



Takoma Park City Council Meeting – July 15, 2020

Agenda Item 3

Voting Session

Proposed Resolution on Principles and Overarching Goals for Tree Canopy and Urban Forest Policies

Recommended Council Action

Adopt the proposed resolution on Principles and Overarching Goals for Tree Canopy and Urban Forest Policies

Context with Key Issues

The City Council is considering tree canopy goals and strategies as well as revisions to the Tree Ordinance. The Council has discussed moving from primarily a focus on regulating the removal of individual trees to a broader focus on urban forest health, and establishing overarching strategic goals of no net loss, more attention to biodiversity and native species, and seeking to address inequities in the distribution of trees throughout the city, among other things. Thus, concurrently with considering proposed changes to the Tree Ordinance, the Council is discussing a proposed resolution on Principles and Overarching Goals for Tree Canopy and Urban Forest Policies. The first version of this was presented to Council at the Feb. 12, 2020 work session. This draft largely reflects consensus of the last two weeks' discussions.

The Council identified goals of reviewing the Tree Ordinance and exploring establishing tree canopy goals and ways to improve community outreach and education on tree matters in its FY19 and FY20 City Council Priorities. A work session on October 24, 2018 established a strategy for moving the effort forward. In spring 2019, the City hosted a public workshop on results of a citywide tree canopy assessment by the University of Vermont, and the Council sought and received resident comments and suggestions on the Tree Ordinance through an online survey (with more than 500 responses). The Council has also received input from individuals and groups of residents, public and written comments at Council meetings, and neighborhood meetings.

Since that time, the Council has held several work sessions, including several in recent weeks. At a June 19, 2019 work session, the City's Urban Forest Manager and Public Works Director provided an overview of the current Tree Ordinance process, presented the tree canopy assessment, and shared results of the online Tree Ordinance survey. The Council held a joint work session with the Committee on the Environment and the Tree Commission on July 22, 2019, to discuss their recommendations for changes to the Tree Ordinance and development of tree canopy goals and strategies. The Council's work session September 11, 2019 reviewed a "starter list" of suggestions for action on the Tree Ordinance, and Council directed the City Attorney and City staff to begin drafting amended ordinance language. Three work sessions on October 16, 23, and 30, 2019 discussed elements on the "starter list" in depth, and Council provided some initial thoughts and direction to the City Attorney and City staff to work on drafting amended Tree Ordinance language for future review, working with the Tree Commission. A November 13, 2019 work session discussed initial draft language the City Attorney proposed to the Tree Ordinance. A Council work session on Feb. 12, 2020 reviewed revised draft language and considered a proposed resolution on broader tree canopy and policy issues.

Council Priority

Environmentally Sustainable Community, Engaged, Responsive & Service-oriented Government

Environmental Considerations

The Tree Ordinance establishes the protection and preservation of trees as a fundamental goal of the City. As noted in the Takoma Park Tree Canopy Assessment, "Trees provide many benefits to communities, such as improving water quality, reducing stormwater runoff, lowering summer temperatures, reducing energy use in buildings, removing air pollution, enhancing property values, improving human health, providing wildlife habitat, and aesthetic benefits." Trees also offer climate mitigation and resilience benefits. The recent tree canopy assessment estimates about 60% tree canopy in the city on average, well above many neighboring communities.

In light of ongoing concerns about climate change -- which the Council recognized formally through its adoption of a resolution declaring a climate emergency and adoption of a climate emergency response framework in March 2020-- taking thoughtful action to develop tree canopy goals and ensuring that the Tree Ordinance functions well take on added importance. Additionally, challenges such as the recent die-off affecting many oaks in the City -- which is having a negative effect on older trees that contribute significantly to carbon sequestration (among other benefits) -- underline the need to ensure that we have in place policies that can give our trees the necessary resilience to cope with changing weather patterns, harmful pests, and other threats.

Fiscal Considerations

The FY20 Budget for the Urban Forest Division is \$267,330, including staff, consultant services, tree purchases and services. Substantial increases in the number of trees to be planted or maintained by the city would require a change in the funding level in order to be accomplished.

The costs of complying with the Tree Ordinance can be substantial when a construction project is proposed, when a property owner wishes to remove a tree that is not dead or imminently hazardous, or when trees suddenly decline. The City's tree emergency fund is available for residents with financial need who must remove hazardous trees. Increasing tree replanting requirements would require additional expenses for property owners. Reducing the tree replacement requirement for City property owners would require additional City funding in order to maintain the City's tree canopy level.

The cost of tree maintenance for an individual property owner is ongoing and similar to other ongoing home maintenance expenses. Energy savings and increased property values may offset or exceed these costs. Removal costs for individual property owners can be expensive and in some cases, unexpected. Trees can sometimes damage pipes or building structures.

