

# *Fairfax County Tree Commission*

*Consolidated Annual Report for 2023*

*July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023*



***1973 - 2023***

**Fairfax County Tree Commission**  
**Consolidated Annual Report**  
**July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023**

The Fairfax County Tree Commission  
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Approved for Submission to the  
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors  
**OCTOBER 2023**



Photo by Nancy Tyler. Fall foliage at Huntley Meadows Park, one of Fairfax County's largest protected forest areas.

# Table of Contents

<i>FAIRFAX COUNTY TREE COMMISSION</i> .....	4
<i>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</i> .....	5
<i>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</i> .....	6
<i>SECTION I: INTRODUCTION</i> .....	7
<i>SECTION II: REPORTING REQUIREMENTS</i> .....	9
A. Guiding Policies and Initiatives.....	9
1. Tree Conservation Ordinance, Chapter 122 .....	9
2. Fairfax Green Initiatives Board Matter .....	9
3. 2019 Tree Action Plan .....	9
4. One Fairfax.....	9
B. Report on Chapter 122.9, July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023 .....	10
1. Meetings .....	10
2. Friends of Trees Awards .....	10
3. Letters of Advice to the Board of Supervisors .....	10
4. Charter Review Update .....	11
5. Ongoing Concerns from the Annual Report 2021-2022.....	11
6. Plans for Next Reporting Period July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024 .....	12
<i>SECTION III: REPORT ON TREE ACTION PLAN - July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023</i> .....	13
A. Know What We Have .....	13
B. Protect and Improve What We Have .....	15
C. Expand What We Have .....	21
D. Improve Urban Forest Policies and Processes .....	23
E. Communicate & Build Partnerships in the Community of Practice.....	26
<i>SECTION IV: NEW &amp; ONGOING RECOMMENDATIONS</i> .....	27
<i>V. CONCLUSION</i> .....	29
<i>VI. GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS</i> .....	30
<i>ADDENDUM A: A History of the Tree Commission, Celebrating 50 Years of Service 1973 — 2023</i> .....	31
<i>ADDENDUM B: Recommendations from the 2021-2022 Annual Report, Complete Staff Remarks and Tree Commission’s Responses</i> .....	38

## FAIRFAX COUNTY TREE COMMISSION

Cindy Speas	At Large, Chair
Jim McGlone	Virginia Department of Forestry, Vice Chair to December 2022
Elaine Kolish	Mt. Vernon District, Vice Chair beginning January 2023
Jeanne Kadet	Braddock District
Robert Vickers	Dranesville District, through May 2023
Barbara Ryan	Dranesville District, beginning June 2023
Jessica Bowser	Franconia District
Bret Leslie	Hunter Mill District
Kevin Holland	Mason District
Rose Hendricks	Providence District, beginning July 2023
Cory Suter	Springfield District
Perry Rhodes	Sully District
Rick Healy	Fairfax County Environmental Quality Advisory Council
John Burke	Fairfax County Park Authority
Jerry Peters	Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District
Brenda Frank	Virginia Cooperative Extension Service

\*Special thanks to those commission members who were able to contribute to the Annual Report by researching, writing or editing.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although the Fairfax County Tree Commission (TC) has prepared and is responsible for this report, many county agencies, nonprofit organizations, and individuals participated in its compilation. This report represents a snapshot of work done on behalf of trees in Fairfax County during the period of review, and any omission of relevant information is inadvertent.

Additionally, the TC extends its gratitude to Fairfax County's Urban Forest Management Division (UFMD) and other staff members from the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) for their support. This continuing partnership is critical to the TC's ongoing efforts to help identify, save and expand our urban forest.

The following organizations and other county agencies are members of the Community of Practice (CoP), as established by the 2019 Tree Action Plan (TAP), and they have engaged in important tree-related activities in the county. The TC appreciates their contributions to and assistance with this report.

Casey Trees

Earth Sangha, Inc.

Fairfax County Environmental Quality Advisory Council

Fairfax County Park Authority Invasive Management Area Program

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Resources Management Division

Fairfax County Stormwater Planning Division, DPWES

Fairfax County Urban Forest Management Division, DPWES

Fairfax ReLeaf

McLean Trees Foundation

Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District

Plant NOVA Natives, including Plant Nova Trees and Tree Rescuers

Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia Department of Forestry

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report constitutes the Tree Commission's (TC) third Consolidated Annual Report to the Board of Supervisors (BOS). The TC appreciates that the BOS is keenly attuned to the many quantifiable and unquantifiable benefits that trees provide for our economy and our citizens' well-being. We are delighted to be providing the BOS a snapshot on the current status of Fairfax County's urban tree canopy.

**Section I** highlights that 2023 is the TC's 50th anniversary of service, and provides an overview of its membership and purpose.

**Section II** describes the reporting requirements this report fulfills, the TC's key activities during the 2022-2023 reporting period and actions planned for the 2023-2024 reporting period. The TC was highly active during the reporting period studying and providing comments on a variety of county initiatives, such as Parking Reimagined, and has proposed a heavy workload for the coming year, including evaluating whether the 2019 Tree Action Plan (TAP) should be updated.

**Section III** reports on the 2019 TAP's five goals regarding the urban forest: (1) know what we have, (2) protect and improve what we have, (3) expand what we have, (4) improve urban forest policies and processes, and (5) communicate and build partnerships. Notably, as described in Section III, although tree canopy data gathering and analyses and other studies have been commissioned and some completed, the results were not available to the TC by the end of the reporting period. Consequently, the TC cannot yet say whether the county is on track to meet its 2025 tree canopy goals. But we eagerly look forward to receiving the reports and having them inform our recommendation during the coming year.

**Section IV** contains the TC's new and ongoing recommendations. The ongoing recommendations are those from prior Annual Reports that are still relevant but not yet acted on. This section also includes recommendations regarding Chapter 122 of the Tree Conservation Ordinance and the 2019 TAP. It also includes recommendations on how to make free or low-cost options for citizen plantings even more feasible and widely available, as required by Action 5 of the Fairfax Green Initiatives Board Matter.

**Section V** contains the conclusion, and **Section VI** is a glossary of acronyms and terms.

**Addendum A** is a brief history of the TC's service from 1973-2023.

**Addendum B** contains the TC's recommendations from the 2021-2023 Annual Report, the staff's comments and analyses of those recommendations as required by the BOS, and the TC's responses. In certain instances, the issue became moot or staff comments persuaded the TC to table its recommendations. Those recommendations that the TC views as still important and relevant are contained in Section IV, labeled as ONGOING.

## SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of service by the Fairfax County Tree Commission (TC). A brief history of the TC is included as Addendum A of this report on p. 29. One of the pivotal moments of its half-century of service occurred in 2005, when then Board Chairman Gerry Connelly personally asked the TC to write a Tree Action Plan (TAP), focusing on what the county could do for the tree canopy. David Bulova, who served on the TC from 2003 to 2005 and who currently represents Virginia's 37th House District in the Virginia General Assembly, recalls the moment: "I don't know that I've ever seen a more excited, energized group! The rest is history." The TC responded with enthusiasm, and the BOS approved the first TAP in 2008 and an updated 2019 TAP in 2020.

The TC's membership of 15 is specified in county code, and all members are appointed by the BOS. The Supervisor of each District is charged with nominating one member, and the Chair chooses an at-large member. The TC also includes a representative from each of five organizations: the Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC), Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (NVSWCD), Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA), Fairfax County Office of Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), and the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF).

This year two long-term members with 30 years of combined experience and leadership on the TC retired (Robert Vickers and Jim McGlone). Jerry Peters, with 11 years of service, will retire at the end of December 2023. The TC will seek opportunities to address the considerable loss of historical memory and tree expertise from these distinguished commissioners.

The purpose of the Tree Commission as established in Chapter 122 of county ordinance is to "provide advice to the Board of Supervisors, based on an annual reevaluation of the administration and implementation of the provisions set forth in this Ordinance and the landscaping and screening requirements contained in the Zoning Ordinance; to provide leadership in developing an understanding of the objectives and methods of tree conservation; and to assist the Urban Forest Management Division of the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services and Land Development Services in the development and maintenance of technical specifications and guidelines." The objectives of tree conservation include, but are not limited to, reducing urban heat island effects, improving residents' health by reducing air pollutants, increasing residents' well-being with shade and buffering noise pollution, reducing energy costs, improving stormwater absorption and filtration, increasing erosion control, increasing areas of biodiversity, and attracting new residents and businesses to an urbanized county that still maintains a beautiful tree canopy.

To continue to provide these extraordinary ecosystem benefits, the 2019 Tree Action Plan (TAP) adopted by the BOS set a goal of maintaining a net of 57% tree canopy by 2025 — a figure established with a state-of-the-art data survey in 2015. This goal was confirmed in the county's recent Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan which adopted an even more

ambitious goal of 60% tree canopy, with a minimum of 40% in all census tracts by 2030. This latter goal is vital for improving racial and social equity, which is both a local priority, as articulated in the One Fairfax policies, and a federal policy, most directly addressed by the Justice40 Initiative. Additionally, Resilient Fairfax confirms the importance of trees and green spaces in county planning for better resilience and adaptability in the face of a rapidly warming climate.

There is a growing awareness worldwide of the benefits of trees, including new best practices in urban building design. A more robust and consistent focus on the impacts of current county planning and development policies and practices on our urban forest would help protect us from the impacts of climate change, and would support a healthier living experience that all county residents deserve.

The TC plays a critical role in advising the BOS on how to achieve its 2017 Environmental Vision ([read here on p. ii](#)). The report states that the BOS “has shaped its vision to protect and enhance the environment around two principles: 1) conservation of our limited natural resources must be interwoven into all government decisions; and 2) the Board must be committed to provide the necessary resources to protect and improve our environment for quality of life now and for future generations.”



Photos by Elaine Kolish. Left, Tree Commission Chair Cindy Speas congratulates Jim McGlone on his retirement after 14 years of service. Right, Chair Speas recognizes Robert Vickers on retirement after 16 years of service.



## SECTION II: REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The Tree Commission’s ,2022-2023 Consolidated Annual Report describes activities that meet its conservation goals to preserve, protect and expand our urban forest, and it makes recommendations to the BOS on these matters. It fulfills the reporting requirements as defined in Chapter 122 of the Tree Conservation Ordinance, the Fairfax Green Initiatives Board Matter, and the 2019 Tree Action Plan.

### A. Guiding Policies and Initiatives

#### 1. Tree Conservation Ordinance, Chapter 122

The TC was established in 1973 as part of the Zoning Ordinance. In 2021, the BOS moved the TC chapter from the Zoning Ordinance to the Tree Conservation Chapter 122 of the county code as Article 9. Chapter 122 is based on Virginia Code Section 15.2-961.1. The TC’s current purpose is to “Provide advice to the Board of Supervisors, based on an annual reevaluation of the administration and implementation of the provisions set forth in this Ordinance and the landscaping and screening requirements contained in the Zoning Ordinance; to provide leadership in developing an understanding of the objectives and methods of tree conservation; and to assist the Urban Forest Management Division (UFMD) of the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) and Land Development Services (LDS) in the development and maintenance of technical specifications and guidelines.” Article 9 of the code also requires the TC to submit a report annually to the county executive and BOS that discusses ongoing and anticipated activities, and an evaluation of the administration and implementation of the provisions set forth in Tree Conservation Chapter 122 and the landscaping and screening requirements contained in the Zoning Ordinance, as well as recommendations to improve the implementation of these ordinances. See Part II, Sections A-D for reporting on this requirement.

#### 2. Fairfax Green Initiatives Board Matter

The BOS-approved Fairfax Green Initiatives Board Matter (Fairfax Green Initiatives Action 5) charges the TC to recommend “low-cost and no cost options” for citizen tree planting in Fairfax County and to report annually to the BOS on progress and accomplishments. See Section III.C on p.18 for reporting on this initiative.

