



GROWING TOGETHER

City of Fairfax's **Urban Forest Master Plan**

October 2025 Draft



Acknowledgments

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INTRODUCTION

PLANNING PROCESS & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The City of Fairfax has long been cherished by its residents as a city full of trees that make neighborhoods healthier, cooler, and more inviting. Fairfax is investing in transportation networks, infrastructure, accessible green spaces, and cultural resources. In the face of increasing development pressures and accelerating climate impacts, it is a critical time for the city to protect and manage its urban forest. To ensure the urban forest continues to thrive on both public and private property, the city developed its first *Urban Forest Master Plan*—a long-term roadmap to grow a resilient tree canopy that benefits all who live, work, visit, and play here.

The Plan was created using an adaptive management approach (Figure 1), a structured yet flexible process designed to guide planning, implementation, and ongoing improvement. This approach answered four key questions:

What do we have?

Where do we want to go?

How do we get there?

How are we doing?

Over an 18-month timeline, baseline data on tree resources, canopy coverage, non-native invasive species, and program capacity were combined with an in-depth review of city policies and management practices. The resulting 20-year vision, built on the guiding principles that trees support healthy communities, offer powerful climate solutions, and grow in

value over time, is paired with five-year implementation cycles to turn goals into measurable action and adapt strategies as conditions change.

Community and stakeholder engagement was central to shaping the Plan. A Steering Committee, city staff, boards and commissions, and local partners provided ongoing input, while broader engagement included public surveys, meetings, interviews, a photo contest, and local event outreach. These conversations captured diverse perspectives on what residents value about Fairfax's trees and how they want to see the urban forest cared for in the future. The Plan reflects this shared vision, establishing a foundation for equitable, coordinated, and proactive management of Fairfax's urban forest so that it continues to enhance quality of life, protect against climate impacts, deliver

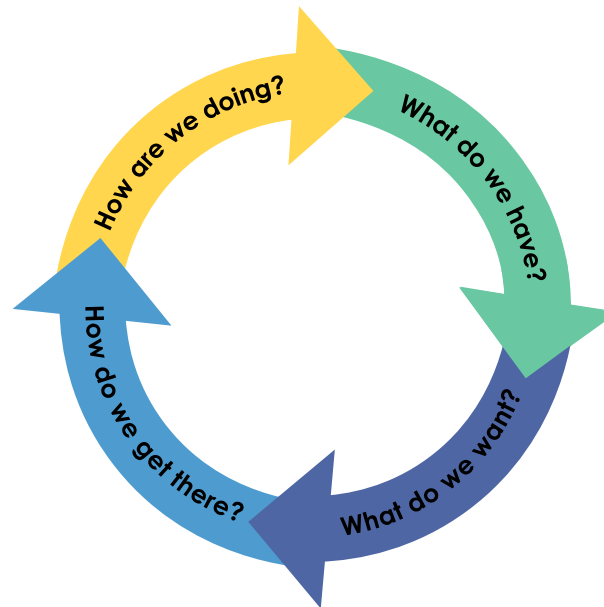


Figure 1: Adaptive management cycle

City of Fairfax Urban Forest Master Plan



Credit to Project Team

cost savings, and contribute to a more resilient city for generations to come. The full Engagement Plan can be found in "Appendix D: Community Engagement".

The Fairfax Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP) is organized around the four core questions of adaptive management—What do we want? (Vision, Guiding Principles, Goals), Where are we now? (Assessment and baseline conditions), How do we get there? (Strategies and actions), and How are we doing? (Monitoring, reporting, and course correction). As a living document over a 20-year horizon, it remains responsive to new data, evolving priorities, and unforeseen challenges such as climate impacts, budget shifts, and development pressures.

CITY OF FAIRFAX INTRODUCTION

The City of Fairfax has long been a place where people and communities gathered.

Long before colonization, the land that is now Fairfax was part of a rich natural and cultural landscape. The region was once dominated by extensive deciduous forests. Indigenous peoples, including the Manahoac and Doeg tribes, lived, hunted,

and cultivated this land for centuries prior to European settlement (Fairfax County Department of Planning and Development, 2021).

European colonization began in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the land was still largely forested at that time and was gradually cleared for agriculture. The area officially adopting the name Fairfax in 1874 after Thomas Fairfax, a British lord whose family was granted the land under colonial rule by King Charles (Historic Fairfax City, Inc., n.d.).

By the end of the Second World War, Fairfax was rapidly transitioning from its agricultural roots to a prosperous suburb of Washington, D.C. (Fairfax County Department of Planning and Development, 2021). Today,

Tree City USA is a national recognition program administered by the Arbor Day Foundation, in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and National Association of State Foresters. The program honors cities and towns that demonstrate a commitment to managing and expanding their public trees.

To earn Tree City USA status, a community must meet four core standards:

- Maintain a Tree Board or Urban Forestry Department
- Adopt a public tree care ordinance
- Spend at least \$2 per capita on urban forestry
- Celebrate Arbor Day with a public observance and proclamation

These standards help ensure trees are planned for, maintained, and valued as part of a healthy and sustainable city.

Fairfax is an incorporated, independent city spanning six square miles, home to 25,000 residents. It is characterized by tree-covered neighborhoods, culturally diverse communities, a destination historic district, strong schools, and a thriving economy.

Cycles of extensive development, beginning nearly 300 years ago, have been particularly transformative over the last two to three decades. Today, the City of Fairfax prepares for continued growth within its six-square miles. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments forecasts a population increase of 3,400 people in the city by 2035. The city's 2035 Comprehensive Plan states that "as developable land has become scarcer, new residential development has been more dependent on infill and redevelopment sites", which can have significant impacts on the urban forest. Additionally, due to the region's proximity to the nation's capital and a steadily growing economy, the cost of living continues to increase.

As the community looks forward to its next chapter, climate change is expected to intensify heat, storms, and precipitation patterns in Fairfax, placing added stress on people, infrastructure, and trees. Yet, the city understands that trees serve Fairfax in many ways making a healthy, well-planned urban forest increasingly critical.

Fairfax's long-standing commitment to trees is reflected in its status as a Tree City USA community for 39 consecutive years, with five Growth Awards recognizing excellence in expanding and improving its urban forestry program. These honors place Fairfax among a national network of communities committed to the stewardship of public trees.

VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Vision and Guiding Principles were developed to provide a shared foundation for decision-making throughout the creation of the Urban Forest Master Plan. They serve as a compass for shaping strategies, priorities, and actions—ensuring that every step of the planning process reflects the community's values, addresses present challenges, and prepares Fairfax's urban forest for the future.

VISION

**VISION FOR THE URBAN FOREST
THROUGH THOUGHTFUL PLANNING
AND SHARED CARE, FAIRFAX WILL
GROW A RESILIENT URBAN FOREST —
NOW AND INTO THE FUTURE.**

This vision is captured in the plan's title and theme: Growing Together.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FAIRFAX'S URBAN FOREST MASTER PLAN

Fairfax's trees make the city healthier and more livable. Trees cool neighborhoods, reduce flooding, clean the air, and connect all living things to each other. Together, these tree benefits turn Fairfax's urban forest into a powerful solution. Trees are one of the only public assets that grow in value over time — but only if with investment in managing them today. These guiding principles reflect the community's commitment to its urban forest and outline how it will be managed for the benefit of all.

URBAN FORESTS ARE...

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



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