



## Takoma Park City Council Meeting – July 22, 2020 Agenda Item 5

### **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 reflects revisions made during the Council's discussion on July 15, 2020.

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. The Council discussion a draft resolution at work sessions on July 1, 8, and 15.

### **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 7/16/2020**

6  
7 **OVERARCHING GOALS AND PRINCIPLES FOR TREE CANOPY AND URBAN**  
8 **FOREST POLICIES**  
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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  
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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  
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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;  
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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  
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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  
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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  
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53 WHEREAS, the tree canopy assessment revealed differences in tree canopy cover across  
54 neighborhoods and wards, with more cover in areas with a higher percentage of  
55 single-family homes and less in areas with more multi-family buildings and  
56 commercial areas, and the Council seeks to identify and address racial inequities  
57 in the distribution of the tree canopy; and  
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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  
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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  
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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:  
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- 83 • increase tree canopy coverage in neighborhoods with less coverage, using a participatory  
84 process for planning to create an equitably distributed tree canopy over time, and  
85 collaborating with members of those neighborhoods in the planning of tree plantings and  
86 in efforts to support and maintain existing mature trees.
- 87 • no net loss of the urban forest canopy overall, with the baseline measurement being  
88 approximately 60 percent tree canopy coverage citywide
- 89 • increased biodiversity (such as species, size) and a focus on planting of native species  
90 and where appropriate, climate-adapted species, and  
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:  
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- 95 • recognition of the important role of the urban forest in climate change mitigation,  
96 adaptation, and resilience, and the wide range of ecological services provided by a  
97 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.

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

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- 130 • provide a multi-year plan in line with the goals and principles of this resolution to:
  - 131 ○ revise existing programs and structures;
  - 132 ○ target planting efforts, both public and private, toward actions that are the most  
133 effective at promoting robust tree canopy, with an appropriate focus on native and  
134 climate adapted species;
  - 135 ○ address the need for greater community planting efforts to replenish trees on  
136 private property that are removed;
  - 137 ○ address racial disparities in current efforts and that otherwise exist with respect to  
138 tree canopy coverage within the City;
  - 139 ○ provide recommendation on options for measurement and benchmarks to use to  
140 measure urban forest health; and
  - 141 ○ a prioritized city tree planting plan and map on city property and right of way.

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- 144       • develop a pilot project in collaboration with those most impacted in the community in  
145       areas of lesser tree cover – including renters, single-family homeowners, multifamily  
146       building owners/managers, and commercial and institutional property owners/managers –  
147       for effective methods to maintain and increase tree health and coverage that could then be  
148       used as a model for other areas of the city; and  
149       • provide recommendations on how the current tree fund may be restructured to help fund a  
150       pilot project and other tree planting and maintenance efforts, including financial  
151       assistance to low and moderate income residents for such purposes.

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

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

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162       Adopted by the Council of the City of Takoma Park, Maryland this \_\_\_\_\_, 2020.

163  
164       Attest: Jessie Carpenter, CMC  
165       City Clerk