#### 3. 2019 Tree Action Plan

The 2019 TAP describes the stewardship necessary to maintain our urban forest, which includes five core goals. See Section III for the detailed report.

#### 4. One Fairfax

The TC adheres to this policy in all its deliberations, advice to the BOS, and its reporting. “One Fairfax is a joint racial and social equity policy of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and

School Board. The 2016 One Fairfax Resolution commits the county and schools to intentionally consider equity when making policies or delivering programs and services. It is a declaration that all residents deserve an equitable opportunity to succeed — regardless of their race, color, nationality, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, income or where they live. The One Fairfax Policy establishes shared definitions, focus areas, processes and organizational structure to help county and school leaders to look intentionally, comprehensively and systematically at barriers that may be creating gaps in opportunity.”

## **B. Report on Chapter 122.9, July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023**

### **1. Meetings**

The Tree Commission (TC) had a quorum of members present at all 11 of its meetings. To gain more insight into tree planting and preservation issues, agendas typically included a presentation from a county agency or a nonprofit, as well as regular updates from UFMD.

### **2. Friends of Trees Awards**

Since 2021, the award categories include individuals, groups, businesses, as well as the development community. Winners are chosen for their exceptional, outstanding and innovative tree actions and programs that involve protecting and preserving existing trees and associated habitats; increasing the county tree canopy; or educating and inspiring others to plant more trees, maintain them and learn about their value and benefits. Nominees from the development community are asked to go above and beyond county requirements for tree canopy conservation. The goal of the recognition program is to inspire even more individuals, organizations and businesses to protect, maintain and expand the county’s tree canopy. The TC selected winners in the fall 2022, and the BOS hosted a celebration for them in spring 2023. The winners were: Cathy Ledec (former TC Chair), Margaret Fisher and Heidi Allen from Plant Nova Trees Tree Rescuers program, Great Falls Citizens Association, Loft Ridge Homeowners Association, Stantec Consulting, and the following Fairfax County Public Schools: Ft. Hunt Elementary, Walt Whitman Middle, Justice High, Greenbriar West Elementary, and Irving Middle (partnering with Girl Scout Nation's Capital Troop 5532).

### **3. Letters of Advice to the Board of Supervisors**

October 24, 2022      **Street Trees in the Urban Design Guidelines** (joint letter with EQAC)

December 22, 2022    **Tree Conservation Code’s Exemption of Linear Projects**

April 6, 2023        **FY2024 and 3rd Quarter Review of the Fairfax County Budget**

April 6, 2023        **Site Specific Plan Amendment (SSPA) process**

- April 6, 2023                    **Parking Reimagined Initiative**
- July 6, 2023\*                **Landscaping/Screening Provisions Section 5108 of the Zoning Ordinance**
- July 6, 2023\*                **Linear Project Exemption letter Update**

\* Although these letters are dated after June 30, the staff presentation and most of the TC discussions occurred in the report period of July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023.

**NOTE:** The TC also sent a letter on May 23, 2023 to UFMD supporting the county’s grant application for \$11.5 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Forestry as part of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) law. The project referenced in the application is to plant and maintain street trees and to provide invasive species management, forest management, and afforestation/ reforestation efforts in Fairfax County’s most vulnerable communities.

#### **4. Charter Review Update**

The TC continued the process of updating its charter, with input from staff, to reflect Fairfax County’s current needs. At its March 21, 2023 meeting, Supervisor Storck suggested, and the BOS requested, that staff initiate the necessary Code amendment process to revise the Tree Commission charter and request BOS approval before December 2023 (see meeting summary at [BOS Meeting Summary March 21, 2023](#)). Section III. D provides pertinent details. [Read the most recent update on proposed charter changes here.](#)

#### **5. Ongoing Concerns from the Annual Report 2021-2022**

At the direction of the BOS, Deputy County Executive Rachel Flynn requested staff to respond to recommendations in the TC’s 2021-2022 Annual Report. The TC replied on April 6, 2023 that it would review and comment on the staff memo in this year’s Annual Report. See [Addendum B](#) for a side-by-side analysis and Section IV for Ongoing Recommendations to the BOS.

Of major concern were land use issues raised by the TC in a September 2021 letter to the BOS that was subsequently endorsed in large part by the McLean Citizens Association, the Great Falls Citizens Association, and the Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC). EQAC also included these suggestions in its 2021 Annual Report on the Environment. The BOS then requested the Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination (OEEC) prepare a response to EQAC’s recommendations, including those on land use, which EQAC received on May 4, 2022. Subsequently, the Mt. Vernon Infill Development Task Force (Infill Task Force) was convened and produced a draft report in March 2023 which included similar land use policy changes. And finally, Deputy County Executive Rachel Flynn sent the TC a memo responding directly to the TC’s Annual Report that included these matters. [See IV. Recommendations](#) for the TC’s ongoing land use policy recommendations that it believes will preserve and protect our urban canopy. Additional information about the staff report can be found in [Addendum B](#).

## 6. Plans for Next Reporting Period July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024

- Conduct outreach highlighting the TC's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, August 2023 – July 2024.
- Complete the TC's proposed charter changes.
- Provide recommendations, as needed, to the BOS on proposed projects affecting tree canopy.
- Establish educational talking points, including PowerPoint presentations on tree benefits, on county and state tree policies, and other tree issues for outreach efforts to the community.
- Evaluate scheduling an update to the 2019 TAP.
- Update, in conjunction with UFMD, the Fairfax County *Tree Basics* booklet distributed countywide at NVSWCD's annual seedling sale. Seek approval for other distribution outlets.
- Review and comment on Resilient Fairfax's work plan to coordinate natural resource protection efforts throughout all identified county agencies and in the wider community.
- Encourage county-wide efforts to both battle invasive vines and other non-native plants that threaten our urban forest, as well as new tree-planting programs that support the Tree Action Plan, CECAP and Resilient Fairfax goals.
- Work with UFMD to update and compile a complete set of reference materials for current TC members and for onboarding future TC members.
- Serve on the Tree Planting and Preservation Fund committee (as required) and increase publicity about the availability of funding for eligible projects.
- Serve the Tree Community of Practice by nominating two members to the steering committee.
- Hold a TC retreat to evaluate what is working well, and what needs to be improved in terms of TC's meetings and work processes.



Left photo by Cindy Speas. Right photo by Fairfax County Public Schools. 2023 Arbor Day at Mantua Elementary School, celebrating Fairfax County's 40<sup>th</sup> year designated as a Tree City, USA.

## SECTION III: REPORT ON TREE ACTION PLAN - July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023

### A. Know What We Have

The first goal of the 2019 TAP is to know what we have, and this section describes the work being done to fulfill this goal. The TC, however, does not yet have sufficient information to determine whether the county is on track to fulfill its 2025 goals.

To “know what we have,” the county must conduct inventories to determine vegetative cover types and conditions, monitor to measure forest change, and evaluate the success of management efforts. The county efforts also must include periodic assessments such as land cover change analysis and i-Tree ecosystem analysis, as well as ongoing assessment programs such as those conducted by FCPA, UFMD and other members of the Community of Practice (CoP).

During this reporting year, CoP member Plant NOVA Trees “Trees Rescuers” developed a technique for volunteers to document invasive vine locations. [Results posted here](#) include an estimated 10,185 trees at risk from invasive vines along 150 miles of roadway, 6,940 trees at risk on residential properties, and 51,718 non-residential areas (17,222 acres) at risk. An estimated 10,026 trees have been rescued. The goal is to save 14,000 trees by the end of 2023.

The county also began (or continued):

- A land cover change analysis.
- A research study with nonprofit partner Casey Trees and Virginia Tech's Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation to assess the effectiveness of the 10-year canopy requirement. For projects that required plantings to achieve the 10-year canopy requirements, the research study will assess whether the project successfully met the canopy requirement 10 years after its completion.
- A county-specific tree equity score assessment that depicts results by neighborhoods. The score evaluates data from each neighborhood for existing tree canopy, population density, income, employment, surface temperature, race, age, and health.
- An i-Tree ecosystem analysis of the vegetation structure, function, and value of the county's urban forest.

Specifically, in 2022, the county contracted with the Conservation Management Institute (CMI) to conduct a tree survey and incorporate the data into the i-Tree Eco™ model. The model estimates ecosystem services and characteristics of the urban forest. Data from i-Tree is used to communicate the extent to which the urban forest provides ecosystem

services such as stormwater runoff reduction, energy savings, carbon sequestration, and pollution removal. The survey can also identify potential impacts from invasive insects and diseases. Upon completion of the survey, data will be analyzed and compared to the 2017 results of an i-Tree Eco™ study. Additionally, CMI will produce a report with an assessment of the potential resilience of the urban forests in the county and stand level carbon stocks. The report will also include suggested management actions, where appropriate, to increase stand level resilience and/or carbon stocks.

Additionally, UFMD and FCPA use existing inventory programs to characterize how the county's forests are growing and changing. County agencies and other entities rely heavily on this data to design evolving management and maintenance strategies to preserve the benefits of Fairfax's forests, open spaces, and natural landscapes.

FCPA continues to conduct extensive inventory work on vegetation on its roughly 25,000 acres of property. The Non-Native Invasive Assessment Prioritization (NNIAP) program maps the severity of invasive plants in forested areas of FCPA property. The field data collection for this effort occurs in the summer, and FCPA properties are completely assessed on a rolling basis once every six years. Although some important programs continue to be understaffed or underfunded, fortunately the NNIAP program continues at full staff capacity. FCPA's series of regional natural resources management plans also assess natural community type and condition. Field work and surveys were completed for the Northern Area Natural Resources Management Plan in FY2023, and funding was approved to begin field work in FY2024 for the central and southern plans. The data on plant species (including trees) are used to assign park areas to a specific Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) defined Natural Community of Virginia. "This system provides a framework for understanding the ecological significance, characteristics, and uniqueness of different natural areas in Virginia. By categorizing areas based on plant species makeup, the department can make informed decisions about conservation, land management, and ecological priorities."

In FY2023, survey work on natural communities and rare wildlife occurrences was completed in the northern portion of Fairfax County. The survey findings will be summarized in the Northern Area Natural Resources Management Plan that will be completed in FY2024. All the surveys and plans inform site selection and management decisions for FCPA's ecological restoration program, "Helping our Land Heal." [See Section III.C for a list of projects](#) from the reporting period. In addition, FCPA continues to survey for rare plants and communities on park authority parcels slated for development in an attempt to avoid damage to these valuable natural resources.

Overall, the combined work of UFMD and FCPA's Natural Resources Bureau and others represents significant efforts to inventory, monitor, protect, and restore forests and natural landscapes in FY2023. These efforts will expand in coming years, once county programs succeed in recruiting sufficient staff to meet goals.

## **B. Protect and Improve What We Have**

Urban forest resources, including meadows and edge ecosystems, as well as forests and individual trees, need to be managed to protect and improve what we have. We must reduce or minimize stressors and maintain the health of the trees and other species to ensure they continue to provide valuable ecosystem services. Existing county and state policies provide some protections for our tree canopy, but there are continuing challenges such as how to manage stormwater, preserve trees during land disturbance, reduce deer browse impacts, control pests, and control invasive plants. Below, we list practices and policies that protect our tree canopy and how implementing native landscaping can improve forest ecology.



Photo by Cindy Speas. Fall foliage near the Dulles Access Road in Reston, Virginia.

