

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

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. Today, this six-square-mile independent city of 25,000 people is known for its tree-lined neighborhoods, cultural diversity, historic character, strong schools, and thriving economy. Fairfax is investing in transportation networks, infrastructure, accessible green spaces, and cultural resources. Amid continuing urban growth and mounting climate challenges, it is a critical time for the city to protect and manage its urban forest.



University Drive

Credit to City of Fairfax

Fairfax's history is deeply rooted in its natural setting. Once dominated by deciduous forests, the area was home to Indigenous peoples, including the Manahoac and Doeg tribes, long before European colonization. Cleared gradually for agriculture, the city transitioned rapidly after World War II into a prosperous

suburb of Washington, D.C. Today, growth continues, much of it through infill and redevelopment that directly impacts the city's tree canopy.

In this context, trees are increasingly vital. They provide shade and cleaner air, protect against flooding, and help neighborhoods withstand extreme heat. Fairfax's longstanding commitment to its urban forest is reflected in its 39 consecutive years as a Tree City USA community and receipt of five Growth Awards for excellence in expanding and improving its forestry program. Building on this legacy, the city has developed its first Urban Forest Master Plan—a long-term roadmap to grow and sustain a resilient canopy that benefits all who live, work, visit, and play here.



Van Dyck Park

Credit to City of Fairfax

PLANNING PROCESS

First-ever Urban Forest Master Plan for Fairfax; establishes a 20-year roadmap for canopy stewardship.

Developed using an **adaptive management framework** (Figure ES-1).

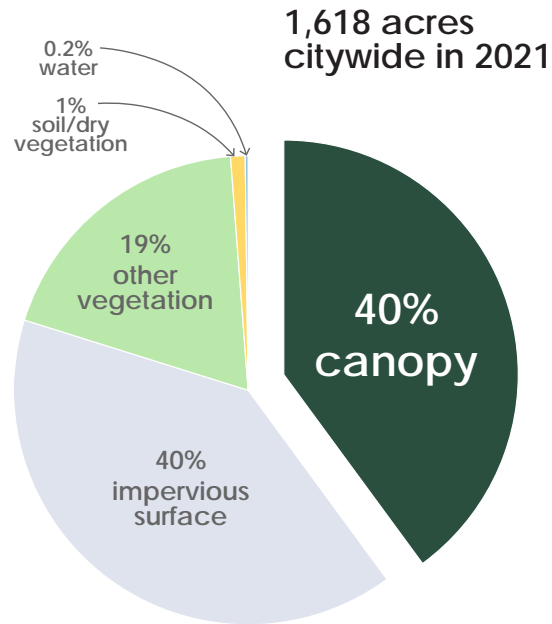
Figure ES-1: Adaptive management cycle



WHAT DO WE HAVE?

STATE OF THE URBAN FOREST

The city's landcover consists of...

