



Public Works Department

Annual Urban Forest Report – 2022

City of Takoma Park Code section 12.12.140 requires the Urban Forest Manager to prepare and present a report on various aspects of the urban forest and the City's Urban Forestry Program. The following is 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

The urban forest canopy of Takoma Park remains robust compared to other similar suburban communities. Sizable park areas and a strong community ethic and regulatory apparatus that prioritize tree preservation are key factors that support the commendable tree canopy in the City. Takoma Park has a significant number of mature trees, some of which are approaching the end of their life, and management of these trees will be an on-going task both for private property owners and for the City in public space. Residents and property owners appear as excited as ever to plant native canopy trees to replace those that have been lost.

The recent pattern of decline in the City's oak population is still a concern to its tree canopy. Experts describe the decline as being primarily caused by recent periods of extraordinarily high rainfall followed by drought. The excessively saturated soils lead to root dieback and reduced vigor, followed by insect and disease problems that result in tree decline and mortality. There is no single ideal proactive management solution to this problem and the best thing that can be done is to emphasize basic tree care practices, including maintaining a root-friendly soil environment and to water trees during times of drought. The notable reduction in number of Tree Removal Permit applications for trees that were determined to be dead or hazardous between FY21 and FY22 suggests that the rate of tree loss may be slowing.

The Urban Forest Manager is monitoring the situation in the region with the spotted lantern fly as well as the reported population levels of the spongy moth (recently renamed from 'gypsy moth'), both of which have not been a significant concern to trees in Takoma Park recently but could become one in the future.

The City prioritizes tree planting to grow the urban forest canopy of the future. This is done by planting trees in public space, offering incentive programs for private tree planting, and administering replacement tree planting requirements for Tree Removal Permits. The following are the relevant tree planting numbers:



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Tree Planting Totals		
	FY21	FY22
Public Space Trees Planted	67	87
'Plant-a-Tree' Trees Planted	88	85
'Pilot Planting Program' Trees Planted	N/A	39
Removal Permit Replacement Trees	126	98

Plant-a-Tree and Pilot Planting Program Species		
	FY21	FY22
American Linden	7	10
Bald Cypress	7	6
Black Gum	22	41
London Plane	2	0
River Birch	9	17
Southern Magnolia	25	5
Swamp White Oak	10	25
Sycamore	4	10
Willow Oak	2	3
Red Maple	0	4
Yellowwood	0	3

Public Space Species		
Species	FY21	FY22
Alternate Leaf Dogwood	0	1
American Hornbeam	11	9
American Linden	6	11
American Sycamore	0	9
Bald Cypress	6	4
Blackgum	1	7
Eastern Redbud	1	10
Flowering Cherry	1	8
Hop Hornbeam	5	0
Serviceberry	1	4
Swamp White Oak	22	25
Sweetbay Magnolia	13	0

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

Tree Removal Permits	FY21	FY22 (through 6/6/22)
Dead/Hazardous Permitted	538	355
Permit Issued	95	98
Eligible for Permit / In Progress	29	51
Denied	15	3
No Permit Required	28	21
Withdrawn	35	21
Total	740	549

TIA and TPP	FY21	FY22 (through 6/6/22)
Tree Impact Assessments	152	136
Tree Protection Plan Permit Applications	58	37



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City tree removals and pruning:

City Tree Work	FY21	FY22 (through 6/6/22)
City Trees Removed	47	66
City Trees Pruned	21	28

Tree Commission Permit Appeal Hearings:

1. 434 Ethan Allen Ave – The City’s preliminary approvals for the Tree Protection Plan Permit and Tree Removal Permits were appealed by multiple neighboring properties. The Tree Commission upheld the City’s decision to grant both permits with the conditions that the Applicant secure their City Stormwater Management Permit and that they secure bond for the value of the trees to be planted as per their Tree Removal Permit replacement planting agreement.
2. 7205 Flower Ave – The City’s denial of a Tree Removal Permit was appealed by the applicant. The Tree Commission upheld the City’s decision to deny the permit.

3. City efforts to achieve its canopy goal;

The City’s percent canopy cover goal set forth by the City Council is currently to achieve no net loss, which means maintaining 58% cover as per 2018 LiDAR data. The University of Vermont Spatial Analysis Lab is currently under contract to conduct analysis and produce a report with the 2020 LiDAR data. The following is a summary of experiences with the recent Pilot Planting Program and an expanded private property program that is currently being implemented:

Pilot Planting Program:

As per City Council Resolution 2020-15, the City developed and implemented a Pilot Tree Planting Program to experiment with targeted outreach, increased financial support, and providing professional guidance with tree planting on private property. The following summarizes how the program went:

- a. Design of program – The goal of this program was to provide low-barrier tree planting opportunities to low canopy areas of the City. The City ultimately decided to focus on a selection of large property types in the City for targeted outreach and planting, which included multi-family residential, commercial, and institutional properties. These properties types are



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noted for having lower tree canopy in the City and narrowing the scope of the eligible properties facilitated the outreach process.

