



Public Works Department

Annual Urban Forest Report – 2023

City of Takoma Park Code section 12.12.140 requires the Urban Forest Manager to prepare and present a report on certain aspects of the urban forest and the City's Urban Forestry Program. The following is a report on the items required by Code section 12.12.140 and includes an update on the status of the urban forest; numbers associated with permits, tree removals, and tree planting efforts; and a discussion of recent and upcoming programmatic developments.

1. The condition of the urban forest and tree planting numbers;

Takoma Park's urban forest canopy remains impressive and commendable for an inner suburban community. Tree loss due to old age and extreme weather stress remain a concern, though the rate of loss appears to have decreased substantially. The rate of loss of oaks in particular has decreased at an even faster pace, which is great news. Vine growth on canopy trees remains a concern, though community-driven volunteer action and City Vegetation Maintenance staff efforts have been hard at work cutting vines back to address this problem.

Canopy tree planting efforts on private property, where the majority of canopy has been lost and the large majority of optimal soil space for planting in the City is located, has increased dramatically due to City incentive programs. The new canopy from these trees will take some time to grow. This action is an essential canopy restoration activity and the Urban Forest Manager applauds property owners who have chosen to offer their yard space for canopy tree planting.

While the rate of oak loss has decreased notably, the decline of our mature oaks remains one of the bigger concerns for our urban forest canopy. Guidance from local researchers and experts is that the elevated rate of loss is the result of stress caused by a combination of select periods of both extreme drought and excessive rain, which stressed our already aging oak population. Insect and disease pressure are understood to be secondary causes of mortality, not primary ones. Recommendations remain to focus on general tree care practices, including good soil mulching and watering.

Spotted lanternfly is in the news and a quarantine has been implemented by the State of Maryland DNR. We will monitor this situation closely to assess potential impacts to the City's Urban Forest. Luckily, the key tree species impacted by this insect pest is the tree of heaven, which is on the City's undesirable list.

The following are the tree planting numbers for the City's public space planting efforts and its private property tree planting incentive program, Tree Takoma.



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Number of Trees Planted	
Public Space Trees Planted	24
Tree Takoma Trees Planted	279
Removal Permit Replacement Trees	53

Tree Species: Public Space	
Species	Number Planted
American Hornbeam	1
American Sycamore	1
Bald Cypress	3
Flowering Dogwood	1
Hackberry	8
Blackgum	3
Willow Oak	7

Tree Species: Tree Takoma	
Species	Number Planted
American Beech	26
American Linden	13
American Sycamore	7
Freeman Maple	1
Bald Cypress	12
Blackgum	11
Southern Magnolia	11
River Birch	22
American Holly	9
Hackberry	26
Sweetgum	19
Northern Catalpa	20
Nuttall Oak	21
Red Maple	1
Overcup Oak	18
Red Maple	4
River Birch	1
Scarlet Oak	4
Honeylocust	4
Swamp White Oak	13
Tulip Poplar	8
White Oak	8
Blackgum	4
Willow Oak	8
Yellowwood	8

An interactive web map showing public space tree planting locations can be found on the City's 'Public Space Tree Management' webpage: <https://takomaparkmd.gov/government/public-works/urban-forestry/city-tree-programs/public-space-tree-managment/>



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2. Tree Permits, Appeals, Pruning, and Removals;

The rate of Tree Removal Permit applications has continued to decrease, particularly since FY21 when the spike in permits for dead and hazardous trees was at its highest. Tree Removal Permit numbers are still substantially elevated from pre-2019 levels, though we welcome the reduction from the peak. Tree Impact Assessment and Tree Protection Plan Permit applications have also gone down, probably due to a slackening of the boom in home renovations that occurred in our community during the peak COVID years, though they are still slightly elevated compared to pre-2020 numbers.

