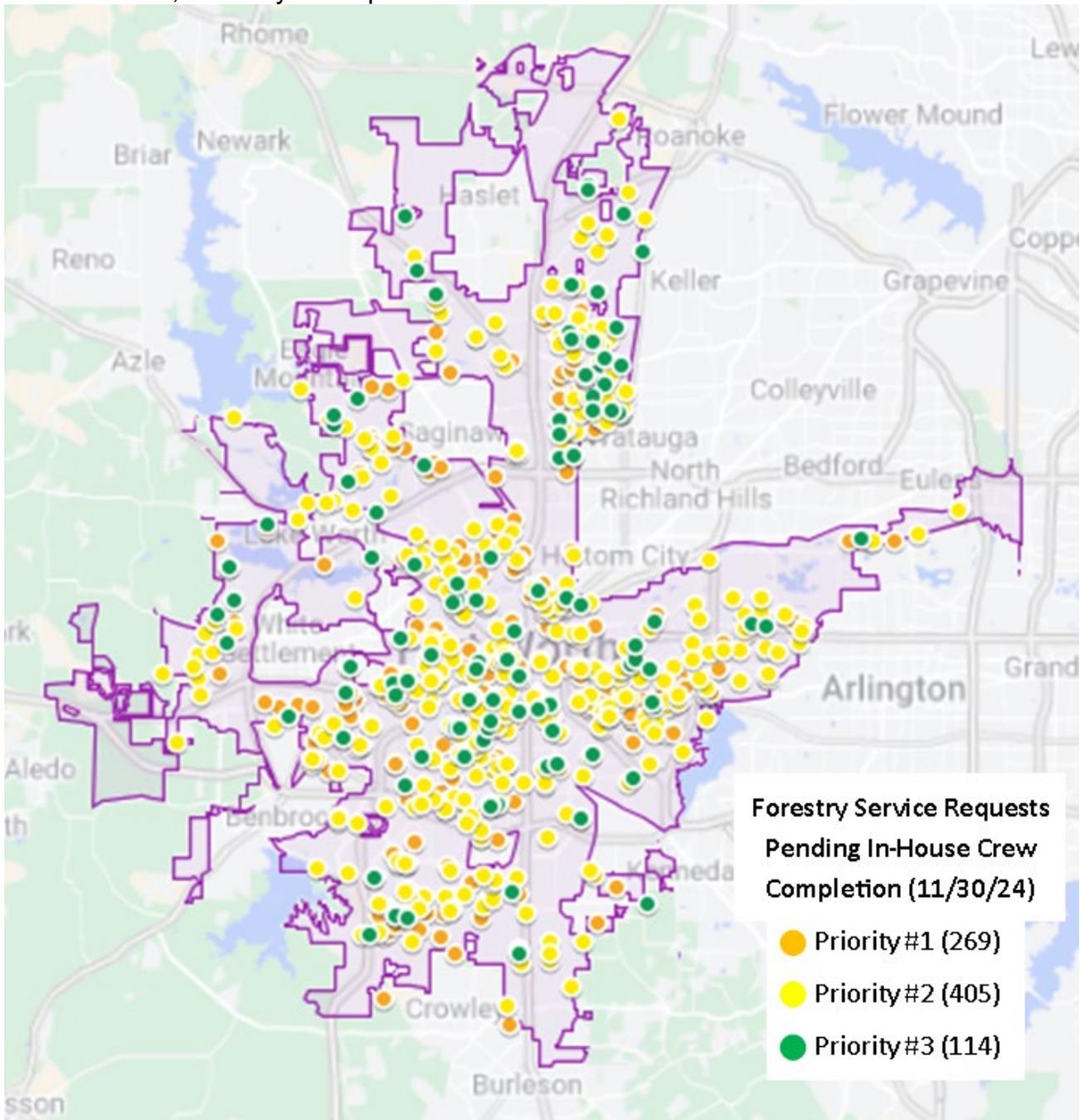
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Attachment 1: Map of service requests for tree work that have been inspected and assigned to an in-house crew, but not yet completed as of 11/30/2024



