



December 21, 2020

Honorable Libby Garvey
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Ellen M. Bozman Government Center
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Urban Forestry Commission Annual Report 2020 and Work Plan 2021

Dear Chair Garvey:

The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) is pleased to submit this summary report for calendar year 2020.

As in previous years, UFC continued to be an active advisor to the County Board, providing recommendations to improve the health and sustainability of Arlington's urban forest. In keeping with its mission, the UFC also supported and participated in:

- reviews of development projects impacting trees;
- programs to educate the public on tree and tree-related issues;
- activities of associated commissions and advisory groups, including the Park and Recreation Commission, Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee, and the Energy and Environment Conservation Commission;
- the initiative under PSMP Recommendation 3.3.1 for Arlington to commit to urban nature and becoming a partner in the Biophilic Cities Network;
- efforts to protect and enhance our urban ecology, including tree canopy and environmental quality;
- examination of particular threats to trees and natural resources, such as storm water damage and unauthorized mountain biking;
- examination of public use and impacts of overuse or abuse of natural park areas and other natural spaces during this difficult covid-19 year;
- exploration of zoning mechanisms as a way to conserve tree canopy;

- development of a very high quality and comprehensive set of proposals for legislation in 2021 that would be a critical tool for sustainability and urban livability; and
- consideration of and proposal for the formal expansion of the UFC charter to include all natural resource matters to encompass a broader, ecological perspective on Arlington’s lands.

Despite the restrictions due to the pandemic, UFC met eight times in 2020, with public comments on tree issues and impacts heard at most meetings. The UFC appreciates staff support and the capabilities developed by the county to support virtual commission meetings. Members found virtual meetings to be a simple and effective way to do business in light of the challenges to in-person meetings during the pandemic.

Representation and Coordination

This year, the UFC commissioners served as liaisons or engaged regularly with a number of other commissions, working groups, and organizations, including:

- Arlington Public Schools
- Arlington Tree Action Group
- Bicycle Advisory Committee
- Environment and Energy Conservation Commission
- Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group
- Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee
- Northern Virginia Urban Forestry Roundtable
- Park and Recreation Commission
- Public Spaces Master Plan – Implementation Advisory Group
- Tree Stewards of Arlington and Alexandria
- Virginia Cooperative Extension
- Virginia Department of Forestry

Planning and Development Support

The UFC is regularly briefed on proposed planning and development projects, ranging from public planning to private development to utility and roadway projects, which may result in the loss of trees and works with staff to minimize

such losses. The UFC sent the County Board comments on a number of proposed projects and other matters, including:

- Key Bridge Marriott
- Missing Middle Housing Study
- Permanent Continuity of Government Ordinance
- Shirlington GLUP
- Metropolitan Park PMP
- Zoning Ordinances and Tree Canopy
- Tree legislation 2021
- Tree Canopy Fund Tree Maintenance Proposal
- Deer Management
- Green Building Incentive Policy

Operations and Management Issues

The UFC was active in the review of the County's budget, analyzing the FY21 proposed budget and exploring options for supporting the Urban Forestry Master Plan and Natural Resources Management Plan updates in light of proposed budget constraints.

Tree Planting and Care Oversight

The UFC was active again this year on its signature program, the Tree Canopy Fund (TCF). This successful public-private partnership has facilitated the planting of 2,820 trees on private property in Arlington since 2008. The UFC continues to work to improve TCF operations, including expanding maintenance grants, developing education grants, and improving planting processes to better ensure long-term tree viability.

In 2020, the UFC:

- worked together with EcoAction Arlington to develop a pilot tree maintenance plan and expanded communications program for the TCF, and
- coordinated through staff and EcoAction Arlington with a contractor for the planting of 409 trees on private property under the Tree Canopy Fund.

UFC Charter and Mission Update

In November, the County Board approved a new, expanded Charter for the UFC, directing UFC to provide the Board with advice and recommendations to improve the health and sustainability of Arlington's urban forests, natural areas, and natural resources, and changing the UFC's name to the "Forestry and Natural Resources Commission."

The 2021 Work Plan is attached to this report.

The UFC, now FNRC, could not carry out its work without a great deal of assistance from County employees, notably Urban Forestry Manager Vincent Verweij, our staff liaison. His collegiality, understanding of tree science, experience with county regulations and procedure, and wisdom about the workings of and connections between county departments and community groups has been invaluable to the Commission. The UFC/UFNRC continues to provide oversight and advice to County Forestry staff on measures that can help protect and enhance the County's invaluable tree canopy.

Sincerely,



Phil Klingelhofer, Chair
Urban Forestry Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Members, Planning Commission
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation

Forestry and Natural Resources Commission 2021 Work Plan

Review and submit recommendations for Annual Budget and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Make recommendations to the County Board concerning funding in the FY 2021 budget and 2021-2030 CIP for activities related to staffing; the planting and care of trees on public property; preservation and acquisition of natural areas; and outreach to residents concerning the planting and care of trees on private property.