### **1. Protecting and Restoring Trees and Natural Areas during Fairfax County Projects**

Fairfax County's watershed management plans, developed and implemented by the Stormwater Planning Division (SWPD) of the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES), address problems of declining water quality and environmental degradation. The plans include preserving stream habitats from disturbance, and in some cases, include preserving trees and replanting where trees are lost. Projects are identified through the Stormwater Capital Improvement Program, which is updated annually.

Construction and maintenance of stormwater projects can result in unavoidable tree and vegetation loss. To offset these losses, restoration planting is done for all projects located in riparian corridors at densities equal to or greater than those required under the county's Chesapeake Bay Ordinance requirements and the Public Facilities Manual, 12-030.1. Those density requirements include 300 trees and 654 shrubs per acre plus native plant seeding. In addition, along most restored stream banks planting of live tree and shrub cuttings called "live stakes" are installed at densities of about one live stake per linear foot of bank and are planted on both stream banks.

Stormwater Management Division of DPWES (SWM) staff participated in multiple efforts to revise county policy to improve restoration planting requirements that will help protect trees. One project was the Fairfax County Seeding Guidelines issued by Land Development Services on July 6, 2022. The guidelines require use of native species in seeding for all county projects and on all Fairfax County lands (i.e., schools, parks, libraries, district government centers.) [Read more here](#). This effort promotes the use of native plant species and limits the use of invasive plant species in seeding applications for soil stabilization, restoration, agriculture, turf, and landscaping. The county's Building Design and Construction Division also works to ensure that natural landscaping methods and practices are incorporated into county building projects.

In addition to the above, FCPA has a program to restore natural areas on parklands called "Helping Our Land Heal." This program rebuilds, repairs and maintains quality natural areas with trees and other plantings. Projects underway during 2022-2023 included:

- Ellanor C. Lawrence Forest and Pipeline Restorations
- Elklick Preserve Forest and Grassland Restorations
- Laurel Hill Forest and Meadow Restorations
- Laurel Hill spotted lantern fly control project
- Frying Pan Farm Park Forest Restoration
- Huntley Meadows Wetland Restorations
- Lake Fairfax Meadow Restoration
- Green Spring Gardens Magnolia Bog Protection Project and Meadow Restoration
- Old Colchester Park & Preserve Forest Management, Forest Restoration & Wetland Restoration
- Poplar Ford Meadow Restorations

## **2. Protecting Tree Canopy During Construction & Other Land Disturbance Projects**

Land use changes on both public and private property, such as construction disturbances, can cause environmental degradation. There is a great deal of opportunity in this area to improve policies to reduce the negative impacts of construction and improve and preserve our urban forest. The Tree Commission has proposed several options for elevating trees as an essential



element in all land use decisions. See Section IV for more information. Our built and natural environments are interconnected and interdependent. Properly siting buildings and gray infrastructure (e.g., stormwater pipes, parking lots, utility corridors) around sensitive urban forest areas involves both due consideration for preserving mature trees and providing adequate space for planting new trees. New approaches to planning, design and construction can result in greater benefits for the built and natural environment. The Tree Commission will continue to actively advise the BOS in this area.

### **3. Protecting the Urban Forest from Deer Over-Browsing**

Another major threat to the health of Fairfax County’s forests is the overabundant population of white-tailed deer. Hunting deer is legal across the county and resulted in 1,367 harvests during the September 2022 through early January 2023 hunting season. Historical data can be found on the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources website. These deer were taken by all hunters across the county on private as well as public lands during the specified period. Fairfax County’s Animal Services Division Deer Management Program, which operates in many Fairfax County parks and other participating properties, had 521 volunteer archers harvest 604 deer. In addition, 38 deer were taken during sharpshooting operations in six selected county parks. Read more statistical information about county deer management here.

### **4. Protecting the Urban Forest from Pests**

The Forest Pest Management Branch (Forest Pest) is a county office cooperating with the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS). Fairfax County has one of the largest and most active forest pest protection staffs in the country. As the threat from spongy moth (formerly “gypsy moth”) has waned, staff has diligently worked to protect the urban forest from other forest pests and pest-borne diseases.

VDACS maintains a list of pests currently eligible for control by service districts in Virginia. In Fairfax County, Forest Pest implements monitoring and treatment efforts in partnership with other government agencies. The forest pests it manages include: emerald ash borer, spotted lantern fly (SLF), spongy moth, cankerworm, hemlock woolly adelgid, Asian longhorned beetle, sudden oak death, and thousand cankers disease. Forest Pest also keeps watch for emerging forest diseases. During the reporting period Beech Leaf Disease also was found in small areas of several parks. You can read more about forest pests on the county website.

### **5. Protecting the Urban Forest from Invasive Plants**

Similarly, invasive plants present a dire threat to the health and abundance of trees in Fairfax County. Over the past year, FCPA’s Invasive Management Area (IMA) program continued to work with resident volunteers to control invasive plants on parkland. In FY2023, 69 IMA volunteer site leaders led 5,391 volunteers logging 14,217 hours to remove nearly 10,366 (estimated) trash bags of invasive plants from FCPA properties.

As discussed earlier (see Section III. A), Plant Nova Trees has mapped invasive vines and the numbers of county trees at risk. Although both these programs have impressive statistics, they are based on individual volunteers, and the FCPA IMA program will require a fully developed staff and budget to effectively tackle this massive problem throughout the county.

#### 6. Improving the Urban Forest with Natural Landscaping

In June 2020 the BOS amended the county's Comprehensive Plan to apply low-impact development practices and natural landscaping methods to the design, retrofit, and maintenance of public facilities. The goals are to minimize resource consumption, reduce stormwater runoff, decrease life-cycle maintenance requirements, increase the habitat value of each site, and increase soil and plant health, many of which also contribute to the health of newly planted trees. County agencies have made strides in reaching these goals by changing installation practices, improving maintenance such as expanding mulched and planted areas beneath trees as they grow, controlling invasive plants, incorporating new procedures in contracts, and educating their own staff. One example is the Department of Vehicle Services (DVS) Alban Road facility where 1 ½ acres were converted to a native meadow, wetland, and wooded border.

Healthy soil is the living foundation for natural landscaping. Urban soils are often compacted by foot and equipment traffic and are deficient in organic matter that is the basis for what is called the "soil food web." Good soil retains moisture and increases permeability to both water and air. In addition to improving soil, reforestation (the planting of layers of native vegetation along with canopy trees or adding to existing canopy trees) is critical to urban forest health. A plan including a sub-canopy made up of smaller tree species, a shrub layer, and a layer made up of herbs, ferns, and grasses provides habitat for wildlife and reducing stormwater runoff.

SWPD seeks to identify and preserve healthy ecosystems prior to construction by mapping existing vegetative communities, describing their type according to Virginia state ecological community type, and assigning a condition rating ranging from excellent to poor. Ecosystems of good or excellent condition cannot be restored if disturbed, so efforts are made to avoid impacts to these communities. Project impacts are instead focused on fair and poor-quality communities that can be improved through restoration. In some cases, valuable native plants are rescued and replanted when construction impacts cannot be avoided, as in the Piney Run stream restoration project.

#### 7. Improving the Urban Forest with the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)

The VCAP program, administered in Fairfax County by the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (NVSWCD), provides financial incentives and technical and educational assistance to property owners installing eligible low-impact practices to address stormwater runoff issues such as erosion, poor drainage, or poor vegetation. Eligible practices include conservation landscapes (including tree planting), rain gardens, dry wells, infiltration trenches,

and pervious pavement. Benefits of the program include improved stormwater management, reduced polluted runoff, healthier local waterways, replenished native flora and wildlife habitat, and stabilized riparian buffers and shorelines.

#### 8. Protecting the Urban Forest Through Public Education

A critical component of protecting forests and managing natural landscaping on private properties is landowner education. Fairfax County has an updated, robust website on the threats of invasive vines and other pests and how residents can learn what to do to combat them on their own property. The Forest Pest Branch of the Urban Forest Management Division is also a key provider of public education about trees and forests.

Forest Pest Branch staff conducts and participates in multiple outreach and education efforts. Staff fosters an appreciation for trees and the urban forest to inspire citizens, county agencies, and the development industry to protect, plant, and manage greenspace resources. Targeted audiences for education and training include Fairfax County Public Schools, county staff, citizen scientists, homeowners' associations, and natural resource professionals. Through public events such as Arbor Day celebrations, environmental expos, and town hall meetings, staff educates the public about the county's urban forest resources and programs. Staff develops hands-on activities and displays that help convey the importance of the stewardship of the county's natural resources. Most of the Forest Pest messaging to the public was delivered through virtual platforms (social media posts, NewsWire, internal blog posts, webinars, website updates, and videos).

Additionally, CoP members contribute greatly to the county's education goals. For example, Plant NOVA Natives (PNN), a CoP member, is the joint marketing campaign of a coalition of nonprofit, governmental, and private groups working to reverse the decline of native plants (including trees) and wildlife in Northern Virginia. On its website, PNN offers information about native plants, where they belong in our landscape, and where they can be obtained, at events and in easy-to-understand publications in multiple languages. It also offers bi-lingual training in Spanish for professionals about how to maintain trees properly.

In 2021 Plant NOVA Natives began a five-year initiative to encourage planting and preservation of our native trees: Plant NOVA Trees is a major public education and engagement resource. Its website reviews the benefits of trees and forests, and provides useful information about selection, acquisition, planting, and care of native trees. Plant NOVA Trees continued its initiatives during 2022-2023.

CoP members at times team up to educate citizens about tree and forest health. An example during the FY2023 period was an Oak Decline Seminar presented on October 19, 2022 by a partnership among Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Department of Forestry, Fairfax County's Forest Pest Management Branch, and elected officials. Information was provided on

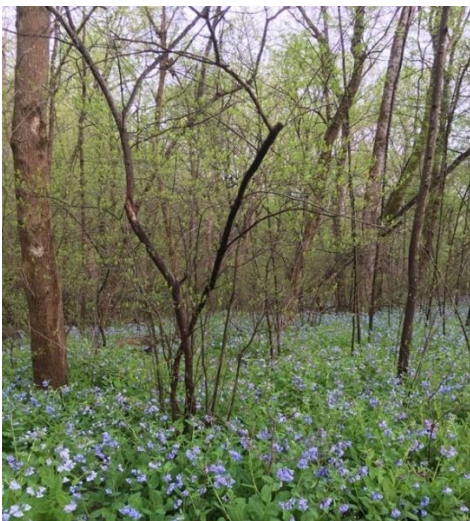
how oak decline syndrome can be combated by individuals and civic organizations. Almost 750 people registered for the seminar which was recorded and remains available on YouTube.

The NVSWCD promotes natural landscaping including invasive plant management, tree conservation, and use of native plants through various means:

- Annual spring sale of native seedlings – every purchaser receives the TC’s booklet, *“Fairfax County Tree Basics.”* See [Section III.C p. 22](#) for data on the sale.
- Publications – NVSWCD has promoted invasive plant management and use of native plants for years. Its website offers publications such as the *“Residential Low Impact Landscaping Guide,”* downloaded 769 times, and *“Rain Garden Design and Construction Guide for Homeowners,”* downloaded 7,425 times during the reporting period.

Local citizens’ associations also contribute to public education about tree conservation and natural landscaping. An excellent example is a Friends of Holmes Run presentation, titled *“The (Lazy) Gardener’s Guide to Protecting Home & Habitat”* that introduces viewers to their local watersheds, illustrates the benefits of native plants to insects and birds, recommends removing invasive tree vines, how to manage mulch to protect trees, and provides hands-on tips for implementing *“habitat gardening.”*

In summary, efforts to protect and improve our urban forest during the past year are extensive and ongoing. They are important for the continued regeneration and expansion of our existing canopy and other natural resources. Long-term protection and expansion require careful land development and new plantings and attention to the threats from invasive plants, forest pests and diseases. Overall, county agencies are leading a cultural shift away from expansive lawns to more diverse natural landscapes, including trees. Ongoing and continued education and outreach to the public is critical to protecting and improving what we have.