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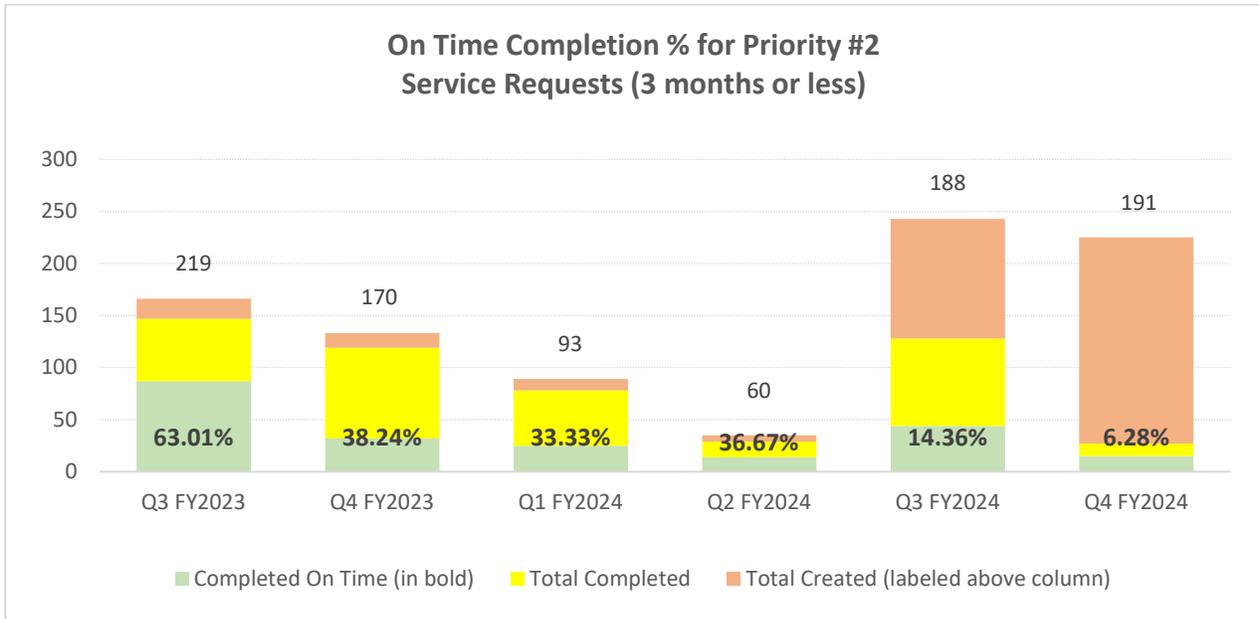
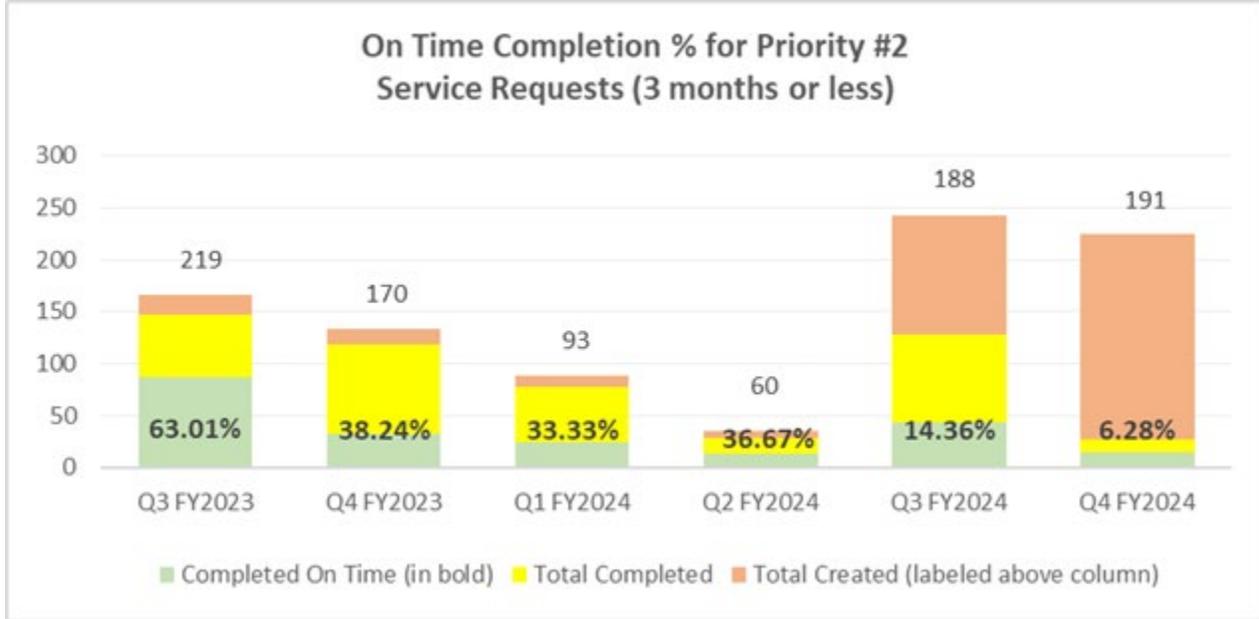
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Attachment 2: Quarterly on time completion rates for Priority #2 and Priority #3 service requests, relative to total volume of requests for the given priority



