

Introduced by:

CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

RESOLUTION 2020-X DRAFT 6/22/2020

OVERARCHING GOALS AND PRINCIPLES FOR TREE CANOPY AND URBAN FOREST POLICIES

WHEREAS, the City Council has identified as priorities maintaining and growing Takoma Park's existing urban forest, adopting changes to the tree ordinance, and developing tree canopy goals and urban forest policies to help achieve those goals; and

WHEREAS, trees and the urban forest provide many benefits to the community, including improving water quality, reducing stormwater runoff, lowering summer temperatures, reducing energy use in buildings, removing air pollution, absorbing emissions that contribute to climate change, enhancing property values, improving human health, providing wildlife habitat, and contributing to the beauty of our neighborhoods, with many of these benefits correlated with the size and structure of the tree canopy; and

WHEREAS, the Council has conducted a comprehensive review of the tree ordinance and discussed overarching forest canopy principles and goals, as well as ways of improving resident outreach and education on tree health, maintenance and related matters. Work sessions on these topics were held October 14, 2018; June 19, 2019; July 22, 2019; September 11, 2019; October 16, 2019; October 23, 2019; October 30, 2019; November 13, 2019; February 12, 2020; and July 1, 2020;

WHEREAS, the Council has sought and obtained input from many sources, including a resident survey focused primarily on the tree ordinance with over 500 responses, public and written comments from individuals and non-governmental groups with expertise in tree issues, advice from County and State officials, discussions at neighborhood meetings, recommendations of the City's Tree Commission and Committee on the Environment, and input from the Department of Public Works and the City Attorney; and

WHEREAS, based on community input, the Council has identified a desire to expand beyond the current focus on tree removal and protection permits in the tree ordinance to a broader approach recognizing shared community responsibility and the public values of trees, and incorporating new strategies to meet today's urban forest, climate, ecological health, and human safety challenges; and

WHEREAS, an independent tree canopy assessment by the University of Vermont Spatial Analysis Laboratory documented a robust tree canopy in Takoma Park covering approximately 60 percent of the City's geographical area over at least the last 10

years with differences across City neighborhoods, identified that maintaining the health of existing trees is crucial when it comes to preserving the City’s tree canopy, and concluded that residents have a key role to play in both maintaining tree health and planting new trees; and

WHEREAS, Whereas, the tree canopy assessment revealed differences in tree canopy cover across neighborhoods and wards, with more cover in areas with a higher percentage of single-family homes and less in areas with more multi-family buildings and commercial areas, and the Council seeks to identify and address racial inequities in the distribution of the tree canopy; and

WHEREAS, the City has adopted a Housing and Economic Development Strategic Plan and a Sustainable Energy Action Plan, and is working on a Public Space Plan, all of which intersect with tree canopy goals and planning; and

WHEREAS, the Council declared a climate change emergency March 13, 2019, with Resolution 2019-15 and adopted a climate emergency response framework on March 4, 2020, with Resolution 2020-6: 2020 which includes as a priority “continuing the City’s commitment to protection and healthy growth of the urban forest and tree canopy, for both climate mitigation and resilience”; and

WHEREAS, there are significant challenges to maintaining and growing the City’s tree canopy, including projections of heavy rainfall and other weather-related impacts due to climate change, as well as infestations, blights and other similar occurrences, such as the recent fungal and beetle infestation that appears to have particularly targeted and caused the loss of many white oaks; and

WHEREAS, the Council is pursuing the adoption of amendments to the existing tree ordinance and has identified as a priority the need to refocus and update ongoing efforts on tree canopy maintenance and urban forest management goals and policies in order to maintain the tree canopy and improve the health of the urban forest, as outlined in the goals below.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the City will adopt goals of:

Option 1:

- no net loss of the urban forest canopy overall, with the baseline measurement being the maintaining an average level of approximately 60 percent tree canopy coverage calculated using the last two lidar studies conducted and the next study scheduled for 2022,

Option 2:

- no net loss of the urban forest canopy overall, with the baseline measurement being approximately 60 percent tree canopy coverage citywide

- increased biodiversity (such as species, size) and planting of native species and other species that may be adapted to a changing climate, and
- working with those most impacted in members of the community to to the extent feasible, increasing tree canopy coverage in neighborhoods with a focus on improving more equitably distributed tree canopy over time, and increasing efforts to support and maintain existing trees.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the City will develop and implement urban forest management policies to achieve these goals with the following overarching principles:

- recognition of the important role of the urban forest in climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience, and the wide range of ecosystem ecological services provided by a healthy urban forest;
- a broad, holistic approach to our urban forest and recognition that trees and tree canopy are community resources that the entire community has a shared responsibility for protecting, nurturing, and maintaining;
- a focus on addressing inequities in distribution of trees and tree benefits citywide, through identifying specific locations for focused planting and attention, working with those most impacted in the community including property owners, renters, and businesses, identifying City processes, such as petition based sidewalk request processes, that might perpetuate inequities in the tree canopy; working with Maryland National Capital Park and Planning regarding maintenance of the tree canopy along Sligo Creek Parkway and county owned parks; and coordinating with State Highway Administration (SHA) to increase plantings along the state right of way; working with members of the community, and prioritizing tree planting in areas of the city with lower percentage of existing tree canopy;
- emphasis on expanding resident collaboration and outreach, education, and engagement;
- increased focus on and proactive efforts to protect and improve the tree canopy, including private-property planting, encouraging planting instead of fee payment, clarifying policy for resident donations to the tree fund, and improving existing tree health and maintenance.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the City should:

- conduct a reassessment of the urban tree canopy City-wide through lidar technology every three years, and advise the Council on recommended needs to reassess tree canopy baseline goals, implementation efforts, and funding levels; and;
- develop an updated species planting list that recognizes these overarching goals, with a plan for periodic review and modification of the list; and
- seek opportunities for collaboration with nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher learning, community groups, and other government agencies where there are opportunities for collaborative efforts to achieve our goals; and
- strive to align urban forest plans and actions with the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan, Housing and Economic Development Strategic Plan, Public Space Plan, Racial Equity Initiative, and Tree Ordinance amendments; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Council directs staff by January 2021 to:

- provide an assessment and a multi-year plans that are in line with goals of this resolution to:-
 - revise existing programs and structures; and

- ~~and target planting efforts, both public and private, including City planting efforts to replant trees removed by permit with no individual replacement requirements;~~ toward actions that are the most effective at promoting robust tree canopy; and
- ~~addressing the racial disparities in current efforts and that otherwise exist with respect to tree canopy coverage within the City;~~ and
- develop a pilot project in collaboration with ~~members those most impacted in~~ the community, ~~especially those~~ in areas of lesser tree cover – including renters, single-family homeowners, multifamily building owners/managers, and commercial and institutional property owners/managers --; for effective methods to maintain and increase tree health and coverage that could then be used as a model for other areas of the city; and –
- provide recommendations on how the current tree fund may be restructured to help fund a pilot project and other tree planting and maintenance efforts, including financial assistance to low and moderate income residents for such purposes.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, the Council will review the City’s financial state given the COVID-19 crisis by early October 2020, to determine whether to ~~the~~ release of funds on hold directed toward tree canopy efforts, some of which may be used to incentivize landlords and Black and Brown homeowners to plant and maintain trees on private property.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the City Council will move forward on the initiatives described in this resolution as quickly as practicable in the context of other ongoing work, taking into account budgetary impacts and staff capacity.

Adopted by the Council of the City of Takoma Park, Maryland this _____, 2020.

Attest: Jessie Carpenter, CMC
City Clerk