



URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

2700 South Taylor Street, Arlington, VA 22206

TEL 703-228-6525 FAX 703-228-6507 www.arlingtonva.us

December 14, 2017

The Honorable Jay Fisetto, Chairman
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Subject: Report on Tree Canopy Fund 2008 – 2017

Dear Chairman Fisetto:

In 2008, the County Board created the Tree Canopy Fund (TCF) to ensure funds contributed by developers who cannot meet tree planting requirements on their sites will be used to plant trees on other private property. Since then, 1,686 saplings have been planted throughout Arlington under the oversight of the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC). The program is managed by Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment (ACE) and trees are planted by a professional tree care contractor. Since 2014 TCF began funding the annual Tree Distribution, making an additional 3,350 younger trees available to Arlington residents (tree “whips” they plant themselves in their yards).

TCF provides larger trees planted by professionals (these root balls weigh 300 – 500 pounds, and trees are 6 feet tall!), sizes more appealing to condos, apartment managers and homeowners seeking immediate impact for the front yard and sidewalks. The annual tree whip distribution appeals to families seeking environmental education opportunities as well as those looking to fill spaces in backyards. The tree distribution is conducted in partnership with Tree Steward volunteers who provide education to the new tree owner families. Since planting larger trees professionally is more costly than providing tree whips, UFC and ACE conducted a tree survey in the summer of 2017 to determine the program’s effectiveness.

For the survey of the professionally planted trees, over 25 Tree Stewards, Master Naturalists and UFC members were instructed on how to score trees on the survey sheets and told not to enter private property without permission. They were assigned neighborhoods and fanned out over the entire county to search for and assess the trees planted during the last 8 years. Volunteers also distributed educational information to homeowners on how to remove ivy from trees, correct mulching and other topics. In many cases, volunteers rang doorbells or left notes offering to discuss tree care or ask permission to enter a backyard to better rate a tree. Other volunteers entered the data collected and assisted with the final analysis.

Key findings from the survey show it is successful:

- **1,372 trees or 81.3% were found by the survey volunteers.** A tree that was “not found” could mean the tree could not be observed and rated because of a fenced yard or the tree location listed was not clear. What we do know is that less than 19% of trees planted through the TCF program have died.
- **88% of the trees found were rated in “Good” condition.** This shows that most residents who have received planted trees under the program take care of their trees. Trees were planted throughout Arlington at single family homes (49%), multifamily properties (49%), and nonprofits (2%).

A similar survey has not yet occurred for the 3,350 small trees planted by homeowners since 2014. During 2018 UFC hopes to come up with a simple assessment tool in partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation, which manages the tree distribution event. Based upon satisfied comments at the tree distribution events, we anticipate a similar rate of trees in good condition will be found.

The Tree Canopy Fund also funds education efforts. The 2012 community education campaign to remove ivy from trees allowed Tree Stewards and Master Naturalists to hire a professional communications firm that has resulted in more than 22,000 internet visits and 5,000 pieces of printed material distributed. In 2018, a community campaign encouraging preservation of mature trees will be conducted by Tree Stewards. Materials will be developed by the same professional communications firm and tested on Arlington homeowners focus groups in February with campaign starting in late March.

All of the Tree Canopy Fund programs depend on volunteers for their success. Arlington residents learn about the free tree offers from notices in civic association newsletters and other media, yet it is committed volunteers who go door to door encouraging neighbors and apartment managers to apply for trees that have had the best success. Education on tree care in the community is promoted by Arlington’s active volunteers.

The 5,000+ young trees planted so far under the Tree Canopy Fund programs will require decades before they can replace the tree canopy lost by the removal of large trees during development, yet it is a start. We thank the County Board for their original creation of the program and ongoing support.

Sincerely,



Nora Palmatier, Chair
Urban Forestry Commission



Trees planted in 2009 are making a difference already. A Red maple and Scarlet oak in the Highview neighborhood provide shade and improve the aesthetic appeal for this apartment complex.



Tree distribution events allow children pick out the family tree while receiving tree care education.