



The Fairfax County Tree Commission  
12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 518  
Fairfax, Virginia 22035  
703.324.1770

September 2, 2021

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors  
12000 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22035

RE: Improving the Land Development Process by Prioritizing Trees

Sent by email to: [ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)

cc: Environmental Quality Advisory Council

Dear Members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors:

At our July 15, 2021 meeting, the Fairfax County Tree Commission voted unanimously to support submitting the following policy recommendations to you, our Board of Supervisors. When implemented, these could improve tree preservation and planting during the land development process.

We recommend that the Board of Supervisors direct County Staff to review all of these policy recommendations and determine which can be implemented under existing enabling legislation and then identify a process and timeline for implementation. In case new enabling legislation is needed, Staff should also identify this need.

**1. A Natural Resources and Tree Inventory with a Conceptual Site Plan should be approved prior to submittal of the Site Plan.**

This would identify existing, healthy mature trees (and other priority environmental features) on a site for preservation, such that the building envelope can be sited to maximize the preservation of existing mature trees along with the opportunities for planting of large shade trees.

**2. 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.**

Currently trees are typically considered last, after stormwater management and utilities are located, leaving inadequate space for tree preservation or planting in the remaining unbuilt land area. This has a significant adverse impact on future residents, in that large shade trees are eliminated from the landscape.

- 3. In areas with building height limitations, provide developers the option to build higher, 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.**

This policy reform would lead to increased green space around buildings. It would not apply when building height limitations are due to historic viewsheds, historic overlay districts, or FAA height restrictions.

- 4. Raise the *fee in lieu* to reflect appraised value.**

It should be more expensive to cut down trees than to preserve them. Currently, Fairfax County's *fee in lieu* is much lower than that of neighboring Virginia jurisdictions. In order to incentivize developers to preserve trees, increase the fee to reflect appraised value. We note that the *fee in lieu* for Arlington County is approximately \$2,400, as compared to Fairfax County at approximately \$900.

- 5. How effective is the 10-year tree canopy requirement? Is it being met, managed, and retained?**

Using tree canopy cover data, along with land use project and case data that is ten years old or older, will be important to assess the effectiveness of the Tree Ordinance and its related 10-year canopy requirement. This analysis would provide the needed knowledge for further policy modifications.

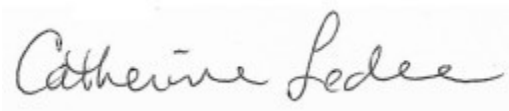
- 6. Identify high priority tree planting areas using an equity lens and vulnerability index.**

We recommend that Staff use the Vulnerability Index and Equity Lens along with tree canopy data, to identify and map high priority areas for tree planting. This should include identifying areas that are underplanted and could be converted from paved to planted space. As a follow-up, a County-funded program should be established with staff support to implement tree planting in these high priority areas.

We look forward to the Board of Supervisors requesting that Staff investigate the feasibility of acting on these recommendations which could strengthen County policy with regard to tree preservation and planting during the land development process.

Thank you for your support of our urban forest.

Sincerely,



Catherine C. Ledec, Chairman  
Fairfax County Tree Commission