

Introduced by: Councilmember Dyballa

**CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND**

**RESOLUTION 2020-15**

**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, 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, renters and property owners should all have access to the benefits of 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, principles, actions and planning below.

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

- increase tree canopy coverage in neighborhoods with less coverage, using a participatory process for planning to create an equitably distributed tree canopy over time, and collaborating with members of those neighborhoods in the planning of tree plantings and in efforts to support and maintain existing mature trees.
- 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 a focus on planting of native species and where appropriate, climate-adapted species, and

**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 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 a range of members of the community including property owners, renters, and businesses, and others.
- 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 the policy for resident donations to the tree fund, and improving existing tree health and maintenance.

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

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

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

- provide a multi-year plan in line with the goals and principles of this resolution to:
  - revise existing programs and structures;
  - target planting efforts, both public and private, toward actions that are the most effective at promoting robust tree canopy, with an appropriate focus on native and climate adapted species;
  - address the need for greater community planting efforts to replenish trees on private property that are removed;
  - address racial disparities in current efforts and that otherwise exist with respect to tree canopy coverage within the City;
  - provide recommendation on options for measurement and benchmarks to use to measure urban forest health; and

- a prioritized city tree planting plan and map on city property and right of way.
- develop a pilot project in collaboration with those most impacted in the community 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 release 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 22nd day of July, 2020.

Attest:

Jessie Carpenter, CMC  
City Clerk