- b. Numbers – Thirty-one properties determined to have substantial space for tree planting were selected for outreach. We established communication with fourteen properties, conducted site visits with seven properties, drafted planting plans for six properties, and ultimately planted thirty-nine trees at four properties. Plantings at two of the properties were ultimately rejected by upper management late in the planning process.
- c. What we learned –
 - i. Direct outreach was effective at establishing relationships with property owners for tree planting. Working with the selected categories of large properties allowed for a greater number of trees to be planted per property while reaching low-canopy areas of the City.
 - ii. Relying exclusively on a targeted-outreach model takes significant staff time to generate participation. A program made available to all private property types supplemented by targeted outreach to low-canopy properties is expected to generate significantly more participation and would be simpler to brand and market to the public.
 - iii. The personal touch of offering a tree planting consultation seemed very valuable to the property representatives and yielded high-quality tree planting plans. The City does not have the in-house staff capacity to offer these consultations at the larger scale at which we need to be planting trees. Identifying a contractor who can offer this consultation service would be instrumental in providing a similar program at a larger scale.

New private property tree planting program:

To fulfill the City's goal of growing its tree canopy, increasing the rate of tree planting on private property is essential. Following on the experience gained with the Pilot Program, the City plans to implement an expanded private property tree planting program.

1. Key goals of the program –
 - a. Reduce/eliminate financial barriers to tree planting on private property.
 - b. Maximize property owner and resident interest in and familiarity with canopy tree planting.



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- c. Plant a large number of high-quality native canopy trees in good locations where they will thrive.
 - d. Build a strong brand for a tree planting program that all residents are familiar with and feel drawn to participate in.
 - e. Make tree planting easily available to all private properties, while especially encouraging and facilitating participation from lower-canopy property type categories, including multi-family residential, commercial, and institutional properties.
2. Program design elements to achieve these goals –
- a. Work with a contractor who can provide an on-site consultation with a professional arborist or landscape designer to educate the property owner/resident about the tree options, help in selecting the best trees for the right locations, and educate about tree care best practices.
 - b. Work with a contractor who has a strong reputation for quality tree planting and customer service.
 - c. Provide native canopy trees and on-site professional consultations at no cost to the property.
 - d. Plant up to 10 trees per property and budget for up to 150 trees per year total.
 - e. Work with our Communications team to build a strong brand and conduct an effective outreach campaign for the program.
 - f. Work with Planning, Housing, and Community Development team and other stakeholders to identify avenues for targeted outreach to multi-family residential, commercial, and institutional properties.

4. Urban Forest Manager Recommendations

The Urban Forest Manager recommends investment in a geospatial asset and work-order management platform to track existing City trees, upcoming and recent tree plantings, available planting locations, tree maintenance work assigned to in-house crew and contractors, and more. A platform like this would streamline workflows, improve data quality, and expand our capacity to analyze and plan for the urban forest. This sort of platform could be used to track all aspects of City



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work in public space in addition to tree-related work and the cost could be spread across multiple divisions within the Public Works department. The current GovQA platform, and other public-facing resident request systems, are acceptable for permit processing and responding to resident inquiries, but are not appropriate for geospatial public space asset and work management. A desirable platform was identified and proposed in the Department FY23 budget request, but was not included in the final budget. The cost was expected to be approximately \$30,000 per year.

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 FY21 and FY22 include the following:

- i. In January 2021 the City published its Approved Tree Species list. This list serves to define the tree options that fulfill a replacement planting required for a Tree Removal Permit. It also provides useful information for selecting a tree, including sunlight preferences, moisture needs, expected size at maturity, and other useful notes. This list is comprised entirely of native species.
- ii. A major overhaul of the Urban Forestry website has begun in late FY22. It is expected that the new content will go live in the first quarter of FY23. Content will include more robust resources to learn about caring for trees, building healthy soil, managing tree risk, managing vines on trees, and limiting tree impacts during construction. It will also provide a more thorough resource explaining tree permitting requirements and other relevant regulations. And, it will provide a more useful landing page for residents to learn about City tree planting programs and other City urban forestry activities.
- iii. The Urban Forest Manager hosted a successful and fun Arbor Day tree walk and community celebration. Representatives from three community groups shared their experiences advocating and conducting service work for the urban forest. The UFM then led a tree walk discussing tree species found along the way.



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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:

	FY21	FY22 (through 6/6/22)
Citation Payments	\$1500	\$2184
Tree Removal Permit Fee-in-Lieu Payments	\$34,872	\$87,672
Forfeited Security Bonds	0	0

Forecast of the Tree Fund.

The Tree Fund currently holds a balance of \$200,350. Based on analysis of the previous five fiscal years, we expect the fund to increase at a rate of approximately \$40,000 per year. In past years, the City has appropriated \$25,000 per year for public space planting. The FY23 budget expands the use of the Tree Fund to \$45,000 for public space and private property planting. For FY24 and beyond, the Tree Fund should be able to sustain a draw down of up to \$70,000 per year for a sustained seven-year tree planting push, at which point funding sources and target tree planting volume could be reassessed. The upcoming expanded private property tree planting program was conceived of as a way of deploying more of the Tree Fund towards replacing trees lost on private property.

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 through the Plant-a-Tree program and in public space were native, with the exception of nine Japanese flowering cherry trees planted as replacements for City installed trees that died out of warranty, which were selected to honor the initial species selection of the adjacent property. The native percentage for FY21 was 99% and for FY22 was 96%.