Photos by Cindy Speas. Left: Spring bluebells bloom below the understory trees in Riverbend Park, Great Falls, Virginia. Right: Old oak winter splendor in Roundtree Park, Annandale.

## C. Expand What We Have

Tree planting efforts in Fairfax County have grown over the past year, supported by increased public education and awareness of tree benefits. For example, the NVSWCD's annual native seedling sale sells out in hours and speaks to the popularity of small tree seedlings.

At the same time, although the county and others have increased efforts to educate the public about trees, the word is still not reaching enough residents or professionals. There are many residential properties and neighborhoods with common area turf grass land that could be used for tree planting. We also know that residents may be reluctant to engage in tree planting for reasons such as fear of property damage, physical labor, lack of knowledge about tree care, and high costs. Although it has been shown that smaller trees are not only less expensive and easier to plant, many people continue to think that 'bigger is better,' unaware that a small tree can become established sooner and catch up to a larger tree in only a few years. Expanding what we have, therefore, includes ensuring that buyers are informed about the benefits of planting smaller and less expensive trees, increasing the number of tree suppliers, and increasing sales by other organizations.

In addition, alternative opportunities to reach citizens about the importance of trees, beyond the usual county emails and supervisor newsletters, should be explored. Plant NOVA Natives has suggested leaving a popular native plants and trees catalog at local businesses, and this effort could be expanded by gaining permission to leave the county's popular Tree Basics booklets, printed in multiple languages, in other areas where people might gather such as libraries, grocery stores, faith-based buildings, and parks and recreation centers

Successful planting efforts also require knowledge about maintenance, both short-term, during the establishment period, and long-term. Proper maintenance is critical for a minimum of five years for newly planted trees up to one and a half inches caliper, and three years for trees between two to four inches caliper — unless we experience a drought. In that event longer maintenance periods are needed. Educating residents and landscaping professionals about proper maintenance is crucial if newly planted trees are to survive. This year the Fairfax Tree Stewards, established in 2022, graduated their first class of trainees. These trained volunteers are ready to serve their communities by educating the public about the benefits of trees, and teaching people how to select, properly plant and maintain their new and established trees.

Collecting and evaluating data on tree planting is essential to assess the county's progress in expanding the tree canopy. We know that it is not enough to just plant more trees because many trees do not survive to maturity. Success must be measured by analyzing data over a period of years, with the help of county staff and volunteers, to determine how many of the planted trees survived and are thriving. To help with gathering data, the UFMD sends a list of questions to all CoP members related to tree planting and tree health in the county. Data for this report was obtained from responses to the following questions:

1. Total number of trees planted
2. Total number of locations
3. Total number of people (staff/volunteers) who participated
4. Were the trees planted in vulnerable locations? (average, high, low, very high, very low)
5. What follow-up maintenance is planned? (None, short term of 1-year, long term of >1 year, other)
6. What was your seedling/tree source? (Private nursery, Other, NVSWCD/Releaf, a nonprofit nursery, VDOF)
7. Funding source (local, donation, private, nonprofit grant, state, federal, other)
8. Number of Planned projects (none, 1-5, 6-20, more than 20)
9. Number of planned trees (none, 1-5, 6-25, 26-100, 101-500, more than 500, other)

The survey was launched on May 23, 2023, and closed on June 30, to reflect tree planting for the reporting period of July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023. Thirteen out of 85 CoP entities responded and the key findings are as follows:

- 7% of reported plantings were in high or very high vulnerability areas
- 32% of the plantings did not have maintenance plans associated with them
- 5 respondents reported plans to plant in the coming fiscal year
- Respondents used a variety of both seedling sources and funding sources

**Celebrating successful planting projects:**

The following members of the CoP reported planting an amazing 16,260 trees in 30 locations, approximately the same number as last year. Those reporting the largest planting efforts are also similar to last year. This may be a reflection of the current capacity of these entities, and could help to identify and encourage other organizations that might be able to take advantage of large-scale planting initiatives. The survey information will be shared with the CoP.

<b>Organization</b>	<b># Trees and Shrubs Planted</b>
Casey Trees	<b>55</b>
Earth Sangha	<b>1,548</b>
Fairfax ReLeaf /Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF)	<b>535</b>
Fairfax Tree Stewards	<b>2</b>
Fox Lake Property Association	<b>63</b>
IMA/Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA)	<b>800</b>
McLean Trees Foundation (MTF)	<b>42</b>
Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District	<b>8,400</b>
Tree Preservation and Planting Fund (UFMD)	<b>103</b>
Stormwater Planning	<b>4,715</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16,260</b>

**Note:** This is likely an underreporting of the number and locations of trees planted in the county. This is not baseline or trend data, but anecdotal information reflecting highly effective local efforts.

Looking ahead, the Natural Resources sector specific goal of the 2021 BOS's Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) is to expand the tree canopy to 60 percent with a minimum of 40 percent tree canopy coverage in every census block by 2030 and a minimum of 50 percent tree canopy coverage in every census block by 2050, prioritizing areas of highest socioeconomic need first. To meet these goals, the county will need to invest even more in forest care and tree stewardship education efforts and hire more urban forestry staff whose full-time jobs are to plant trees and remove invasive vines that are killing trees.

The TC is pleased that the county is seeking additional funding for street tree planting. It recently applied for \$11.5 million in grant funding through the Inflation Reduction Act's Urban and Community Forestry grant from the U.S. Forest Service to establish a street tree planting and urban forest management program. The TC sent a letter of recommendation to the U.S. Forest Service supporting the proposal. [Read the support letter here.](#) If awarded funds, the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services hopes to plant 1,000 trees over a five-year period. Planting and maintaining climate-resilient street trees is one of the strategies in the [Resilient Fairfax plan](#) to address areas experiencing a high urban heat island effect. Guided by the One Fairfax policy, the county will use its [Vulnerability Index](#) and the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#) to prioritize communities that most need trees and urban forest restoration. **Update:** the county did not receive any funds under the IRA's Urban and Community Forestry program, and is evaluating strategies for reapplication when possible.

## **D. Improve Urban Forest Policies and Processes**

One provision of the 2019 Tree Action plan directs the TC to recommend improvements to urban forest policies and processes “to reflect best management practices, advances in technology” and relevant changes to state and national policies on protecting and expanding forest resources. Each of the provision's subparts discussed below.

### **1. Optimize Tree Conservation in County Policies**

(i) The TC has proposed revisions to its charter that this year advanced to the Board of Supervisors, who made it a board matter. Chief among the revisions is a provision to make explicit that the TC, at its discretion, may choose to comment on actions that could affect the urban forest that are being considered by the Planning Commission, the Board of Zoning Appeals, the Fairfax County Schools and Board, the Fairfax County Park Authority and any other county or county-related agencies. This proposal ensures that the TC would continue to advise the BOS but may also choose to review and comment to other agencies on tree matters. The TC is hopeful that the BOS will approve the updated charter by the end of 2023. [The updated proposed changes may be found at this link.](#)

(ii) On April 6, 2023, the TC recommended changes to the Site-Specific Plan Amendment (SSPA) process, which pertains to an expedited zoning amendment process. The TC wrote to advise that current BOS policies, in addition to CECAP and the Resilient Fairfax plan recommendations, be fully considered during the SSPA process. It also recommended that if a SSPA application is non-compliant with those policies, that the application be denied outright. [The letter containing specific details can be viewed here.](#)

## **2. Strengthen State Legislation that Promotes Forest Health**

Although outside the official reporting period, in August the TC sent the BOS four proposals for the county's 2024 General Assembly Legislative Package that support legislation to:

- (i) fund and conduct a study on tree canopy losses in the commonwealth and how to reverse those losses;
- (ii) continue to fund the successful VCAP and help ensure that residents in community property associations are not prohibited by covenants from installing conservation landscaping;
- (iii) allow counties to adopt ordinances to ban the sale of the most damaging invasive plant species that are threatening countless trees in parks and forested areas throughout the commonwealth; and
- (iv) initiate a study on whether a permitting system for the removal of mature native trees would help preserve a healthy mature urban forest.

## **3. Encourage Sustainable Design Practices**

In the reporting period, the TC submitted several letters and a memorandum to the BOS with recommendations to promote design and landscape requirements that promote natural landscaping practices.

(i) In April 2023, the TC advised the BOS that the TC supported the Parking Reimagined Initiative call for reduced parking minimums because it could increase needed tree canopy and native plantings. To make that happen, the TC provided advice on what the Initiative should require. [Read the letter on Parking Reimagined here.](#)

(ii) In December 2022, the TC advised the BOS that, if legally allowable, it should remove the linear project exemption in Chapter 122 of code on Tree Conservation. The letter was spurred by the concerns of county residents who observed valuable mature trees being clear cut for linear projects (e.g., trails). Upon receiving further information from county staff, in May 2023 the TC dropped that recommendation. It instead advised the BOS to issue a policy directive to require staff to provide relevant data to the TC (as cooperatively determined by the TC and staff) about tree preservation and planting efforts for linear projects. These data would be included in the TC's annual report to the BOS. Bearing in mind that a new reporting obligation



would place additional responsibilities on the staff, the TC further proposed that it and the staff evaluate the reporting obligation after a period of three years to determine if its benefits outweigh the costs of such reporting. At that point, the TC could recommend to the BOS whether to sunset staff's reporting obligation or continue it.

(iii) Additionally, in a memorandum dated October 24, 2022 on which the BOS was copied, the TC supported a proposal from UFMD and the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) to incentivize the planting of additional trees in urban areas. The proposal would have allowed certain tree canopy credits for plantings in less than desirable soil volume conditions. The TC (along with EQAC which joined the TC in its comment) recommended, however, that the plan be revised before submission to the BOS. In particular, the TC called for eliminating proposed credit for trees planted in the most substandard conditions because they would only provide visual aesthetics because there would be insufficient room for a healthy root system that would allow the tree to survive in the long term. Staff accepted the recommendation. [Read the TC's comments here.](#)

#### **4. Support and Refine the County's Urban Forestry Programs**

Many of the TC's meetings included presentations by staff in LDS and DPWES, which includes UFMD. During all of its meetings, the TC expressed ongoing support for appropriate staffing and funding for agencies working on urban forest issues. [Read the TC's April 2023 Budget letter to the BOS here.](#) This has been an ongoing TC recommendation.

#### **5. Enforce and Periodically Update the Fairfax County Tree Conservation Ordinance**

Now, more than ever, bold action is needed to preserve and expand our tree canopy. Tree loss from violent storms, invasive insect and plant species, and development are all taking an enormous toll on our tree canopy. One way to compensate for these losses and to overcome the additional ones that are coming with ongoing climate change is to address the fees developers pay when they cannot preserve or plant trees as required.

Accordingly, as it has in years past, the TC recommends updating the Public Facilities Manual (PFM) sections that specify the amount to be paid in lieu when tree preservation or planting requirements cannot be met. Although preservation and planting are preferable, when not feasible, the fee in lieu should be an appropriate one so that it is not easily considered a small part of the cost of doing business.

Currently, Section 12-0312 of the PFM states that the amount is set at the unit cost for a 1.5-2.0 inch caliper deciduous tree, which is currently \$1,066. [Link here to the Land Development Services Comprehensive Unit Price Schedule](#) under Landscaping. This amount fails to capture the quantifiable environmental service benefits a mature tree will provide over a 20-year period, as can be calculated by i-Tree Design software, let alone the appraised value of the tree. The appraised value is already being used to calculate the bond held by the county specifically for trees to be preserved on a site. Accordingly, the TC recommends that policies be changed so

that the PFM sets the in lieu fee at the appraised value of the tree, as determined in the bonding process, or the projected environmental benefits of the tree over 10 years, whichever is higher. Increasing the “in lieu fee” would put the county on a better path to incentivizing tree preservation and providing funds for new needed plantings elsewhere in the community.