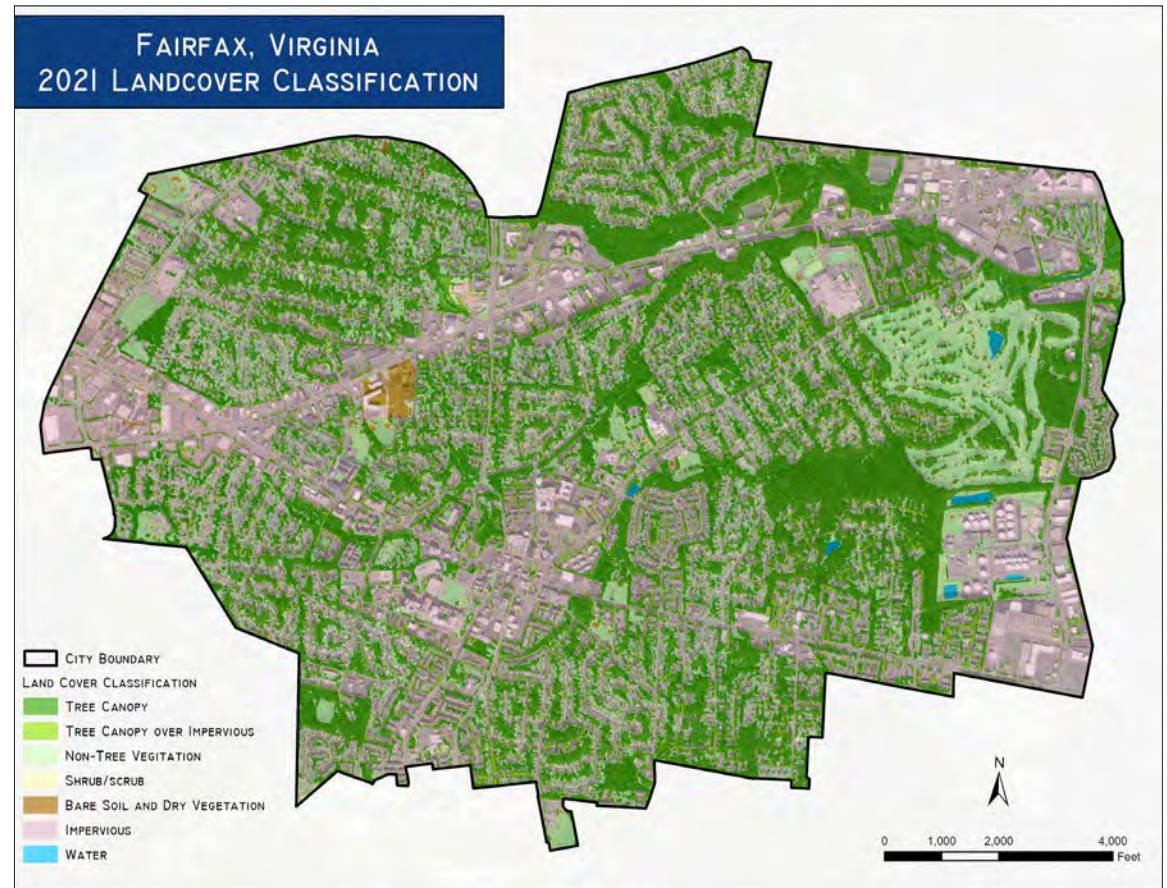


+5% increase in citywide canopy cover since 2012

There is an uneven distribution: canopy cover varies 27%–52% across census blocks

15% of land in the city is potential planting space, **70% of which is on residential land**

Figure ES-2: Land cover type throughout Fairfax



WHAT DO WE HAVE?

STATE OF THE URBAN FOREST

According to the **2023 Public Tree Inventory**, there are...

11,314 managed trees across ROWs, parks, streets, and trails (*excludes private trees and forested public land*)

160 unique tree species but, the **top 5 species = 32% of the total**

and **red maple (*Acer rubrum*) = 14%**, which exceeds the recommended maximum by **4%**

13,000+ maintenance needs recorded, **over 80% of which are pruning**

Photo credits
 Red maple: Missouri Botanical Garden
 Young tree: City of Fairfax
 Street: City of Fairfax
 Porcelain-berry: Virginia Native Plant Society
 Amur honeysuckle: City of Fairfax

The **2023 Public Tree Inventory** also found that...

94% of trees were in **fair to excellent condition**

The **predominantly young age profile** indicates a need for structural pruning

1,900+ **potential planting sites exist**, including those along streets, trails, and ROW, in parks, and on city properties

76% of potential planting sites were identified **along streets**

Non-native Invasive (NNI) Species include...

103 NNI species identified in VA

30 NNI species identified across **25 park, trail, and open space sites** in Fairfax

Locally dominant species such as...

Porcelain-berry (*Ampelopsis glandulosa* var. *brevipedunculata*)

Amur honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*)

Forest edges, disturbed lands, and riparian areas are most vulnerable

Land along streams, wetlands, and other water bodies

WHAT DO WE HAVE?

PROGRAM CAPACITY AND OPERATIONS

Fairfax's **urban forestry staff** include...

3

International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) **Certified Arborists**

2.9

full-time equivalent (FTE) staff dedicated to urban forestry **across three departments**

→ Public Works

Parks and Recreation

Community Development and Planning



1

Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ)-**certified staff**

All photos this page credit to City of Fairfax

Fairfax's **maintenance program** involves...