Racial Equity Considerations

Tree canopy is not spread equally throughout the City of Takoma Park and varies by location and type of property and land use. Heavier tree canopy coverage in residential areas has generally been found in areas with a higher percentage of single-family homes as opposed to multi-family residences. The 2018 analysis of tree canopy in Takoma Park showed less tree canopy in Wards 4 and 6 than in other wards, with Ward 6 having significantly less than all other wards. Wards 4 and 6 also have greater amounts of large multi-family and/or commercial properties and parking lots. Wards 4, 5, and 6 have the highest percentages of people of color in the City.

Research at the national level has found racial inequities in the distribution of tree canopy. Neighborhoods with lower incomes and high percentages of people of color have been found to have hotter temperatures and fewer trees. Racial inequities have been found in tree cover on public land. Extra heat can have dangerous and even deadly health consequences, and it costs more to cool a hotter home. Low-income neighborhoods and communities of color generally experience higher levels of air pollution. The presence of trees can provide economic boosts through raising property values and boosting retail sales. These and other benefits should be considered alongside some

potential negative impacts of tree cover, such as allergies and asthma and the costs of maintenance, removal, and replanting requirements.

75% of the respondents to the Tree Ordinance Survey were residents of Wards 1, 2, and 3. These three wards are majority white and have fewer multifamily properties than do Wards 4, 5, and 6.

Attachments and Links

- Draft Resolution on Principles and Overarching Goals for Tree Canopy and Urban Forest Policies

1 Introduced by:
2

3 **CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND**

4
5 **RESOLUTION 2020-X DRAFT 7/10/2020**

6
7 **OVERARCHING GOALS AND PRINCIPLES FOR TREE CANOPY AND URBAN**
8 **FOREST POLICIES**
9

10 WHEREAS, the City Council has identified as priorities maintaining and growing Takoma
11 Park's existing urban forest, adopting changes to the tree ordinance, and
12 developing tree canopy goals and urban forest policies to help achieve those
13 goals; and
14

15 WHEREAS, trees and the urban forest provide many benefits to the community, including
16 improving water quality, reducing stormwater runoff, lowering summer
17 temperatures, reducing energy use in buildings, removing air pollution, absorbing
18 emissions that contribute to climate change, enhancing property values,
19 improving human health, providing wildlife habitat, and contributing to the
20 beauty of our neighborhoods, with many of these benefits correlated with the size
21 and structure of the tree canopy; and
22

23 WHEREAS, the Council has conducted a comprehensive review of the tree ordinance and
24 discussed overarching forest canopy principles and goals, as well as ways of
25 improving resident outreach and education on tree health, maintenance and
26 related matters. Work sessions on these topics were held October 14, 2018; June
27 19, 2019; July 22, 2019; September 11, 2019; October 16, 2019; October 23,
28 2019; October 30, 2019; November 13, 2019; February 12, 2020; and July 1,
29 2020;
30

31 WHEREAS, the Council has sought and obtained input from many sources, including a
32 resident survey focused primarily on the tree ordinance with over 500 responses,
33 public and written comments from individuals and non-governmental groups with
34 expertise in tree issues, advice from County and State officials, discussions at
35 neighborhood meetings, recommendations of the City's Tree Commission and
36 Committee on the Environment, and input from the Department of Public Works
37 and the City Attorney; and
38

39 WHEREAS, based on community input, the Council has identified a desire to expand beyond
40 the current focus on tree removal and protection permits in the tree ordinance to a
41 broader approach recognizing shared community responsibility and the public
42 values of trees, and incorporating new strategies to meet today's urban forest,
43 climate, ecological health, and human safety challenges; and
44

45 WHEREAS, an independent tree canopy assessment by the University of Vermont Spatial
46 Analysis Laboratory documented a robust tree canopy in Takoma Park covering

47 approximately 60 percent of the City’s geographical area over at least the last 10
48 years with differences across City neighborhoods, identified that maintaining the
49 health of existing trees is crucial when it comes to preserving the City’s tree
50 canopy, and concluded that residents have a key role to play in both maintaining
51 tree health and planting new trees; and
52

53 WHEREAS, ~~Whereas,~~ the tree canopy assessment revealed differences in tree canopy cover
54 across neighborhoods and wards, with more cover in areas with a higher
55 percentage of single-family homes and less in areas with more multi-family
56 buildings and commercial areas, and the Council seeks to identify and address
57 racial inequities in the distribution of the tree canopy; and
58

59 WHEREAS, the City has adopted a Housing and Economic Development Strategic Plan and a
60 Sustainable Energy Action Plan, and is working on a Public Space Plan, all of
61 which intersect with tree canopy goals and planning; and
62

63 WHEREAS, the Council declared a climate change emergency March 13, 2019, with
64 Resolution 2019-15 and adopted a climate emergency response framework on
65 March 4, 2020, with Resolution 2020-6: 2020 which includes as a priority
66 “continuing the City’s commitment to protection and healthy growth of the urban
67 forest and tree canopy, for both climate mitigation and resilience”; and
68