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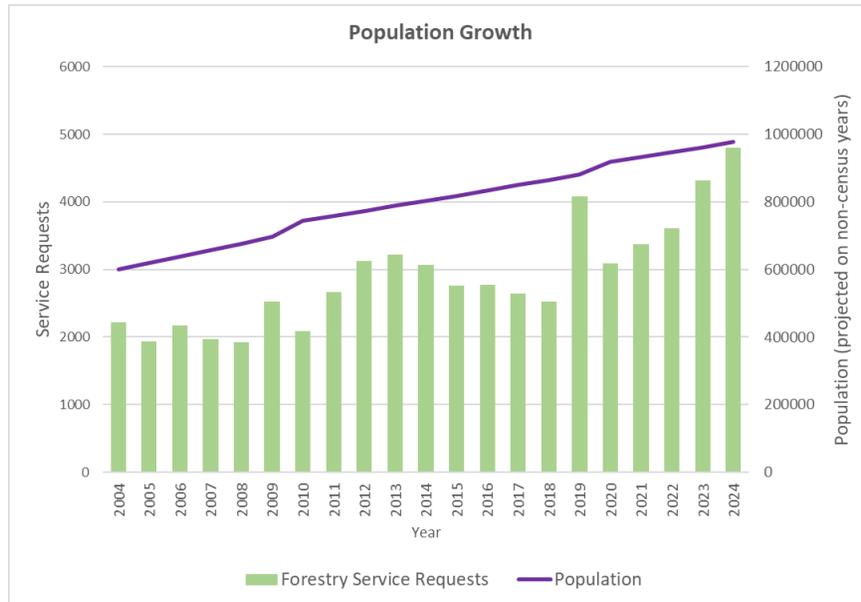


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Attachment 3: A summary of challenges related to population growth, land area and weather.

Population Growth

Over the past two decades, Fort Worth has been characterized as one of the fastest growing communities in the nation. The population boom has occurred via increased density through in-fill lots, a sharp increase in multi-family projects and a utilization of previously undeveloped areas. Not only does the growth mean increased tree planting to meet citywide canopy goals, it also leads to a greater number of street lane miles, more utilization of unimproved roadways where expansion has not kept pace with private development, more drivers on the road and a larger population to report tree-related issues.



A subdivision ordinance enacted in 2006, includes the requirement to have one or more trees per residential lot. Since adoption, 147,398 single/two family homes have been permitted. Trees planted within the right-of-way become city property with jurisdiction and maintenance resting with the PARD under Chapter 33. Trees planted on private property may also pose increased maintenance issues as these private trees may require pruning for street and sidewalk clearance, pruning to remove visibility obstructions, or work to clear signs, traffic signals and street lights.

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Land Area

Coinciding with population growth, the geographic area of Fort Worth has increased by more than 20 square miles over the past two decades. Annexation is owner-initiated with many developers opting to have Fort Worth accept large tracts of land and adjacent rights-of-way. This incorporation of subdivisions and related projects into full purpose limits allows utilization of Fort Worth’s municipal services while adding taxable value to the city. The majority of these annexations either include existing trees or will add trees that yield tremendous benefits, but trigger future maintenance needs.



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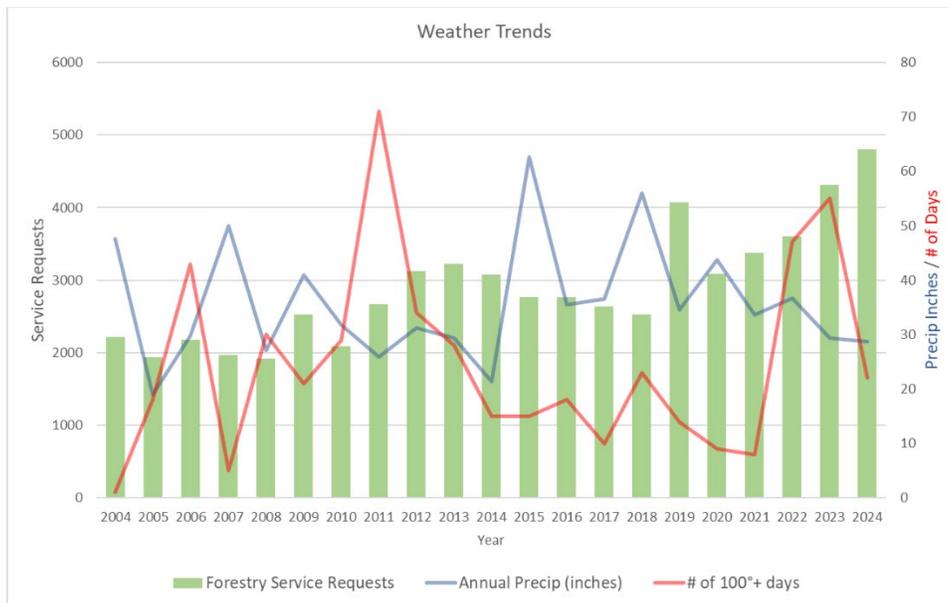
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Weather

To help gauge impacts from weather, statistics for annual inches of precipitation and number of days of 100° were compiled over the past 20 years. Though weather poses far greater complexity with regard to potential impact than what is reflected, an increase in service requests is notable in years of high heat and low rainfall and in years of high rainfall and low heat. There is less direct correlation to volume of work when hot summers are accompanied by high precipitation or mild summers are combined with low levels of precipitation.