Reactive operations primarily in response to community requests or staff observations

624

trees pruned per year

→ Best practice would be to prune **1,500 to 2,200 trees per year**, to allow for a 5- to 7-year pruning cycle

On city-managed properties from 2018 to 2024, the city...

planted
797 trees



removed
1,155 trees



Benchmark comparisons to similar cities indicate that...



Fairfax's **staff capacity** is at **58%** of the peer city average

Fairfax's **urban forestry budget** is **76% lower** than the national average for similarly-sized cities



The number of **certified arborists** on Fairfax's staff is **greater than** the peer city average

WHAT DO WE HAVE?

BENEFITS OF FAIRFAX'S URBAN FOREST

Healthy Communities

Tree-lined streets...



property values
business activity
pavement lifespan by
40 - 60%



crime
surface temps by
20 - 45°F

plus the urban forest...

contributes to community character
reduces stress
improves mental health

Climate Solutions

Every year, Fairfax's urban forest...



sequesters
1,826 tons
of carbon



stores
66,478 tons
of carbon



prevents
20M+ gallons
of stormwater runoff
from entering the
municipal stormwater
system

plus the urban forest...

prevents flooding
reduces stormwater treatment costs

Cost Savings

Fairfax's urban forest provides...



\$1,285,230
in ecosystem services
annually (i-Tree):



in **air pollution**
removal



in **carbon sequestration**



in **avoided**
stormwater costs

plus an additional...



in **stored carbon value**
over its lifetime

WHAT DO WE WANT?

COMMUNITY VOICES

We heard...

A strong desire for stricter tree preservation policies and enforcement during development

Calls for clearer processes for removals, planting, and permitting

Support for more staffing and funding for proactive care and invasive species management

That residents recognize the urban forest as critical to livability, climate resilience, and equity

Vision and Guiding Principles

Vision

Through thoughtful planning and shared care, Fairfax will grow a resilient urban forest—now and into the future.

Guiding Principles

Urban forests are...



Healthy communities: Trees improve health, livability, and safety.



Climate solutions: Cooling, stormwater management, cleaner air, and resilience.



Cost savings: Lower utility bills, infrastructure longevity, and a high return on investment.

Urban Forest Master Plan Goals

Goal 1

Champion and sustain a resilient and equitable urban forest in Fairfax.

Goal 2

Increase Fairfax's capacity to care for trees.

Goal 3

Strengthen the community's support and involvement in the urban forest.



Over 150 members of your community participated in Urban Forest Master Plan events and activities.

Credit to Project Team

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

IMPLEMENTATION OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND ACTIONS

Objectives

PROTECT Strengthen tree and forest conservation

+4 strategies, each with 5 to 9 actions

REGULATE Enhance city policies to protect and expand tree canopy – both in content and process

+4 strategies, each with 6 to 12 actions

GROW Create space, plant, and care for new trees

+4 strategies, each with 3 to 8 actions

MANAGE Establish a dedicated urban forestry division for all urban forestry activities

+5 strategies, each with 8 to 13 actions

ENGAGE Foster community stewardship of Fairfax’s urban forest

+4 strategies, each with 6 to 12 actions

Implementation Facts

→ 5-year cycles nested within a 20-year horizon.

→ Strategies and actions tracked with **Strategy Metrics** and **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**.

→ Each strategy identifies the **necessary resources** and defines the **roles of existing staff and partners**.

→ Adaptive management allows for **course corrections as conditions evolve**.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

MEASURING SUCCESS

Assessment Timeline

Plan adoption

Annual progress tracking and reporting

Produce the *State of the Urban Forest* annual report

Five-year comprehensive reviews

Produce the *Five-Year Progress Report and Urban Forest Master Plan Update Addendum*

New Urban Forest Master Plan in 20 years

Prepare a new *Urban Forest Master Plan* to respond to changing conditions in Fairfax

Key Performance Indicators

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have been established to measure progress toward each of the three goals, with corresponding baselines, targets, and current status.

The following examples are provided for illustration and do not represent a complete list. For a full list, see Table 8.

Example KPIs include:



Percent increase in canopy in low canopy areas



Number of trees planted



Acres of public land managed for non-native invasive species



Ratio of tree plantings to removals



Percent of newly planted trees receiving establishment care



Number of engaged volunteers/residents