#### **6. Participate in Review of Policy Plan**

In December, 2022 the BOS authorized an update to the Policy Plan, a component of the Comprehensive Plan. The BOS action directed staff to initially focus on five Policy Plan elements: Equity; Community Health; Land Use; Environment; and Transportation. Staff are currently performing a review of existing county guidance and an outreach plan will also be developed. The Tree Commission should take an active role in commenting on trees in this process.

#### **E. Communicate & Build Partnerships in the Community of Practice**

A critical component of partnership building for the TC is the Community of Practice (CoP). Members are volunteer individuals from county agencies, nonprofit groups, businesses and individual advocates who are dedicated to maintaining, managing and expanding the county tree canopy. The CoP’s Steering Committee follows a two-year work plan developed by the entire CoP to set agendas for semi-annual meetings of the CoP. The steering committee has six members: two from the Fairfax County Tree Commission; two Fairfax County staffers; and two community (non-governmental or regional commission) representatives; and is aided by a consultant and UFMD staff. The first CoP meeting took place March 13, 2020 just before the pandemic shut down in-person meetings. Since then, there have been an additional four meetings with approximately 35 attendees at each session. The Steering Committee members have committed to inviting additional tree stakeholders to join the CoP.

During the current reporting period, the CoP met twice. On September 28, 2022, the bi-annual agenda included updates on successful programs by the newly formed Fairfax Tree Stewards; a progress report on UFMD’s data gathering initiatives; and a quick overview of stream restoration efforts in the county. Breakout groups were invited to share one long and short term tree canopy goal with one another, seek partnerships from the group, and then commit to an action and a goal moving forward. Those commitments become the basis for energizing and exciting updates in future meetings. One of the outcomes of the meeting was a strong desire to hear about tree policies and advocacy at the state level.

Thus, on March 8, 2023 the CoP met to share information from experts on state initiatives that might help inform county efforts to preserve, protect and expand our tree canopy. Presenters were Delegate David Bulova from Fairfax County, a longtime tree champion, and Peggy Sanner, Virginia Executive Director of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation who talked about state tree initiatives. Tree project updates included Friends of Holmes Run on tree preservation in watersheds, Plant NOVA Trees on the native plant supply in our area, the Northern Virginia

Conservation Trust on legal opportunities to protect locally owned forested areas, and UFMD on upcoming changes to street trees requirements in certain designated areas.

The Tree Commission’s position as a leader of the CoP is critical to growing its reputation as a partner with various community groups, but it is also important to communicate directly with residents of the county through education and outreach activities. Residents can easily contact the TC with questions, and are able to participate in a public hearing section that starts every TC meeting. TC members actively promote the value and benefits of caring for and expanding our urban forest when there are opportunities to speak in the community or participate in county sponsored forums such as the 2023 Arbor Day festival or the Mt. Vernon Environmental Expo. The TC’s county website presence, its Tree Planting Basics Booklet and its Friends of Trees Awards provide additional educational outreach initiatives.

## SECTION IV: NEW & ONGOING RECOMMENDATIONS

This is the third successive comprehensive Annual Report the Tree Commission has sent to the BOS. Prior reports include recommendations that are still relevant to the preservation, maintenance and expansion of our urban tree canopy. Last year’s Annual Report recommendations were reviewed by staff in the spring of 2023, and the TC advised the BOS that it would respond to staff in this report. See Addendum B for a full set of the TC’s recommendations, county staff’s response, and the TC’s updated comments.

Those recommendations that the TC believes are extremely important to keep at the forefront of our work are sorted below according to each of our reporting requirements, and labeled as **ONGOING**. Recommendations from this reporting period are labeled **NEW**.

### Chapter 122 Recommendations

- NEW** Study at the state level the benefits and impact of permitting systems to preserve healthy, native trees in urban forests, including, but not limited to, resource protection areas, riparian buffers, and floodplains. See **“Strengthen state legislation that promotes forest health (iv)”** on p.21.
- ONGOING** That the BOS follow CECAP recommendations for a Natural Resources and Tree Inventory including a conceptual sketch to be approved prior to preparation of a full Site Plan (which includes building or accessory project site, land disturbance parameters and stormwater and utility corridors).
- ONGOING** That county code be revised to increase property boundary setbacks for infill development and re-zonings to provide adequate space for preservation of mature trees and planting of large shade trees.
- ONGOING** That the “fee in lieu” of tree preservation and planting be increased has been an ongoing TC recommendation. This year the TC recommends revising the Unit

Price Schedule to require the appraised values for any tree removed, or the projected economic benefits of it over a 10-year period, whichever is higher.

**ONGOING** That the required site plan tree inventory be expanded to provide a more quantitative and objective assessment of tree health.

### **Tree Action Plan Recommendations: Know What We Have**

**ONGOING** That the BOS support all efforts to gather and disseminate, on a regular basis, critical data on tree canopy (using satellite imagery and urban tree canopy analyses), success of the 10-year canopy requirement in Chapter 122 and other data measures needed to ensure effective tree policies.

### **Tree Action Plan Recommendations: Protect and Preserve What We Have**

**NEW** That the county's IMA program be fully staffed and fully funded to tackle the massive problem of invasive plant species throughout the county that are killing trees. **See April 6, 2023 Budget Letter.**

**NEW** That the BOS support state-wide efforts to provide resources and funding to assess where and why tree canopy losses are occurring in Virginia, provide incentives to stop and reverse tree canopy loss, increase statewide educational efforts regarding the harms caused by tree canopy loss, the benefits of native trees, and how they help to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. **"Strengthen state legislation that promotes forest health (i)" on p.21.**

**NEW** That the BOS support efforts to allow counties to adopt ordinances banning or imposing a surcharge on the sale of the most damaging of invasive plant species which are threatening the viability of countless trees in parklands and forested areas across Virginia. **"Strengthen state legislation that promotes forest health (iii)" on p.21.**

**ONGOING** That the BOS provide ongoing support for appropriate staffing and sufficient funding for agencies working on urban forest issues, including UFMD and FCPA's Natural Resources Department and NVSWCD. The TC believes clarification of what the funding source is for each agency is critical for advising on policy changes.

**ONGOING** That the BOS expand and maintain no-mow zones throughout the county and restore natural areas where possible.

**ONGOING** That the BOS follow the CECAP recommended action to incentivize developers and homeowners to reduce clearing, grading, or otherwise disturbing soils for development because soils provide important carbon sequestration.

## **Tree Action Plan Recommendations: Improve Policies & Procedures**

- NEW** That the BOS’s CECAP and the Resilient Fairfax plans (with natural resource and tree policies) be fully considered during the Site Specific Plan Amendment (SSPA) process and that if a SSPA application is non-compliant with those policies to deny the application outright. See SSPA letter.
- NEW** That the BOS approve a Parking Reimagined Initiative that will reduce parking minimums and apportion some percentage of the reclaimed parking surface for green space and native plantings. See Parking Reimagined letter.
- ONGOING** That the county’s Tree Action Plan inform and guide ongoing and new county policies and programs that conserve and expand green spaces and trees.
- ONGOING** That the BOS budget staff and fund processes that use tree canopy data and its analysis in all land development projects.

## **Tree Action Plan Recommendations: Communicate and Build Partnerships**

- ONGOING** That the BOS budget staff and fund processes that use tree canopy data and its analysis in all land development projects.
- ONGOING** That the county follow CECAP goals to increase creative educational outreach efforts to residents on the ecological, climate, environmental, social economic, health and other benefits of trees.
- ONGOING** That the BOS direct the county executive to request a tree champion from each county agency whose work impacts trees to attend the Community of Practice biannual meetings.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Overall, although there are ongoing public and private efforts to preserve and expand the county’s tree canopy, there is so much more that can and should be done, as described in this report. For example, one critical need is for additional, stable funding for trees and management of tree planting, preservation and education programs. Another critical need is for updated and ongoing data analyses of how our land use policies and pests are affecting the tree canopy. In terms of climate change and resiliency, trees are an important, effective and low-cost asset that provide numerous other tangible ecological benefits to Fairfax County residents. To better protect, preserve and expand our urban forest, we urge the Board of Supervisors to read and adopt this report’s new and ongoing recommendations. As the county’s Environmental Vision says, working together we can “leave our land, water and air better than we found it,” including our trees.

## VI. GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS

BOS:	Board of Supervisors
CECAP:	Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan
CoP:	Community of Practice
DPD:	Department of Planning and Development
DPWES:	Department of Public Works and Environmental Services
Forest Pest:	Forest Pest Management Branch of UFMD
OEEC:	Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination
LDS:	Land Development Services
NIP	Not in Package of a posted Board Agenda
SWMD:	Stormwater Management Division of DPWES
TAP:	Tree Action Plan
UFMD:	Urban Forestry Management Division of DPWES



Photo by Cindy Speas. Fall colors at Idylwood Park in Falls Church area of Fairfax County.

## **ADDENDUM A: A History of the Tree Commission, Celebrating 50 Years of Service 1973 — 2023**

The year 2023 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Fairfax County Tree Commission (Tree Commission). It was chartered in August 1973 by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) to advise them on the effectiveness of the newly enacted Tree Ordinance. Since then, the Tree Commission has contributed greatly to the successful preservation and expansion of the tree canopy in Fairfax County, but challenges remain. The county's population growth and continued land development, as well as invasive plant and insect species, are ongoing threats to the existing urban forest. Additionally, climate change has raised new public concern about the vital need for a healthy tree canopy to help combat the effects of global warming.

### **Tree Commission Members and Mission**

The original Tree Commission had only six citizen members, but by 1992 it had been expanded to its present form of 15 members. Ten commissioners are citizen volunteers; nine are nominated by their county district supervisor and a tenth by the chairman of the BOS to represent the county at large. The other five commissioners represent the Virginia Department of Forestry, the Virginia Extension Service, the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District, the Fairfax County Park Authority, and the county's Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC). Everyone serves without compensation.

In the last 10 years, the Tree Commission's membership has undergone significant turnover. Only two of the current members have been commissioners for more than a decade. They are Jeanne Kadet, who joined in 2012 as the Braddock District representative, and Jerry Peters, who joined the same year as the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District representative. In 2023 there have been two retirements and a third will happen this fall. Robert Vickers, who was appointed in 2007 as the Dranesville District representative; and Jim McGlone, who became the Virginia Department of Forestry representative in 2009, both ended their terms in summer 2023. In December, Jerry Peters will be leaving the NVSWCD and will no longer be its representative on the Tree Commission. During the same time-frame, there have been three Chairs of the Commission; Robert Vickers from 2012-2018, Catherine Ledec from 2019-2021, and Cindy Speas from January 2022 to the present. Jim McGlone served as the Vice Chair for more than a decade. In January 2023, Elaine Kolish, from the Mt. Vernon District, was elected Vice Chair.

The Tree Commission's main purpose since 1973 has been to advise the BOS on how well the Tree Ordinance is being implemented and how best to preserve, protect, and expand the county's urban forest. This has required close interaction with the Urban Forestry Management Division (UFMD, part of the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services) which is tasked with administering the ordinance. In 1976, the Tree Ordinance was incorporated into

the zoning section of the Fairfax County code, thereby establishing tree preservation and planting requirements for land developers.

