

City of Takoma Park Fiscal Year 2018: Recommended Priorities from Tree Commission to City Council on Urban Forest

First tier priorities: Evaluate condition of our urban forest
Improve transparency, documentation and communication
Outreach and education

Second tier priorities: Public utilities and tree canopy
Devoting resources to care and expansion of tree canopy

Third tier priorities: Tree Ordinance

Goals for Evaluation of Urban Forest (1st tier): Work with the City to enhance our understanding of current condition of City urban forest by more fine-grained analysis of 2014 tree canopy report by the University of Vermont, combined with ground-truth census. This would help us understand whether certain demographic populations (e.g., large trees) are in decline, evaluate the diversity and resilience of existing urban tree mix, and most importantly, determine where, when and what to plant for the future.

Transparency, Documentation and Communication Goals (1st tier): Improved documentation of tree evaluations, posting of permits and waivers on website. Improve communication among the Commission, City Council and Urban Forest Manager, as well as public works staff. Work on ways to convey information to the community such as website improvement. Include criteria for determination of every permit process in communication to permit applicants. These and similar actions enable Tree Commission to function as advisory panel, and are good customer relations for City residents.

Outreach and Education Goals (1st tier): The City and Tree Commission can work together to educate City residents on Tree Ordinance, by posting simplified explanation of process (e.g. flowchart) on website; work to ensure that all contractors are aware of provisions of Tree Ordinance.. Equally important, Tree Commission, working with Urban Forest Manager and youth groups, can promote value of urban forest, provide specifics on tree care, and encourage planting of new trees. Tree Commission and Urban Forest Manager can work with Sustainability Manager to incorporate trees in sustainability efforts such as moving toward zero carbon footprint. These actions help residents to understand the rationale for Tree Ordinance and promote tree care and planting on private property.

Public Utilities Goals (2nd tier): Improve transparency of vegetation control by PEPCO and other public utilities, work more closely with Urban Forest Manager and utilities to alert residents about impending tree work, remove incentives for homeowners to allow utilities to remove non-hazardous trees on private property that are not in conflict with utility clearance requirements, and closer supervision by City of utility work crews. These and other actions should help spare many trees and reduce residents' angst over unnecessary losses. Note that the

Tree Commission has been and will continue treating this goal as a top priority in fiscal 2017, in support of the leadership of Councilmember Jarrett Smith in fiscal 2017 on these issues at the state level.

Care and Expansion of Urban Forest Goals (2nd tier): Incentivize tree planting on private property (e.g., devote funds from tree permits or other sources to provide grants for planting trees to neighborhoods). City should devote more resources to tree care (e.g., mulching, watering for 3 years) for City trees and model best practices, e.g. avoid mulch volcanoes. Consider dedicating part of environmental enforcement position to education about tree care.

Tree Ordinance Goals (3rd tier): Enhance public understanding about Ordinance, while retaining its protections of the urban forest.