

Subject: DPR- Tree Canopy Preservation

**FY 2018 Proposed Budget
Budget Work Session Follow-up**

4/10/2017

The following information is provided in response to a request made by Libby Garvey at the work session on 3/28/2017, regarding the tools the County has to limit tree cutting and positively affect the tree canopy?

According to the most recent 2011 aerial tree study, the County has an estimated 40% tree canopy coverage which equates to about 755,000 trees. Of these trees, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) directly maintains approximately 16% or 119,500 trees (19,500 street trees and 100,000 parkland trees). The remaining 84% of the canopy is on private, federal, and Arlington Public School properties.

On public property, DPR uses a balanced approach to tree removal; only removing trees that pose a public safety hazard based on professional assessment. County influence on private tree planting is driven by several different ordinances and regulations:

- Chapter 61 of the Arlington County Code (also known as the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance) requires that existing trees and other vegetation in Resource Protection Areas (RPAs), which include streams, adjacent wetlands, and typically a 100-foot buffer, be safeguarded and only removed with special County permission.
- Chapter 61 also requires that by-right development projects over 2,500 square feet must have a tree preservation and planting plan approved by DPR Urban Forestry as part of the of the permit process.
- Chapter 67 of the Arlington County Code protects trees on County property, and establishes a mechanism for declaring trees on private and public properties as heritage, memorial, or specimen, offering these trees additional protection from removal or damage.

Beyond what is stated above, the County has limited ability to control tree removal on private property. The County uses a number of additional resources to limit tree cutting and promote preservation and planting of trees on non-County property. These resources include development plan review, the Tree Distribution and Tree Canopy Fund Programs, and ongoing education. In addition, DPR urban forestry staff work closely with Tree Stewards and the Arlington Regional Master Naturalists, as well as other interest groups, to promote preservation and planting of trees on private property.

DPR reviews an average of 800 development plans (including resubmissions) each year for large residential and commercial construction projects, to assess tree impact both during and after construction.

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In cases involving by-right development or redevelopment of a property, the County's authority over trees is limited to ensuring that the owner/developer meets the requirements of Arlington's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance. This ordinance requires a permit for any land disturbing activities greater than 2,500 square feet. In this regard, developers of properties in single-family residential areas must submit plans demonstrating that 20% tree canopy coverage will be achieved within 20 years. This canopy requirement can be met by preserving existing trees, planting new trees, or a combination of both. If replacement of trees cannot be planted on-site, then those developers requesting variances are required to make donations to the Tree Canopy Fund based on the loss of trees.

Although the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance requires a tree protection plan (also known as landscape conservation) on by-right developments of lots over 2,500 square feet, the County has limited ability to reduce impact to vegetation outside of the direct construction footprint. The ordinance does require the minimization of disturbance of vegetation outside the limits of clearing, but with Arlington's limited space, this does not always result in tree preservation. If the landscape conservation plans do not provide sufficient tree canopy through preservation, the ordinance requires replanting, but there are no specific requirements dictating a preservation percentage in these areas.

In surveying surrounding jurisdictions, Fairfax County has laws in place that require a percentage of preservation on by-right development. DPR is currently investigating whether this option would result in a net benefit for the County.

The County also gives away an average of 670 trees per year through the Tree Distribution and Tree Canopy Fund Programs. Both programs focus on stopping the decline of the tree canopy by planting more trees on private property. In addition, the Tree Canopy Fund Program, managed through a partnership between the County and Arlingtonian's for a Clean Environment, supports the maintenance of Champion Trees designated or under application for protection as specimen, heritage, or memorial trees.

Critical Measures	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Actual	FY 2017 Estimate	FY 2018 Estimate
Number of Trees Distributed to Public through Tree Distribution and Tree Canopy Fund Programs	N/A	812	577	515	700	750
Number of Site Plans Reviewed for Tree Impacts during Construction and Development	785	765	761	957	760	816