### **Memories from the Tree Commission's Second Decade of Work**

Sharon Bulova was appointed to the Tree Commission in 1984 to represent the (then) Annandale (now Braddock) District. As President of the Kings Park West Civic Association at the time, Ms. Bulova was just becoming active in civic life. Her appointing supervisor was Audrey Moore, an environmentalist who had an impressive skill set in community conflict resolution. Ms. Bulova, an avowed lover of trees, served on the Tree Commission for three years and stepped down to run for Ms. Moore's seat on the Board of Supervisors.

Ms. Bulova remembers going out into the field to look at trees that had been nominated for "big tree" status. "What was tragic was the county's inability to preserve trees like that during the development process. I remember the Tree Commission at the time advocating for legislation in the General Assembly to require developers to preserve a percentage of tree cover when clearing a wooded area." The legislation was somewhat, but not entirely, successful, but she remembers then-Chairman Moore exclaiming "Well *finally* we managed to get some decent tree preservation legislation!"

As a freshman supervisor, Ms. Bulova continued her interest in trees. She remembers thinking that the newly widened Braddock Road running through her District looked more like an airport runway! She initiated The Braddock Road Tree Planting Project where donors paid for trees to be planted in the medians of Braddock Rd in honor or memory of someone. Ms. Bulova enthusiastically notes, "Those trees have grown up to thrive – they 'put the green' back into Braddock Road!" As Annandale District Supervisor, Ms. Bulova also created something called 'the Bulova Tree Proffer,' where developers walked a site before development to identify trees they would proffer/commit to saving, with a hefty bounty they would have to pay if one of those trees were destroyed once development took place. The practice spread from her district to others and helped to augment state legislation that has been strengthened over the years aided by her son, Virginia Assembly Delegate, David Bulova.

As Ms. Bulova puts it, her career in Fairfax County "all started with the Tree Commission!"

### **Population Growth Brought New Threats to the County's Urban Forest and New Actions to Protect It**

Over the next few decades, the county continued to grow rapidly, and by 1990, its population reached more than 800,000. In the early 2000s, the county population reached more than one million residents, and concerns about preserving tree canopy reached a new level. In 2005, Gerry Connolly, then chairman of the BOS, visited the Tree Commission and challenged it to develop a plan to manage and enhance the county's forests and trees. The Tree Commission convened a committee of county and state staff, nonprofits and developers, and produced the first Tree Action Plan (TAP). Subtitled "A 20-Year Plan to Conserve and Manage Fairfax County's



Urban Forest,” it was an ambitious attempt to recommend new actions that the BOS could take to promote public awareness of the need for tree preservation in the county.

In 2008, the county successfully sought new Virginia state enabling legislation to protect trees. The new legislation was required because of the “Dillon Rule,” which requires local jurisdictions to get state approval for new ordinances that exceed state requirements. Fairfax County used the new legislation to enact a new Tree Conservation Ordinance. It requires that a minimum percentage of trees be preserved during development based on the percentage of the development site covered by existing tree canopy. Then, to support the Tree Conservation Ordinance, the board amended Chapter 12 of the Public Facilities Manual, which ensures that tree preservation efforts by land developers conform to the new ordinance. Additionally, in February 2021, the Tree Commission was moved from Part 5 of Chapter 19 of the Zoning Ordinance to Chapter 122 of the county ordinances.

### **Administration and Enforcement of the Tree Conservation Ordinance and Tree Preservation and Planting Activities**

UFMD has grown considerably in the last ten years in response to continued land development, new legislation affecting tree preservation and planting activities, and ongoing threats from forest pests and diseases. It also currently provides staff support to the Tree Commission. The UFMD Director is the designated person to provide this support, which includes arranging monthly meetings and reviewing and disseminating the Tree Commission’s periodic advisory letters and annual report to the BOS. UFMD has had three directors in the past ten years, beginning with Mike Knapp in 2012, Keith Kline from 2014 to 2019, and Brian Keightley since 2019. Until recently, the Division has had two main components, the Forest Conservation Branch and the Forest Pest Branch. In fall of 2022 the Forest Conservation Branch was moved to Land Development Services (LDS).

The Forest Conservation Branch plays an important role in the land development process. Its main mission is to oversee the implementation and application of the Tree Conservation Ordinance to help ensure compliance by developers. It reviews re-zoning applications and site development plans, and its arborists attend meetings and do inspections during the on-site site construction process. Upon request, UFMD arborists give arborist advice to the Conservation Branch in LDS.

The Forest Pest Branch is concerned with protecting the counties’ trees from pests such as gypsy moths, emerald ash borers, and the spotted lantern fly, as well as other invasive species and diseases. It also conducts outreach programs for schools, HOAs, and civic organizations on forest health and tree planting projects.

In 2023 UFMD will administer a new tree planting program, specifically focused on underserved communities throughout the county. The Tree Planting and Preservation Fund will be expanded and used to implement this new agency focus.

The Tree Commission's activities also have increased dramatically over the past decade. Under the leadership of Mr. Vickers and Mr. Kline, the Tree Commission's interactions with UFMD grew substantially, including a joint offsite retreat held in 2017.

### **Updating the Tree Action Plan**

In 2016, the Tree Commission determined that it was time to revise the 2006 TAP. Robert Vickers, chair, assembled and led a team consisting of Jim McGlone, vice-chair, Commissioners Jerry Peters, Jeanne Kadet, and Eleanor Quigley, Charles Smith of Stormwater Planning Division of DPWES, and Hugh Whitehead of UFMD. It took two years to complete the drafting, review and approval process by other county agencies. It was submitted to the BOS as TAP 2019 and it was approved in early 2020.

When the BOS adopted the original TAP in 2006, it set a goal of achieving 45 percent tree canopy by 2037. At the time, it was estimated that the county only had a 30 percent canopy. The BOS subsequently commissioned an Urban Tree Canopy Assessment, which when completed in March 2017 found the existing tree canopy to be 57 percent of the land area of the county. The new assessment was a result of advances in technology, including overhead imagery. It affirmed the growth of the county's urban forest largely as a result of the planting of new trees. The new tree canopy management goal in TAP 2019 set a goal of no further net loss to our existing 57 percent tree canopy.

TAP 2019 is almost certainly one of the most important contributions that the Tree Commission has made to the county in the past decade. It contains two parts, an Urban Forest Strategic Plan and an Urban Forest Management Plan. It discusses the health and environmental benefits of the urban forest, and it lays out the need for a Community of Practice. This would be led by the Tree Commission, the UFMD, and the Virginia Department of Forestry and would include key county stakeholders in the tree preservation and planting process who would meet and report annually to the TC on their projects and progress.

### **New Housing and Infill Development Challenges in the Last 10 Years**

One of the main issues concerning tree preservation in recent years has been new housing development on infill lots. The demand for new and larger homes in the county has increased significantly in the last decade, and developers have begun looking for vacant lots or smaller homes in already developed suburban neighborhoods to purchase. The owners have the right to build larger new homes as long as they meet all zoning standards. In fact, more than 50% of residential building applications countywide are for infill lots. These "by right" developments do not have to go through a public hearing process, and they often result in the loss of mature trees. Although UFMD has no enforcement authority under the Tree Conservation Ordinance, it does play a critical advisory role in the tree preservation process which can sometimes preserve more trees.

In 2016, Supervisor Foust established a working group in the Dranesville District in response to citizen complaints about new infill developments, particularly in McLean and Great Falls. The working group included State Senator Barbara Favola, local citizens, housing developers, and county officials as well. Chairman Vickers represented the Tree Commission. After much discussion, Supervisor Foust introduced a resolution to the BOS in early 2017 that would have allowed the county to post a sign on infill lots when the site plans were approved for development. Local citizens could then provide input on tree preservation efforts. Unfortunately, the measure failed on a tie vote. Now, however, developers are required to notify surrounding landowners if a tree on their property might be endangered by construction. Through discussion and negotiation, some trees may be saved.

### **The Last Five Years**

At the beginning of 2019, Robert Vickers resigned as chairman but remained on the Tree Commission as the Dranesville Representative. Catherine Ledec was elected to replace him. She joined the commission in 2016 as the Mount Vernon representative and had worked closely with Supervisor Stork, who was and remains the head of the BOS Environmental Committee. Ms. Ledec encouraged more public participation at commission meetings and more input to the BOS on all environmental issues relevant to tree preservation.

One result was an increase in Tree Commission resolutions and letters sent to the board on various environmental initiatives that would impact the county's urban forest. Topics included the impact of changes to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance, support for Natural Landscaping Plan Amendments, comments on the Joint Environmental Task Force Final Report, Resource Protection Area Planting, and Improving the Land Development Process by Prioritizing Trees. Another addressed the progress of the new Community of Practice proposed in the Tree Action Plan, which held meetings in both 2020 and 2021.

Chair Ledec also submitted the first consolidated Tree Commission annual report to the Board of Supervisors in November 2021 (replacing individual reports the BOS requires on various initiatives). It covered the period from July 2020-July 2021 and included actions the Tree Commission had taken in support of the 2019 Tree Action Plan and the Fairfax County Green Initiatives document, which the BOS adopted in early 2019. It was a comprehensive document with nine chapters and an appendix which contained the previously listed letters to the BOS. It also included recommendations on items affecting trees in the Community-Wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) that the BOS adopted in September 2019. Chair Ledec also began the process of updating the Tree Commission's charter so that the Tree Commission could more effectively fulfill its mission.

Due to relocation out of Fairfax County, Ms. Ledec resigned as chairman in December 2021. She was succeeded as chair by Cindy Speas, the at-large county representative appointed by BOS Chairman Jeff McKay. Under Chair Speas a revised charter has become a BOS matter and the process is expected to be completed by the end of 2023. In October 2022, Chair Speas sent the

BOS the TC's second Consolidated Annual Report for the period July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. It is a comprehensive document that contains input from the entire Tree Commission, UFMD, and the Community of Practice.

In March 2023, at the BOS's request, county staff wrote a comprehensive review of the 33 recommendations in the 2021-2022 Annual Report. This has launched a new era of active dialogue between the Tree Commission and BOS, resulting in more letters of advice being sent to the BOS.

### **Tree Commission Outreach and Educational Efforts**

In collaboration with UFMD, the Tree Commission administers a Friends of Trees Awards program (which since 2001 includes the former Tree Preservation and Planting Awards). The Friends of Trees awards date back to the early 1990s, and the BOS has awarded them annually since then. Awards are given to individuals, nonprofit groups and associations, for profit businesses such as nurseries, and developers and contractors whose projects go above and beyond county requirements. All winners show exceptional support for tree preservation, planting efforts, and community education.

The Tree Commission's major community outreach is its traditional participation in the annual Fairfax County Spring Fair/Earth Day. At the Mount Vernon commissioner's request, the Tree Commission increased its outreach by also manning a table at the Mount Vernon District's annual Environmental Expo on Earth Day. At these events, using games to attract visitors, the Tree Commission distributes educational information on the value of trees and the *Tree Basics* booklet, published by the county under the auspices of the Tree Commission.

The Tree Commission appreciates that Commissioner Kadet often has coordinated the Tree Commission's participation in Earth Day and her major role in working with UFMD to update the *Tree Basics* booklet, which was most recently reissued in 2019. It has sections on the benefits of trees, how to select, plant, and care for trees, and on tree identification. Besides Earth Day events, it also is distributed at other outreach events, to every tree seedling purchaser at NVSWCD's spring sale, and on demand (it is one of the county's most popular publications).

Arbor Day 2023 saw the post-pandemic continuation of a presentation ceremony recognizing 40 plus years of Fairfax County's designation by the Arbor Day Foundation as a "Tree City USA." UFMD provides staff support to apply for the award recognizing the county's continued tree preservation efforts, and the Tree Commission traditionally is represented at the ceremony and tree planting, now held annually at a county public school.

