

DRAFT 7/6/26

2027 Legislative Priorities

Forestry and Natural Resources Commission

Introduction:

The recommendations focus on improving ecological and environmental health and are related to tree canopy targets, including flexibility for local jurisdictions in preservation and planting policies of trees.

Recommendation 1

Provide Flexibility for Tree Preservation and Replacement

Amend Sections 15.2-961.1 to change the word “town” to “locality” in the phrase “any town in Planning District 8”. The adopted language in HB549 allows towns in Planning District 8 to require tree canopy targets to be met at 10-years after planting, rather than 20-years for the rest of Virginia. The use of the word “town” significantly limits the applicability of this statute and should be expanded to include localities, such as Arlington County.

- **Urgent**

Recommendation 2

Establish a floor, rather than a ceiling, for tree canopy requirements

Support legislation that would allow Arlington County and other jurisdictions to require greater canopy coverage for new single-family developments than is permitted under the current tree replacement ordinance, which has an upper limit of 20% tree cover in 20 years (section § 61-10 of the County code). Creating a floor of minimum tree canopy requirements and allowing local jurisdictions to establish tree canopy goals allows needed flexibility for the differing circumstances in different jurisdictions.

- **Ready**

Recommendation 3

Fund Virginia Trees for Clean Water

Increase funding for the Virginia Department of Forestry’s Trees for Clean Water Program. Although a recent budget compromise restored state funding to \$1 million, previous reductions combined with the loss of federal funding have significantly diminished the program’s capacity. While the restored funding is a notable improvement, it remains well below historical funding levels and is insufficient to meet growing community demand. Increased state investment in this program will enable local governments and nonprofit organizations to expand tree canopy, reduce urban heat, improve water quality, and strengthen the resilience of communities across the Commonwealth.

- **Urgent**