Tree Removal Permits	FY23	FY22	FY21
Dead/Hazardous Permitted	308	380	538
Not Dead/Hazardous, Desirable Species: Permit Issued	59	92	76
Not Dead/Hazardous, Undesirable Species: Permit Issued	12	14	14
Eligible for Permit / In Progress	33	50	28
Denied	4	3	15
No Permit Required	19	23	28
Withdrawn	28	23	35
Total	463	585	740

TIA and TPP	FY23	FY22	FY21
Tree Impact Assessments	112	144	152
Tree Protection Plan Permit Applications	26	41	70

Increased departmental efforts to conduct block-by-block surveys of public space streets for hazardous tree and clearance pruning needs has led to a substantial increase in removals and pruning this fiscal year. The majority of tree removals included in the numbers below are large trees that require the services of fully-equipped tree care companies. The majority of trees pruned are the result of work by our in-house crew. FY23 saw an expansion of the deployment of Public Works crews to conduct clearance pruning of street trees to better maintain branch elevation adequate for vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

City tree removals and pruning:

City Tree Work	FY23
City Trees Removed	94
City Trees Pruned	200

Tree Commission Permit Appeal Hearings:

There were no permit appeal hearings in FY23.



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3. City efforts to achieve its canopy goal;

The City's goal set forth by the City Council is to achieve 60% canopy cover. In 2022, the City again contracted with the University of Vermont Spatial Analysis Lab to conduct its periodic urban forest canopy assessment using the most recently available aerial LiDAR data, which was collected in 2020. This study found that the urban forest canopy cover for the City was 57.8%. This is below our goal, but just a 0.2% loss over two years. Considering that this period saw the substantial spike in loss of mature oaks, this relatively small drop is actually somewhat welcome news. While the loss of oaks remains a serious concern, it is likely that canopy expansion due to growth and planting of trees is doing a good job of counterbalancing this loss. However, the trend since 2009, when the canopy cover was 61.2%, has been downward. We would like to be more certain that we have arrested this decline and, ideally, reversed it. Tree planting and protection efforts remain as important as ever to this goal.

The City plants trees in public space and incentivizes planting on private property. Private properties tend to have a substantially greater abundance of quality planting locations than public space. This is due to yards with open soil areas that are larger and less constrained by pavement and utility wires than street locations. Private properties often come with the benefit that the property owner is especially attentive to caring for a tree that they chose to have planted. These locations also are more protected from vehicle traffic, soil compaction from foot traffic, and other activities on streets that can damage trees. Additionally, the large majority of tree canopy loss has occurred on private property. In response to this, the City Council Resolution 2020-15 set the City on a path towards expanding efforts to facilitate tree planting on private property.

After conducting a pilot planting program in FY22, the City embarked on an expanded private property tree planting program called Tree Takoma. This program provides free canopy trees to any private property in the City. Importantly, the structure of the program includes a consultation from an arborist so that the property owner can make the best decisions about planting location and species for their property. Prior experience with the City's more limited 'Plant-a-Tree' incentive program revealed that most property owners would benefit from professional guidance to achieve the desirable results with their tree planting designs. With Tree Takoma, the property owner consultation and coordination of tree planting are managed entirely by the contractor, which allows the program to provide this service at scale without straining City staff resources.

In FY23, the City contracted with Casey Trees to implement Tree Takoma and has just completed the first year of a two-year contract with options for extension. Since this program is funded largely through permit fee payments into the City's Tree Fund, it is able to operate at significant scale without requiring an increase in tax dollar appropriations. (See further in this report for a discussion on the status of the Tree Fund)



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Tree Takoma has been enormously successful with over 300 properties signing up and 279 trees being planted so far. This is a dramatic increase from the average of 80 trees per year through the City's previous Plant-a-Tree incentive program, with the added benefit of higher quality plantings due to on-site professional consultation for the design. Eliminating the cost barrier to tree planting and providing a professional consultation to participants appear to have been very successful at increasing the number of properties that choose to plant canopy trees. The City looks forward to building on this success and continue this important reforestation work through Tree Takoma.