Tree Commissioners also frequently participate in local forums and meetings held by citizens' associations, HOAs, and other environmental organizations concerned with tree preservation. These meetings often are related to citizen concern over local development projects that may result in considerable tree loss. On occasion, these meetings also might involve the

participation of UFMD members. It has long been the policy of both county organizations that they are separate entities and do not represent each other at these forums. When the concern is about local developments involving tree loss, Tree Commission members understand that they speak as individuals or for other advocacy groups or county agencies (such as NVSWCD or EQAC) and do not speak for the commission unless it has voted for a particular response.

**Going Forward**

The Tree Commission is proud of its efforts to preserve trees and expand Fairfax County’s urban forest over the 50 years of its existence. Its accomplishments over the past decade have been particularly noteworthy, helping to bring the county together in support of robust efforts to protect our natural environment. The commission hopes its ongoing activities will help combat global warming, as well as bring more equity to tree preservation and planting efforts throughout the county.



Photo by Cindy Speas. Spring at Mason Neck State Park, located in Fairfax County.

## **ADDENDUM B: Recommendations from the 2021-2022 Annual Report, Complete Staff Remarks and Tree Commission's Responses**

For ease of comparing, this section includes the full text of the Tree Commission's 2021-2022 Annual Report recommendations, the full text of county staff's analysis, and comments from the Tree Commission this year. Some recommendations have been tabled, some have been included in the TC's Proposals for the 2024 General Assembly Legislative Package, and some have been carried over as "**Ongoing**" recommendations for 2022-2023. These can be found along with "**New**" TC recommendations in Section IV.

**\*\*NOTE:** Beginning with #8 there are two numbers for the same section, one from the TC Annual Report and one from the staff comments. The text is the same, so don't be confused by the numbering here.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GREEN INITIATIVES ACTION 5**

1. Approve a permanent funding source for the Tree Fund to supplement current developer "in lieu of" payments. This fund pays for tree planting on public property and offers grants to nonprofits planting trees on private property.

**Staff Response:** The "Tree Fund" is the Tree Preservation and Planting Fund established in County Code Section 122-2-5 (Use of Tree Banking and Tree Preservation and Planting Fund), and is funded primarily by developer payments when on-site tree conservation requirements cannot be met or through proffers. Funding also includes cash reparations for violations and contributions from the County General Fund through the annual Environmental Improvement Program. The Office of Environmental & Energy Coordination (OEEC) is working to establish other funding sources for climate change initiatives (e.g., plastic bag tax revenues, federal grants), including new tree planting efforts with UFMD. **Additional contributions to the Tree Fund would require approval of the Board of Supervisors.**

**2023 TC Recommendation: That the TPPF fund receive annual funds from the county budget for ongoing staff and program support, so that it is not solely reliant on developer contributions, cash reparations, or one time grants.**

2. Approve permanent annual funding for a full-time position in the UFMD to support tree planting on public and private property and to manage the Tree Fund.

**Staff Response: A Project Manager position has already been established** as a Tree Planting Coordinator in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget. The recruiting advertisement will be posted in March 2023 and should be on-boarded in summer 2023.

**2023 TC Recommendation: No further action needed.**

3. Ensure that no monies in the Tree Fund expire prior to being used.

**Staff Response:** The Tree Planting and Preservation Fund has been reviewed and there is no evidence of money being used for non-tree planting activities. **Staff will ensure that funding is being utilized prior to any expiration requirements.**

**2023 TC Recommendation: No further action needed.**

4. Support Tree Commission and UFMD efforts to gather reports of tree planting in Fairfax County in support of the Watershed Implementation Plan III goals by tasking all county agencies to report tree planting as directed by the UFMD and solicited by the Tree Commission.

**Staff Response: The Project Manager position in UFMD is [will be] responsible for gathering information from County agencies and reporting on tree planting activities.**

**2023 TC Recommendation: Provide ongoing budgetary support for gathering tree planting data, and including the results in the TC's Annual Report.**

5. Increase funding to the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (NVSWCD) for additional staff to create and service Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) projects in Fairfax County.

**Staff Response:** Approximately \$600,000 of stormwater tax revenues are currently provided by DPWES to the NVSWCD annually to support their activities, and Fairfax County provides approximately 60% of the NVSWCD total budget. **Staff await further direction from the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation for increased funding.**

**2023 TC Recommendation: Seek clarity of funding sources. The staff report is not clear what the total NVSWCD budget is and where the other 40% of funding is sourced. Recommendations #5 and #6 highlight the need for NVSWCD to have a right-sized staff and budget to provide the community appropriate conservation assistance.**

6. Increase funding to the NVSWCD for staff and management of the Storm Water Management Fund. (Provide additional support to the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District to expand capacity to provide technical assistance and oversight of conservation projects on private and common interest properties.)

**Staff Response:** Approximately \$600,000 of stormwater tax revenues are currently provided by DPWES to the NVSWCD annually to support their activities. Fairfax County provides approximately 60% of the total NVSWCD budget. **Staff await further direction from the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation for increased funding.**

**2023 TC Recommendation: See above.**

7. Support new messaging and approaches to persuade citizens who are reluctant to plant trees by asking county agencies to meet with the Tree Commission or the Community of Practice to discuss how residents' resistance to tree planting might be overcome. This topic should be added to the Carbon Free Fairfax education and outreach initiative of CECAP, as administered by the Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination (OEEC).

**Staff Response: This recommendation has been addressed.** The Community of Practice is a forum of governmental, nonprofit, and private interests to collaborate on urban forest management facilitated by UFMD. The Board of Supervisors has directed the County's Office of Public Affairs to redistribute educational materials from Plant NOVA Trees, encouraging planting on private property, through fall 2026. Tree planting will be included in the Carbon Free Fairfax education and the outreach initiatives of CECAP. Tree planting outreach and

education is included in Resilient Fairfax (see CRC.1c Expand Targeted Tree Planting, CRC.2b Climate Resilience Education and Guidance Program, AE.1d Integrate climate change considerations into urban forestry programs, AE.2c support continued urban reforestation) including in vulnerable areas.

**2023 TC Recommendation: Monitoring data on each of these programs is needed to provide either evidence of success or the need for additional and more creative public education efforts. Success should be measured not just by the number of trees planted but also their 3-5-10 year survival rates.**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TREE ACTION PLAN: KNOW WHAT WE HAVE**

8. (1) Establish accurate, consistent, and updated data reporting measures for the county's urban forest. At this point we do not have data indicating whether the county is on track to meet its goals of retaining a net 57% tree canopy by 2025, much less the CECAP goal to expand tree canopy to 60% with a minimum of 40% canopy coverage in every census block by 2030.

**Staff Response: UFMD is finalizing an agreement** with our nonprofit partner Casey Trees to procure updated canopy data and fund the data acquisition with a grant from the county's Tree Planting and Preservation Fund. Updated canopy data will be provided within six weeks of finalizing the agreement.

**2023 TC Recommendation: The county should establish capacity to access up-to-date tree canopy database information. Useful data means data collected at least every 1-2 years, not every 5-8 years, to provide accurate critical reporting of declines, threats, or improvements necessary to make good tree policy decisions.**

9. (2) Provide budgetary support where needed to ensure that relevant data is current and useful to BOS leadership and all other stakeholders who are working to maintain, preserve and expand the urban forest.

**Staff Response: Staff await further direction from the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation of additional county funding.**

**2023 TC Recommendation: See #8 (1) above.**

10. (3) Increase regular budget funding for both long-term operations, ecological maintenance of completed restorations, and other FCPA natural resources programs directly, as well as for the Environmental Improvement Program under OEEC.

**Staff Response: DPWES stream restoration project maintenance is funded through the stormwater tax during the project warranty period. Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) and DPWES staff are collaboratively working to more effectively manage the maintenance of restoration projects beyond the warranty period. Additionally, FCPA removes hazardous trees within county parks through the FCPA Forestry's hazard tree and risk mitigation operations. Widespread oak decline continues to negatively impact trees in parks. FCPA anticipates existing funding will be insufficient to meet future tree risk mitigation demands, and staff await further direction from the Park Authority Board and the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation for additional county funding.**



**2023 TC Recommendation: That maintenance and restoration budgets continue to be robust and match assessed county needs.**

**TREE ACTION PLAN: PROTECT AND IMPROVE WHAT WE HAVE**

11. (4) Prioritize improvement projects, such as FCPA’s “Helping our Land Heal,” in neighborhoods that score high on the Vulnerability Index, keeping equity in mind.

**Staff Response:** Staff agrees with this recommendation, and is currently using the One Fairfax lens as a key criterion to prioritize tree planting and FCPA projects. High priority tree planting in areas of vulnerability is part of Resilient Fairfax (see CRC.1a Adaptation Action Areas, CRC.1c Targeted Tree Plantings). Additionally, the county’s pilot project to increase tree planting on private property, implemented in cooperation with our nonprofit partner Casey Trees, utilized social vulnerability index scores to identify target neighborhoods and prioritize equity consistent with One Fairfax.

**2023 TC Recommendation: The TC is pleased with the staff response. Appropriate data collection, however, as outlined in #8 (1) above is still important.**

12. (5) Determine the effectiveness of the 10-year tree canopy requirement—is it properly managed and is canopy retained at projected levels?

**Staff Response:** UFMD is finalizing negotiations of an agreement with our nonprofit partner Casey Trees and Virginia Tech’s Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation to complete a research study to address this recommendation. Project completion is currently estimated in 2024.

**2023 TC Recommendation: The TC is pleased that this study has been commissioned and looks forward to viewing the results.**

6. Expand and maintain no-mow zones throughout the county. Plant trees where possible in those areas.

**Staff Response:** UFMD actively works with partners in Facilities Management Department, FCPA, and Fairfax County Public Schools to designate no-mow zones where turfgrass is not required for specific activities. As UFMD tree planting programs expand, these areas will be evaluated for future tree planting.

**2023 TC Recommendation: No further action needed.**

7. Implement budgetary support for the Tree Preservation and Planting Fund and encourage other actions to increase tree planting on public and private county land.

**Staff Response:** Staff await further direction from the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation for additional county funding.

**2023 TC Recommendation: The county should provide budgetary support for the TPPF and seek ways to incentivize planting on private land (e.g., coupons for tree purchases) as well as publicly owned property in the county.**

8. Identify high priority tree planting areas through an equity lens using the county's Vulnerability Index.

**Staff Response:** DPWES completed this analysis in 2022 and will publish results in spring 2023.

**2023 TC Recommendation: Evaluate the data when published and make recommendations on providing planting programs in vulnerable neighborhoods.**

### **TREE ACTION PLAN: IMPROVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

9. Require a Natural Resources and Tree Inventory with a Conceptual Site Plan to be approved prior to preparation of the Site Plan. This would allow UFMD to guide land developers on optimal ways to preserve the site's tree canopy that can be taken into account in preparing and submitting the costly Site Plan.

**Staff Response:** The county currently requires an existing tree inventory for development proposals, including an assessment by a certified arborist of the condition of trees proposed for removal. Staff review this documentation for compliance with County Code, and provide recommendations when appropriate for tree preservation where the applicant is requesting tree removal. County Code emphasizes that all efforts, consistent with state law, shall be made to preserve existing trees. The recommendation to expand the tree inventory to provide a more quantitative and objective assessment of tree health and to create a new tree preservation review process to facilitate coordination of applicants and tree review staff earlier in the permitting process has been discussed by the Mount Vernon Infill Development Task Force, formed in 2022. Staff await further direction from the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation by the Tree Commission.

**2023 TC Recommendation: That the BOS make these code revisions as soon as possible.**

10. Increase property boundary setbacks for infill development and re-zonings to provide adequate space for preservation of mature trees and planting of large shade trees.