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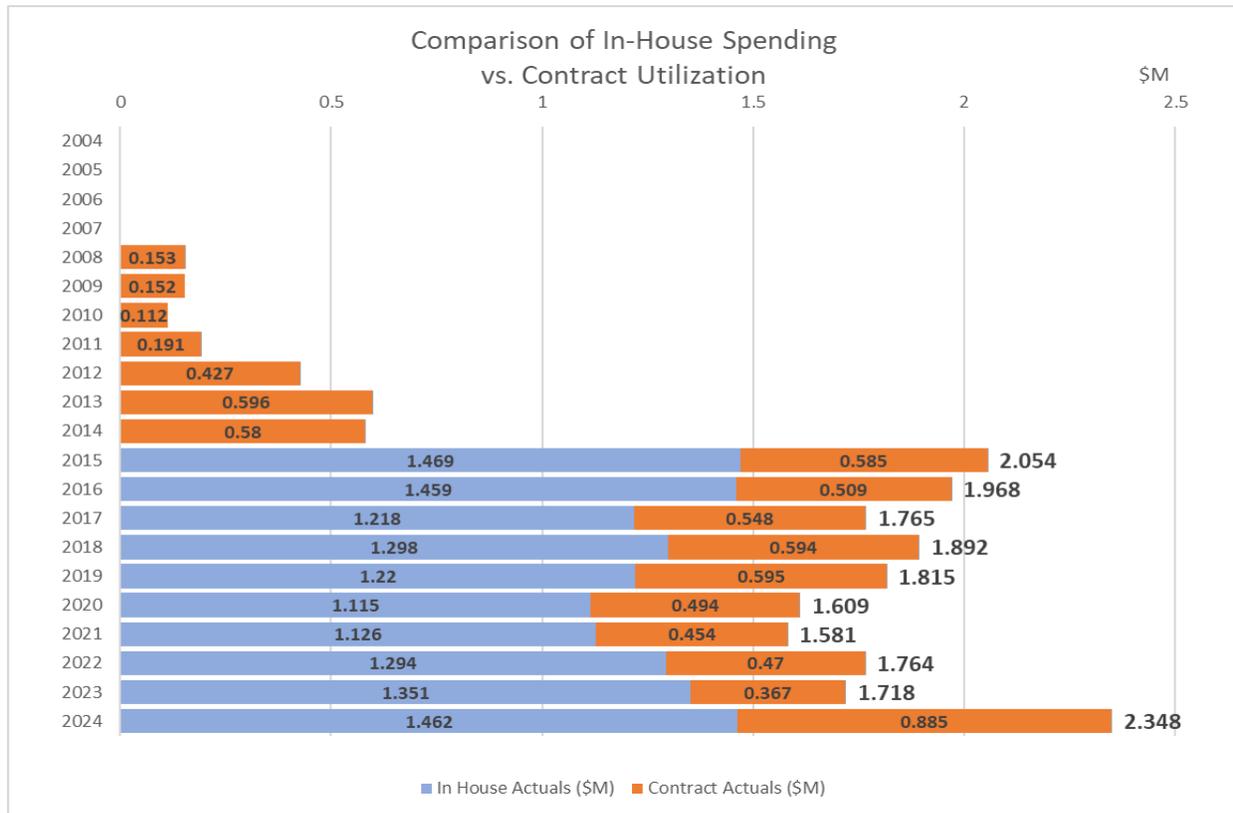
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Attachment 4: Actual expenditures for Hazard Abatement in-house work and contract utilization



2010	Reduction from 3 in-house crews to 2. Record snowfall w/ mass tree impact (February).
2011	2nd hottest summer in DFW history. Beginning of 4 year drought (2011-2015).
2012	Drought.
2013	Drought.
2014	Drought.
2015	Wettest year in DFW history.
2018	2nd wettest year in DFW history.
2019	Widespread severe storms (May/June 2019).
2020	Covid (Feb 2020). Hiring freeze--operating with 68% staff.
2021	Record cold (February). Realignment of staff responsibilities to cope with work load.
2022	Winch truck down for most of year.
2023	3rd hottest summer in DFW history (47 days of 100 degrees or greater). Decision package added 1 AP with \$100k for structural pruning (not allocated until FY2024). Loss of 1 bucket truck.
2024	Decision package added \$100k for aesthetic pruning of central city areas.