

To: Takoma Park City Council
From: Tina Murray and Sat Jiwan Ikle-Khalsa
Date: June 14, 2019
Subject: Vision Statement for the Takoma Park Urban Forest for Council consideration

The Committee on the Environment and the Takoma Park Tree Commission met in January to discuss two City Council requests for input and recommendations related to the Takoma Park urban forest. The Council asked for feedback on potential revisions to the Takoma Park Tree Ordinance and suggestions on identifying a reasonable tree canopy goal and the design of an implementation plan to reach the canopy goal. As chairs of the respective groups, we invited members of our committees to join the “joint subcommittee on trees” to assist the Committee on the Environment and the Tree Commission in addressing these two Council requests.

The “joint subcommittee on trees” held an initial meeting in January and two subsequent public meetings to discuss these assignments. The members of the subcommittee agreed that a vision statement would be helpful in guiding this work. The team also agreed that this vision setting process would prompt discussion of new ideas and initiatives that may be connected to delivering on the vision or integrated into the ordinance revision or tree canopy goal setting projects. The purpose was to guide and provide parameters for the tree ordinance review and tree canopy goal setting exercises.

The result of that visioning process is the draft vision statement for review and consideration by the City Council attached to this memo. The joint subcommittee does acknowledge and requested that this memo note that this vision statement was developed with little community input outside of the members of the two committees and those who attended the meetings.

The joint subcommittee discussed, but ultimately did not directly address the City Council Climate Emergency declaration and role of the urban forest in mitigating climate impacts or make specific mention of equality and environmental justice across all wards in the city in the statement. The subcommittee is comfortable with the vision statement as written but did agree to highlight these points of discussion in delivery of the draft to Council.

The Tree Commission is leading the tree ordinance revision work with input from members of the joint subcommittee and the public through public meetings. The Committee on the Environment is also represented in this process with members attending Tree Commission meetings and were encouraged to provide specific feedback on the ordinance. The suggested ordinance revisions/recommendations will be shared with members of both committees as soon as the ordinance recommendations were organized and in draft format before they are delivered to Council.

The tree canopy goal setting and tree canopy enhancement planning are progressing slower than the vision setting and tree ordinance revision recommendations. Subcommittee members agree that establishing the tree canopy goal and implementation plan requires close coordination with city staff with more opportunities to gather community feedback. They identify the Council survey as one important source of data, but they emphasize the need for more direct engagement

of the public. Members of these committees pledge to assist the Council and city staff in outreach efforts.

They agree that the city staff is best equipped to quantify the canopy assessment and charting next steps in tying the goal to an implementation plan. The joint subcommittee suggests that TKPK Public Works and the TKPK Urban Forest Manager lead the canopy goal setting process. Following the public meeting on the LIDAR assessment by the University of Vermont in conjunction with TKPK Public Works, joint subcommittee, Tree Commission, and Committee on the Environment foresee their role as providing feedback and recommendations on a plan drafted but TKPK Public Works that incorporates the vision statement to set an ambitious but achievable canopy goal and connects this canopy goal and implementation plan to the residents needs and goals for the TKPK urban forest.

Any additional clarity the Council can offer in review of the vision and the forthcoming ordinance revision suggestions will be important by identifying focus areas and priorities. Public Works can then develop a canopy goal and implementation plan and process and provide opportunities for input from the Committee on the Environment, Tree Commission, and the public before presenting the proposed canopy goal and implementation plan to Council.

Urban Forest Vision Statement V. 2:

Enhancing Takoma Park's Urban Forest (A community stewardship vision for this shared asset)

Takoma Park is committed to community stewardship of a diverse, healthy urban forest of desirable species. The urban forest is a high value, community asset that sequesters carbon to help mitigate global warming and temperature extremes, reduces energy consumption, contributes to stormwater control, reduces air, noise, and visual pollution, supports wildlife, and enhances quality of life for all who live and work in Takoma Park.

The viability of this invaluable asset-relies-on sustained multigenerational commitment from private individuals who own the land where the bulk of this forest grows. These individuals should be recognized for their contributions and be invited to partner with city officials, staff, and neighbors to sustain and enhance our urban forest.

Sustaining this vision is best accomplished by inviting members of the Takoma Park community to commit to:

1. Outreach and education on the value of the forest by providing easily understood materials to explain urban forest contributions, objectives for maintaining healthy, diverse forest, and the rules and regulations that apply to the urban forest;
2. Community support and adequate resources to foster a resilient urban tree canopy;
3. Partnership building to identify and deliver financial and technical assistance;
4. Pledge to seek proven approaches to enhance the urban forest, and well-defined plans and measurable goals to evaluate progress.