**Staff Response:** This recommendation is being considered by the Mount Vernon Infill Development Task Force. Staff await further direction from the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation.

**2023 TC Recommendation: That the BOS make these code revisions as soon as possible.**

11. Provide developers the option to build higher in areas with current building height limitations, thereby achieving more density, with a concurrent development condition that the building footprint must be reduced to allow for tree preservation or large shade tree planting and not for accessory construction.

**Staff Response:** During the development review process, where appropriate, staff often recommends increased heights to accommodate larger tree preservation and planting areas, subject to the limitations of the maximum heights anticipated by the Comprehensive Plan and those permitted by the Zoning Ordinance. The Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance, and the maximum heights therein, are adopted by the Board of Supervisors and developed with

consideration of the character of an area, the heights of surrounding uses and other community input. The requirements of Chapter 122 of the County Code (Tree Preservation Ordinance) are also evaluated during the development review process. Zoning districts each include maximum heights, which, when considered in conjunction with setbacks, help promote compatibility between adjacent uses. An increase in height might not be desired by neighboring property owners, particularly residential properties, even with an increase in setbacks.

In a single family structure context, an increase in height would not result in an increase in density. Much of the new development within the County is entitled through the public hearing process, during which issues such as the balance between increased height and tree preservation are considered. Regarding height increases for by-right development, public support for such a provision might be limited, especially in consideration of views, aesthetics, and shadow effects.

**2023 TC Recommendation: The Tree Commission agrees with staff's explanation and withdraws this recommendation.**

12. Raise the fee in lieu developers pay when removed trees cannot be replaced on site to reflect the appraised value of removed trees instead of the arbitrarily-set fee of \$900, much lower than that of neighboring Virginia jurisdictions. In order to incentivize developers to preserve trees, increase the fee to reflect appraised value, to encourage more tree conservation and to reflect better the lost benefits of removed trees.

**Staff Response:** Currently, the fee in lieu is based on the County's Unit Price Schedule which is updated annually and reflects the cost of materials and installation, not the appraised value of the tree. Staff acknowledge that the Unit Price Schedule does not provide full compensation for the loss of mature trees. Appraised value has been used to calculate the bond held by the county specifically for trees to be preserved on a site. Appraisal methods have not been used to calculate the fee to be paid in lieu of tree planting to meet the 10-year tree canopy requirement for the site. Staff await further direction from the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation.

**2023 TC Recommendation: that the BOS revise its Unit Price Schedule to require appraised values or estimated benefits at 20 years, whichever is higher. This should provide incentives for builders to work with UFMD to preserve trees and ensure the Tree Preservation and Planting Fund is better funded for needed new tree plantings.**

13. Continue to seek policy opportunities that elevate the importance of trees as an essential element in all land use decisions. Our built and natural environments are interconnected and interdependent, and a land use approach that recognizes that fact, will result in greater benefits from both the built and natural environments.

**Staff Response:** County staff support this recommendation.

**2023 TC Recommendation: That the preservation of trees continue to be elevated in importance in all land use decision making checklists.**

14. Support UFMD in analyzing the 2022 General Assembly's new tree canopy goals. Because the new code Section 15.2-961.5 [sic] does away with the grandfather clause that allows Fairfax

County to set 10-year goals instead of the state mandated 20-year goals, adopting this new code could in effect reduce tree canopy in the county. Staff should carefully consider the effects of this new authority and make recommendations on whether or not to adopt it.

**Staff Response:** The Senate Bill that proposed the new authority under 15.2-961.4 (mistakenly listed as 15.2-961.5 in the Tree Commission report) is subject to a reenactment clause, but was not enacted again in the 2023 General Assembly and thus is no longer in effect. County staff will continue to monitor General Assembly actions affecting tree conservation and will provide analysis and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors if amendments to County Code are needed.

**2023 TC Recommendation: Bill was not re-enacted, so this recommendation is moot.**

15. Amend the county's ordinances to ban the sale of the most damaging of invasive species in the county, which ultimately requires considerable county resources to remove from parklands and forested areas. This is a logical next step after the county's newly enacted ordinance to curtail the spread of invasive running bamboo.

**Staff Response:** Enabling legislation from the state is required to provide the county new local authority to ban the sale of invasive species.

**2023 TC Recommendation: The TC has asked for this to be added to the county's 2024 legislative package.**

16. Encourage Community of Practice (CoP) participation of a volunteer from every county agency and community or business organization that works with and champions the value and benefits of trees.

**Staff Response:** This recommendation has been addressed. UFMD has been collecting a list of interested and potentially interested individuals from county agencies. Members of the CoP have been submitting potentially interested individuals and organizations from outside of the county government.

**2023 TC Recommendation: That the BOS direct the county executive to request a tree champion from each county agency whose work impacts trees to attend the Community of Practice biannual meetings.**

## **CECAP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION: EDUCATION**

1. "Data education: Monitor tree cover changes (using satellite imagery and urban tree canopy analyses) to assess current conditions and determine how forests and urban tree ecosystems change over time, and regularly report that data to the public." Tree Commission comment: The last canopy data for the county was accrued in 2015.

**Staff Response:** Staff agree with this recommendation, and as previously noted, UFMD is working with nonprofit and academic partners to complete the initial analysis in 2023.

**2023 TC Recommendation: As previously noted above in 8. A (1)**

2. "Land use goal outreach: Ensure that the broader community understands the importance of green spaces to their quality of life, and that any development project—from redesigning a yard

to building a new apartment complex—can choose to minimize impacts to and loss of high-quality trees and natural vegetative communities.” Tree Commission comment: Vegetative communities are groups of plants from trees to ground cover that ecologically support each other in the food web (fungi, insects, birds, small mammals, etc.). There are important ecological choices every landowner and developer must make.

**Staff Response:** Staff agrees with this recommendation, and the county and Park Authority have numerous outreach and education programs developed for educating the public on the importance of green spaces.

**2023 TC Recommendation: The county and FCPA agencies should continue with creative educational outreach efforts on the ecological and other benefits of trees.**

3. “Educational programming: Highlight the importance of natural resources and trees in mitigating the effects of climate change, and also in providing environmental, social, economic, health and other benefits to Fairfax County citizens.” Tree Commission comment: This is low hanging fruit. Residents are interested in trees and their benefits. Now is the time to educate about how caring for trees has multiple benefits.

**Staff Response:** Staff agrees with this recommendation, and the county and Park Authority have numerous outreach and education programs developed for educating the public on the importance of green spaces.

**2023 TC Recommendation: See #2 above.**

## **CECAP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNTY ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT NOW**

4. “Create a cross-disciplinary county staff team to analyze existing programs and policies across the county to evaluate where climate change and natural resources intersect that includes mitigation plus adaptation and resiliency.”

**Staff Response:** A cross-disciplinary team to analyze climate change and natural resource overlaps, including both mitigation and resilience, was accomplished within the Resilient Fairfax planning process (see Audit of Existing Policies, Programs, and Plans in Resilient Fairfax). Resilient Fairfax strategies indicate co-benefits such as emissions absorption/carbon sinks. Similarly, the CECAP Implementation Plan also flags strategies that have resilience co-benefits. Staff are addressing this through the implementation of the Resilient Fairfax plan (see for example IAP.4a Interagency Collaboration system for resilience; AE.1a Consolidated Natural Resources Management Plan).

**2023 TC Recommendation: We are tabling the recommendation because Resilient Fairfax staff has created a cross-disciplinary team and is putting together a work plan.**

5. “Use research and inventory data to conduct land use reviews that ensure that local policies will prioritize open space [and] better value and preserve natural areas. The county could also use this information to reform how land is sold and coordinate new and expanded green areas with new or existing trails to create a network of green spaces.” Tree Commission comment: Land use decisions must be reviewed to prioritize preserving and expanding our urban forest. Data is key in these decisions.

**Staff Response:** For developments that are evaluated through the public hearing process, connectivity and green space networks are considered by staff, with emphasis placed on preservation and restoration of natural networks such as stream valleys. Additional county resources would be required to collect and analyze this data. Staff awaits further direction from the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation.

**2023 TC Recommendation: That the BOS budget staff and fund programs to analyze tree data in the development process.**

6. “Require a higher density tree canopy replacement in development projects”.

**Staff Response:** Fairfax County would need new enabling legislation from the state to increase the density of tree canopy replacement required in development projects. In projects that are evaluated through the public hearing process, neighborhood context and compatibility are evaluated which may include a request for increased or modified tree canopy.

**2023 TC Recommendation: The TC tables this request at this time as the county has the highest canopy requirements in the state. However, if data show that it has been unsuccessful, the TC will revisit this recommendation.**

7. “Strengthen existing county voluntary programs that conserve and expand green spaces and trees.” Tree Commission comment: We agree with another comment in the CECAP that “The Fairfax County Tree Action Plan provides a guiding structure through which the county can develop programs that conserve existing young and mature trees to help improve soils, filter groundwater, and remove air pollutants [and use] other urban areas as models.”

**Staff Response:** Staff concurs that trees provide multiple environmental and human health benefits and await further direction from the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation.

**2023 TC Recommendation: That the county’s Tree Action Plan inform and guide ongoing and new county policies and programs that conserve and expand green spaces and trees.**

8. “Pursue the expansion of financial tools, such as the Tree Preservation and Planting Fund, to include tree planting in private spaces.” Tree Commission comment: This could include, but not be limited to, developing public-private partnerships, supporting Green Bank funding, and increasing county funding of Earth Sangha and Fairfax ReLeaf.

**Staff Response:** Staff await further direction from the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation.

**2023 TC Recommendation: The county fund tree planting programs should provide for plantings on private as well as public land. This would ultimately benefit from a change in state code.**

## **CECAP’S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE COUNTY ACTIONS:**

**Important NOTE:** Many of the land use recommendations below were first included in the Tree Commission’s advisory letter to the BOS on September 9, 2021 and were endorsed in large part

by the McLean Citizens Association, the Great Falls Citizens Association and the Environmental Quality Advisory Council. In particular, EQAC's Annual Report included these suggested policies in its 2021 Annual Report on the Environment published in December, 2021. The board then requested OEEC to prepare a response to all EQAC's recommendations, including these, which EQAC received on May 4, 2022. Subsequently, the Mt. Vernon Infill Development Task Force (Infill Task Force) was convened and produced a report in March 2023.

Staff writes that since the following CECAP recommendations have been considered by the Infill Task Force, staff awaits "further direction from the Board of Supervisors to implement this recommendation as put forth by the Mt. Vernon Infill Development Task Force and **does not take a position in response to the TC's recommendations.**

1. Require a tree preservation plan first, before the stormwater, utility, and building plans are prepared and before any accessory project, such as a deck, shed, etc. is sited.

2. Incentivize more infill developers to conserve existing tree canopies and green spaces and reevaluate the existing Infill Development Review Process to incorporate best practices for preserving mature tree canopy. Specific actions include, but are not limited to, those listed below.

- Change (increase) boundary setback requirements, particularly on smaller lots.
- Incentivize developers and homeowners to reduce clearing, grading, or otherwise disturbing soils for development because soils provide important carbon sequestration.
- Incentivize or require conservation of tree canopies or green spaces in development projects, such as a regulation that restricts the removal of mature trees, and building designs and construction strategies that incorporate green space protection.
- Reduce the allowed amount of impermeability on any size of lot.

The next land use recommendations from the TC include several that staff have identified as needing "enabling legislation" from the state.

- Ban the removal of mature trees in resource protection areas, buffers, or flood plains.
- Establish stiff penalties for unpermitted removal of trees and/or damaging preserved trees in any building process. **2023 TC Recommendation: TC will continue to put forward suggested changes in land use requirements that will preserve, protect, maintain and expand the dwindling resources of our urban forest.**