Guide Implementation of the Tree Canopy Fund. Work with staff and EcoAction Arlington to continue a biannual cycle of the Tree Canopy Fund program. If approved, implement a pilot program to provide tree maintenance funds for qualified canopy trees. Assist with implementation of the Fund's Preserving Mature Trees Campaign, managed by the Arlington Tree Stewards.

Support Forestry and Natural Resources Master Plan Update. Support staff in the updates to the combined 2004 Urban Forest Master Plan and 2010 Natural Resources Management Master Plan, and coordinate on the update to the Public Spaces Master Plan.

Support Biophilic Cities Participation. Work with County departments and other commissions to identify strategies and specific actions aligned with the County's resolution to join the Biophilic Cities Network, embracing a design strategy that reconnects people with the natural environment. Biophilic City strategies would be incorporated into the Public Spaces Master Plan and the Natural Resources and Urban Forestry Master Plan.

Conduct Review of Legislative Options. Continue to identify legislative changes that would enable Arlington County to improve preservation of its tree canopy; support efforts to enact the desired changes; and prioritize changes (if any) to pursue. With the potential selective easing of the Dillon Rule by the state legislature in 2021, and subsequent opportunity for a more active and ongoing chance to shape our local authorities and tools, support efforts to protect and enhance our urban ecology, including saving mature trees, increasing the tree canopy and environmental quality.

Advise on Planning Processes and Developments. Advise on development of the combined Forestry and Natural Resource Master Plan update. Advise that guidelines for County and commercial development projects incorporate multiple environmental and biophilic benefits (e.g. storm water projects should also include significant natural resource benefits as parks and wild spaces, with woodland, wetland, and native meadow areas, as well as carbon sinks, temperature moderation areas, air pollution filters, and rainwater retention features). Work with staff and partners to identify and plan natural corridors on public and private land to connect existing natural spaces in parks.

Advise on public and private development plans. Review site-plans for private developments and County plans for public facilities. Provide advice on potential impacts to the County's tree canopy, natural habitat, and wildlife to optimize saving mature trees, protecting the canopy and our local ecosystems. Work with County staff to adjust design layouts to maximize the number of trees and protection of natural spaces, and incorporate improved planting processes and biophilic features in site plan conditions. Engage with other commissions to ensure mature trees are saved, existing natural areas are protected, and new wildlife habitat and corridors are identified and restored.

Reduce the Negative Impact of By-Right Development on the Tree Canopy. Undertake efforts to lessen the impacts of by-right development on trees and natural resources and work with staff and other partners to develop and implement programs and incentives for establishing natural areas on private lands, leveraging benefits for contiguous natural spaces, and make it an engine for saving mature trees and preserving our tree canopy. Explore how current zoning ordinances impact the tree canopy in Arlington County and whether some modifications in those ordinances might be an effective means of reducing losses. Consider the extent to which zoning ordinances can and should be viewed as a mechanism to execute, reinforce and formalize county policies about tree canopy and natural resources while also addressing other traditional zoning purposes.

Advise on additional activities for County Forestry staff. Identify additional activities that staff could take to enhance the County's tree canopy, and advocate for County support for those efforts. In particular, these could include:

- 1) stepping up efforts to preserve mature trees during development, especially during in-fill residential development,
- 2) implementing a regular, rigorous method of assessing Arlington's tree canopy coverage, such as a periodic aerial survey using Lidar tools and other state-of-the-art methodologies, and
- 3) monitoring the success or failure of the requirements for tree canopy coverage on new residential developments (typically 20% coverage in 20 years), and then using that information to inform possible improvements in those requirements (such as higher canopy coverage or a bond program that gives homeowners financial incentives to keep and maintain trees).

Continue Cooperation with Arlington Public Schools (APS). Continue to work with APS to promote increased tree canopy and tree maintenance on school grounds. Provide input on the *Seats for Students* school expansion initiative to stress the importance of preserving trees and open space.

Work with APS in coordinating plans for the 2021 Arbor Day ceremony at an elementary school.

Continue Participation in Northern Virginia Urban Forestry Roundtable.

Continue to participate in the Northern Virginia Urban Forestry Roundtable, fostering information exchange with other jurisdictions and organizations and strengthening urban forestry programs across the region.

Promote Public Awareness. Promote more robust public education content and communication about 1) the value of natural resources for healthy living and a sustainable environment, including the monetary value of high quality trees and natural resource spaces, as well as the importance of mitigation of the costs of poor quality or minimized natural resource assets, and 2) the beneficial role mature trees, other natural resources, and healthy soils play on climate change impacts to our environment and ecosystems.