

April 2, 2024

Jeffrey McKay, Chairman  
Members, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors  
12000 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22035

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

RE: FY2025 Fairfax County Budget and 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter FY2024 Budget Review

Dear members of the Board of Supervisors:

The Tree Commission (TC) is pleased to provide the following comments on the FY2025 Budget and the 2024 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Review, specifically as related to natural resources and the preservation, maintenance and expansion of our urban forest.

The TC appreciates the Board of Supervisors (BOS)'s commitment to, and work on behalf of, our urban forest. It is a pleasure to work with you to identify both the benefits of our trees as well as the opportunities we have to preserve and maintain them for future generations of Fairfax residents.

**Third Quarter Review:**

1. **Supplement the Tree Planting and Preservation Fund.** The TC recommends that a portion of any available overage in the Environmental and Energy Program (EEP) budget\* or other sources be allocated to the Tree Planting and Preservation Fund (TPPF) to provide labor and materials to the Urban Forest Management Division (UFMD) for the fall 2024 tree planting season. Spring 2024 tree planting activities will encumber all remaining available funds in the TPPF. \*(Formerly the Environmental Improvement Program or EIP)
2. **Enhance funding for Fairfax County Park Authority's (FCPA) Park Operations Division - Forestry for needed tree maintenance.** The TC recommends that FCPA Forestry receive additional funds to provide maintenance and preservation services to protect mature trees that are not labeled high-risk. Current funding *only* covers immediate high-risk tree removals. Funding to mitigate threats to mature healthy trees and prevent a high-risk removal is critically needed.

**FY2025 Budget Cycle:**

1. **Provide stable funding for County agencies and programs that focus on tree preservation.** Sustainable and stable financial support for the proper maintenance and management of Fairfax County's tree canopy is critical to addressing the effects of climate change and providing the healthy urban forest that Fairfax County residents expect and deserve.
2. **Provide specific direction to staff to clarify who has spending authority for a tree planting budget allocation.** The TC notes that the Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination

(OEEC) has budgeted in line item 30015 (Volume 2) an amount of \$500K to work on various Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) and Resilient Fairfax goals, including tree planting. Because there is no mention of UFMD or FCPA Natural Resources, which are already focused on tree planting and maintenance, it is unclear whether these agencies will have access to these funds.

3. **Fund additional staff positions so the County has the ability to preserve more trees and incorporate natural landscaping in Capital Projects.** The TC recommends that the Department of Public Works and Environmental Sciences (DPWES) receive authorization to create several staff positions to enable DPWES to better preserve trees by:
  - working with all County agencies to seek opportunities to incorporate natural landscaping and preserving trees in *all* County Capital Projects;
  - consulting on all Capital Projects planned in County Resource Protection Areas to assess threats to local native plant communities including trees, and to provide tree loss mitigation opportunities ahead of the engineering design phase.
4. **Fund at least one additional staff position in FCPA's Natural Resources Branch.** The Natural Capital Protection Program needs at least one more ecologist to enable the branch to better preserve trees on FCPA property.
5. **Fund the Invasives Management Area (IMA) Program as a line item.** The TC recommends that the IMA program be funded as a line item in the FY2025 budget. This will provide staff with operational stability and allow hiring merit positions. This should be in addition to the annual EEP grants available to that program. We cannot state often enough that invasive plants are a critical threat to the survival of Fairfax County's urban forest.
6. **Do not move the current, highly successful County Deer Management Program out of the Fairfax County Police Department via the FY2025 budget.** The TC recommends that organizational alternatives be thoroughly evaluated and the analysis available for public comment. The TC shares the concerns expressed by the Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC) in its March 26, 2024 memorandum to the BOS regarding the proposed Animal Services Consolidation Proposal. As the BOS is aware, deer browse is a key threat to the biological integrity and the healthy succession of new generations of trees, and is critical to the survival of our urban forest.

**Comments on Future Annual Budget and Carryover Planning:**

1. **Provide a line item in the budget for UFMD tree planting and maintenance.** As mentioned above in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Review carryover comments, one current source of UFMD tree planting money is the EEP grant fund. This funding has increased plantings in vulnerable communities, where quality of life is deeply affected by heat islands and concrete deserts. While grateful for these occasional infusions of funds, the TC recommends that EEP funding be robust enough to continue funding these UFMD requests annually. In addition, we recommend the funding be increased at every carryover opportunity until this can become

a recurring line item for UFMD in the budget. This sustained funding for tree planting, maintenance and public outreach/education efforts will help the county meet its urban canopy goals.

2. **Provide a regular line item for robust funding to the TPPF.** Currently the TPPF is funded by developer fees, however there is no state legislation preventing additional funding from the general budget. The TPPF has funded tree plantings on FCPS properties and could be widely expanded to partner with organizations working with county faith congregations and businesses to forest their properties. It also has funded public education efforts about the benefits and importance of trees to our community.
3. **Establish an invasive plant management program for *all* county owned properties.** The TC recommends that the BOS stand up a fully staffed (with merit positions) and funded Invasives Removal program dedicated to invasives plant removal across all county owned properties, not just FCPA. A new program could absorb the current FCPA's IMA program or be a sister program for other non-FCPA owned property. Additionally, the program should include significant cost-sharing opportunities to private property owners as invasives do not honor property lines, and the combined efforts of government and homeowners are needed to combat this threat to the County's climate and resiliency goals. For the same reasons, it would be necessary to expand VDOT's current agreements with individual volunteers to allow the removal of invasive species on its Right of Way property. Currently, the IMA effort relies on hundreds of County volunteers trying to prevent the most egregious and visible tree deaths. Invasive vines are as serious a threat to our urban forest as some other insect pests which are being combatted with a steady revenue source (i.e., a percentage of the real estate tax). We must recognize that the County cannot meet its tree canopy goals with a fragmented approach and an over-reliance on volunteers. That is not a sustainable model for the permanent success that we need. As usual, when establishing a new program, it is assumed that the County Attorney's office would determine if additional enabling legislation is required from the Virginia General Assembly.
4. **Budget for more permanent, full time merit positions as on-site park managers.** Funding for these critical staff jobs has in recent years been deferred to cover critical infrastructure needs. These front line personnel play an important role in identifying and often rectifying forestry, grounds, trails, and gardens maintenance needs. They are the first line of defense in helping to preserve and protect our urban forest on public lands, and they are the people who interface with park visitors on issues of preservation and care of our precious natural resources.
5. **Allocate a portion of the bag tax to fund messaging about trees on reusable bags.** The TC believes that this would help educate our citizens about the benefits of trees, tree pests and invasive species management, as well as how to preserve and maintain the urban forest.

Thank you for your attention to our budget recommendations that are designed to preserve, protect and expand our urban forest, essential because of all the known benefits of trees and

their impacts on our County residents' quality of life. The CECAP and Resilient Fairfax policies have high aspirational climate mitigation and resiliency goals for the urban forest, but they need and deserve commensurate budget support. As the County starts to develop the FY2026 budget, the TC will follow up with appropriate comments on these future opportunities.

Sincerely,

Cindy Speas, Chair  
Fairfax County Tree Commission

Cc: Bryan Hill, Fairfax County Executive  
Rachel Flynn, Deputy County Executive  
Jai Cole, Fairfax County Park Authority Executive Director  
Kiel Stone, Fairfax County Park Authority Board Chair  
Chris Herrington, Director Department of Public Works and Environmental Services  
Brian Keighley, Urban Forest Management Division  
Laura Grape, Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Resources Division