69 WHEREAS, there are significant challenges to maintaining and growing the City’s tree
70 canopy, including projections of heavy rainfall and other weather-related impacts
71 due to climate change, as well as infestations, blights and other similar
72 occurrences, such as the recent fungal and beetle infestation that appears to have
73 particularly targeted and caused the loss of many white oaks; and
74

75 WHEREAS, the Council is pursuing the adoption of amendments to the existing tree ordinance
76 and has identified as a priority the need to refocus and update ongoing efforts on
77 tree canopy maintenance and urban forest management goals and policies in order
78 to maintain the tree canopy and improve the health of the urban forest, as outlined
79 in the goals, principles, actions and planning below.
80

81 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the City will adopt goals of:
82

- 83 • no net loss of the urban forest canopy overall, with the baseline measurement being
84 approximately 60 percent tree canopy coverage citywide
- 85 • increased biodiversity (such as species, size) and a focus on planting of native species
86 and where appropriate, climate-adapted species, and
- 87 • increase tree canopy coverage, using a participatory process for planning and by focusing
88 on neighborhoods with less coverage to create a equitably distributed tree canopy over
89 time, and collaborating with members of -those neighborhoods in the planning of tree
90 plantings and in efforts to support and manage/maintain existing mature trees.

91
92 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the City will develop and implement urban forest
93 management policies to achieve these goals with the following overarching principles:
94

- 95 • recognition of the important role of the urban forest in climate change mitigation,
96 adaptation, and resilience, and the wide range of ecosystem and ecological services
97 provided by a healthy urban forest;
- 98 • a broad, holistic approach to our urban forest and recognition that trees and tree canopy
99 are community resources that the entire community has a shared responsibility for
100 protecting, nurturing, and **maintaining**;
- 101 • a focus on addressing inequities in distribution of trees and tree benefits citywide,
102 through identifying specific locations for focused planting and attention, working with a
103 range of members of the community including property owners, renters, and businesses,
104 and others.
- 105 • emphasis on expanding resident collaboration and outreach, education, and engagement;
- 106 • increased focus on and proactive efforts to protect and improve the tree canopy, including
107 private-property planting, encouraging planting instead of fee payment, clarifying the
108 policy for resident donations to the tree fund, and improving existing tree health and
109 maintenance.

110

111 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the City should act:

- 112 • to conduct a reassessment of the urban tree canopy City-wide through lidar or similar
113 technology every three years, and advise the Council on needs to reassess tree canopy
114 baseline goals, implementation efforts, and funding levels;
- 115 • to develop an updated species planting list that recognizes these overarching principles
116 and goals, with a plan for periodic review and modification of the list;
- 117 • to seek opportunities for collaboration with nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher
118 learning, community groups, and government agencies to achieve our goals;
- 119 • to review City processes that might perpetuate inequities in the tree canopy in the City;
- 120 • to work with Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission regarding
121 maintenance of the tree canopy along Sligo Creek Parkway and county owned parks; and
122 coordinate with State Highway Administration (SHA) to increase plantings along the
123 state right of way; and
- 124 • to align urban forest plans and actions with the City’s Sustainability and Climate Action
125 Plan, Housing and Economic Development Strategic Plan, Public Space Plan, Racial
126 Equity Initiative, and Tree Ordinance amendments.

127

128 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the Council directs staff by March 2021 to:

129

- 130 • provide a multi-year plan in line with the goals and principles of this resolution to:
 - 131 ○ revise existing programs and structures; target planting efforts, both public and
132 private, toward actions that are the most effective at promoting robust tree
133 canopy;
 - 134 ○ address the need for greater community planting efforts to replenish trees on
135 private property that are removed; and
 - 136 ○ address racial disparities in current efforts and that otherwise exist with respect to
137 tree canopy coverage within the City.
- 138 • develop a pilot project in collaboration with those most impacted in the community in
139 areas of lesser tree cover – including renters, single-family homeowners, multifamily
140 building owners/managers, and commercial and institutional property owners/managers -
141 - for **effective methods to maintain and increase tree health and coverage** that could then
142 be used as a model for other areas of the city; and

- 143 • provide recommendations on how the current tree fund may be restructured to help fund a
144 pilot project and other tree planting and maintenance efforts, including financial
145 assistance to low and moderate income residents for such purposes.
146

147 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT**, the Council will review the City’s financial state given
148 the COVID-19 crisis by early October 2020, to determine whether to release funds on hold
149 directed toward tree canopy efforts, some of which may be used to incentivize landlords and
150 Bblack and brown homeowners to plant and maintain trees on private property.
151

152 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the City Council will move forward on the initiatives
153 described in this resolution as quickly as practicable in the context of other ongoing work, taking
154 into account budgetary impacts and staff capacity.
155

156 Adopted by the Council of the City of Takoma Park, Maryland this _____, 2020.
157

158 Attest: Jessie Carpenter, CMC
159 City Clerk