



December 17, 2021

Honorable Matt de Ferranti, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Ellen M. Bozman Government Center
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Forestry and Natural Resources Commission Annual Report 2021 and Work Plan 2022

Dear Chair de Ferranti:

This report summarizes the activities of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission (FNRC) for calendar year 2021.

The Forestry and Natural Resources Commission strives to be an active advisor to the County Board, providing recommendations to protect and improve the health and sustainability of Arlington's invaluable urban forest and other natural spaces. Among its many other activities, the FNRC also supported and participated in:

- planning processes such as the Pentagon City Planning Study and Plan Langston Boulevard;
- the Site Plan Review Process, especially of development projects with impacts on trees and other natural resources;
- programs to educate the public on tree and tree-related issues;
- activities of associated commissions and advisory groups, including the Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group, Park and Recreation Commission, Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee, the Energy and Environment Conservation Commission, and the Bicycle Advisory Committee;
- 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;
- further development of a high quality and comprehensive set of legislative proposals to extend progress made in 2021 during the next legislative session in 2022. These new provisions are critically needed to slow the worrisome loss of trees in many parts of the County;
- formal expansion of the original Urban Forestry Commission charter (and a change in the name of the Commission to the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission) to include all natural resource matters to encompass a broader, ecological perspective on Arlington’s lands.
- expansion of the activities supported by the Tree Canopy Fund to include a pilot program of tree maintenance offered at no charge to County residents to encourage continuing care of important mature trees.
- reviews of the County’s 2021 deer survey, including recommendations for quickly launching a deer management program in order to halt the damage that deer are doing to the County’s forests.
- efforts to urge the County to move ahead with a new survey to measure the extent of (and trends in) the County’s urban canopy. Such a survey is vital to understanding how and where valuable trees are being lost—and in addressing difficult questions of equity, given the lower extent of tree canopy coverage in lower income, vulnerable, and historically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Due to the pandemic, FNRC met virtually in 2021, holding all regularly scheduled 11 meetings. Most meetings included public comments on tree issues and impacts. The FNRC appreciates staff support and the capabilities developed by the county to support virtual commission meetings.

Representation and Coordination

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

- Arlington Public Schools
- Bicycle Advisory Committee
- Climate Change, Energy and Environment 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

The FNRC also is working with local organizations like the Arlington Tree Action Group and Arlington Regional Master Naturalists that are dedicated to protecting and enhancing Arlington’s tree canopy and natural environment.

Planning and Development Support

The FNRC 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. In letters to the County Board, the FNRC:

- Strongly recommended that the **Community Energy Plan** include carbon capture gain (or loss) from the County’s trees in formal calculations of the County’s net greenhouse gas emissions.
- Urged the County to work with **NOVA Parks** and increase funding to better maintain the three parks that NOVA Parks operates in Arlington and to remove invasive species – Potomac Overlook Regional Park (PORP), Upton Hill Regional Park (UHRP), and 5 miles of the W&OD Trail (W&OD)
- Asked the County not to cut funds for park maintenance in the **FY 22 budget**. In a subsequent letter, the FNRC thanked the County for following that recommendation, and also for funding an additional urban forester position.
- Presented **key legislative recommendations**, such as granting local jurisdictions more authority to require greater tree canopy coverage in new development, including trees and natural vegetation in calculations of net greenhouse emissions for meeting climate change targets, and expand funding for the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort

- Pleaded with the County to conduct a scientifically rigorous **tree canopy survey** to inform and strengthen planning now underway to update the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan.
- Criticized the **Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)** for its failure to move forward with what Arlington County has claimed to be one of its top priorities— the acquisition of more open space and natural areas. The FNRC also urged the County to boost support for Gulf Branch and Long Branch Nature Centers, which have been woefully neglected.
- Praised the draft **Public Art Master Plan** for its efforts to create meaningful connections between people and places important to civil life, drawing on diverse environmental resources, and to make public art enriching.
- Thanked the County for conducting a deer population survey, and urged the County to rapidly move forward with a **deer management plan**, given the magnitude of the deer problem.

Tree Planting and Care Oversight

The FNRC was active again this year on its signature program, the Tree Canopy Fund (TCF). This successful public-private partnership has facilitated the planting of 3,258 trees on private property in Arlington since 2008. The FNRC continues to work to improve TCF operations, including piloting maintenance grants, developing education grants, and improving planting processes to better ensure long-term tree viability.

In 2021, the FNRC:

- worked together with EcoAction Arlington to implement 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 438 trees on private property under the Tree Canopy Fund.

The 2021 Work Plan is attached to this report.

The FNRC appreciates the assistance of County employees, notably Urban Forestry Manager Vincent Verweij, our staff liaison. The Commission also thanks the County for filling the vacant urban forestry positions (including the newly created one) and looks forward to meeting and working with the new staff members.

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 2022 Work Plan

Continue to review and submit recommendations for Annual Budget and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Make recommendations to the County Board concerning funding in the FY 2022 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. Move forward with the 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 the 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.

Continue Monitoring and Review of Legislative Options and Progress. The upcoming 2022 legislative session will be challenging, given the change in leadership in Richmond. It is particularly important, therefore, for both the County and the FNRC to closely follow the actions of the legislature and to forcefully weigh in on measures that affect the preservation of its tree canopy.

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. Continue exploring 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) conducting a new tree canopy survey to better understand trends and areas of the County where trees are being lost. Ideally, the County would do a regular, rigorous aerial survey using Lidar tools and other state-of-the-art methodologies
- 2) stepping up efforts to preserve mature trees during development, especially during in-fill residential development,
- 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.

Conduct a study of past in-fill development. Follow up on development projects to show whether or not these properties are on track to meet the requirements in the tree replacement ordinance to achieve 20% tree canopy lot coverage in 20 years.

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.

Engage with partners on equity issue in Arlington. Further explore the equity issue and develop ideas for increasing tree canopy in lower income and historically disadvantaged areas in the County that currently have limited numbers of trees and other natural resources.

Collaborate with other County Commissions and groups on plans to mitigate impact of climate change. Given the accelerating impacts of climate change, engage with other County Commissions and groups, such as C2E2 and EcoAction, on developing a Climate Action Plan for the County, especially focusing the FNRC efforts on the significant benefits that trees and natural areas can provide in both mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Promote more robust public education content on value of natural resources. Work with partners to enhance 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 stormwater and climate change impacts to our environment and ecosystems.

Work with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). Engage with VDOT to make the right-of-ways of major arteries in Arlington, such as I-66 and Route 50 more biophilic. Restoring these right-of-ways with native vegetation will both bring benefits from improved open spaces and make journeys through Arlington more natural and appealing. An element of the restoration should be adding to or creating pollinator corridors per Arlington's 2016 [Monarch Pledge Day](#).