Tree Takoma is available to all private properties in the City but also has a goal of reaching properties in areas of the City with lower canopy cover. The key strategy used so far has been to target multi-family properties, which tend to have substantial space without trees and are where lower income residents and renters often live. Mailings, direct phone calls, and direct email outreach were conducted to engage these properties. 22 multi-family properties signed up for the program, with six having been planted so far for a total of 27 trees. Seven more of those properties are in process, while the others decided not to get trees planted. Even with the financial and professional support offered by the program, not all properties choose to have trees planted and this decision must be respected. We are pleased with all the multi-family properties that followed through with plantings and these accounted for approximately 10% of the trees planted by the program.

4. *Urban Forest Manager Recommendations*

The Urban Forest Manager has no specific recommendations for the City Council other than to continue to support the current work of the Urban Forestry Division.

5. *Education and Outreach;*

The City implements a variety of strategies to educate the public on tree care best practices, awareness of City regulations, and promotion of tree planting, including the maintenance of useful resources on the Urban Forestry page of the City's website, responding to resident inquiries, hosting an annual Arbor Day event, and publishing newsletter articles and digital content. Developments and activities of note from FY23 include the following:

- i. A major overhaul of the Urban Forestry website was concluded in FY23. This involved a substantial expansion of educational content both about City programming and laws, and regarding general



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tree care advice. This resource has streamlined our ability to inform residents and has provided an improved “one-stop-shop” for all things tree in Takoma Park.

- ii. The City partnered with Conservation Montgomery to host a Tree Care 101 class at the Siegler Carriage House on 10/29/23.
- iii. The Urban Forest Manager (UFM) hosted a successful and fun Arbor Day gathering and tree walk at Circle Woods. The UFM provided a brief talk on the importance of Arbor Day, the value of trees, and City programs to support the urban forest, and then led a tree walk educating attendees about trees species found along the way.

6. Funds the City has received from fees-in-lieu, fines, and forfeited security bonds; and update on the Tree Fund

Citation, Fee-in-Lieu, and Forfeited Bond Numbers:

Payment Type	FY23
Citation Payments	\$3,000
Tree Removal Permit Fee-in-Lieu Payments	\$70,799
Forfeited Security Bonds	0
Total	\$73,799

Updated on the Tree Fund.

Tree Fund Allocation and Status	FY23
Tree Fund Amount Allocated During FY23	\$73,000
Tree Fund Revenue Available at End of FY23	\$205,705

The Tree Fund is primarily funded by payments made by Tree Removal Permit recipients when they choose not to plant the required replacement trees themselves. In past years, the Tree Fund and these fee payments have not been deployed at volume and the fund has grown over time. With the Tree Takoma program now able to more effectively deploy those fee payments towards canopy tree plantings in good locations, City Council, City residents, and permit recipients can feel confident that these funds are being effectively used for their prescribed purpose.



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At the end of FY23, the Tree Fund held a balance of approximately \$205,705. Based on analysis of the previous five fiscal years, we conservatively expect the fund to increase at a rate of at least \$55,000 per year. In past years, the City has appropriated \$25,000 of general funds and \$25,000 from the tree fund per year towards tree planting efforts. The FY23 budget, after amendment, expanded the use of the Tree Fund to \$73,000 to accommodate the demand from the Tree Takoma program. The FY24 adopted budget expands the use of the Tree Fund further to \$97,000 per year. This includes an ambitious target of 300 trees planted through Tree Takoma and 75 trees planted in public space. We expect the volume of participation in Tree Takoma to go down at some point as the most receptive properties fill their available planting locations, and we will learn more after our second year running the program. The current funding structure and rate of planting could be sustained through at least FY27 without any expanded use of general funds. The current annual planting targets should be seen as part of a multi-year 'push' to get canopy trees in the ground and growing.

In summary, the Tree Fund is in a good position to sustain an expanded tree planting push for a number of years and to take advantage of the strong interest in tree planting demonstrated by Takoma Park residents.

Additionally, the City is pursuing grant opportunities that may extend its capacity further.

7. The number and percentage of native trees and climate adapted trees relative to the total number of trees purchased with City funds.

All trees planted with City funds were of native and climate adapted species.