

## City of Falls Church

Meeting Date: 03-25-19	Title: TREE COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT	Agenda No.: 8 (c)
Originating Dept. Head: Mike Whitfield Director of Public Works	Staff: Kate Reich Arborist KRR	



## Falls Church Tree Commission

**DATE:** March 19, 2019

**TO:** Mayor Tarter and Members of Falls Church City Council

**FROM:** Tree Commission Chairman

**SUBJECT:** 2018 Annual Report

---

IAW City Code 2-119 (3)(f) 2-119 (3)(f), we are presenting our annual report for calendar year 2018. It was a challenging year for everyone in public service, and Board and Commission volunteers were no exception. As it is in every endeavor that dares to accomplish for the common good, the Tree Commission (TC) experienced short term gains but strategic losses in 2018. Our advocacy for trees and greenspace were largely unsuccessful in two major mixed-use redevelopment projects. However, we are encouraged by the commitment of FCCPS to tree canopy and greenspace for the new George Mason High School campus project though our reaction is tepid for both trees and greenspace from the Falls Church Gateway Partners for the 10-acre West Falls Church project. We also note that our continuing partnership with the Environmental Sustainability Council provides Council and the City with substantive input for a sustainable community.

The report not only looks back on 2018 events but sets urban forest expectations for 2019 and beyond through our input to the Comprehensive Plan update.

We wish to thank Council for its support and look forward to continuing to provide you well thought and practical policy recommendations.

Finally, in addition to support from both Council and Planning Commission liaisons, we commend Staff, especially Kate Reich and Charles Prince, for their commitment and support for the urban forest.

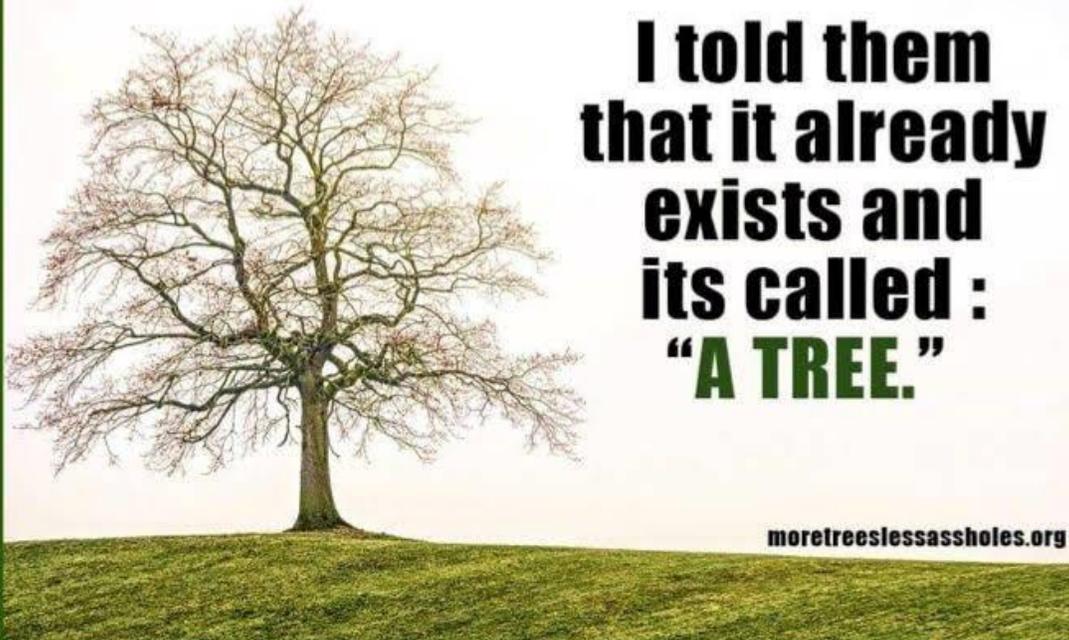
Cc: Wyatt Shields

## Table of Contents:

- Arbor Day, Tree City USA and Tree of the Year
- Tree City USA and signage
- Chapter 5 Natural Resources and the Environment
- Influencing Mixed Use Redevelopment
- FCCPS tree canopy for New High School
- Specimen Trees
- Red Oak Leaf Scorch
- Input to WFC RFP
- Mature Trees and Citizen Concerns
- Downtown plaza
- Plan Reviews
- Education and Outreach

**I talked to someone about climate change, and they told me :  
"Sooner or later we'll invent a machine that can capture carbon from the atmosphere in an efficient way".**

**I told them that it already exists and its called :  
"A TREE."**



[moretreeslessassholes.org](http://moretreeslessassholes.org)

Arbor Day, Tree City USA  
and Tree of the Year

The City of Falls Church has a long history of valuing the urban forest, and especially trees. Falls Church was the first Tree City USA in the Commonwealth of Virginia and, in 1892, celebrated the first Arbor Day in Virginia. The City has been recognized by the Arbor Day Foundation with the Tree City USA status every year since 1978.

We also annually recognize a “Tree of the Year” as part of our commitment to educating the public on trees and desirable species. In 2018, the Pignut Hickory was named TOTY. The TOTY for 2019 is the Loblolly Pine.

Tree Commission Contributions to Chapter 5 Natural Resources and the Environment

Tree Commission Contribution  
to Draft Comprehensive Plan -  
Urban Forestry Vision and Goals

---

**VISION:**

The City’s vision is that the urban forest be recognized and invested in (1) for the many inherent benefits it provides, including reduced energy use, stormwater management, improved pollution control, diverse wildlife habitat, beauty, and increased human health, (2) as an essential component of the City’s environmental sustainability and resilience strategies, and (3) as a critical part of the economic and civic well-being of the City.

**GOALS:**

Protect and enhance our urban forest, which is the network of trees and green spaces on public and private property throughout the City. Continually integrate urban forestry goals across all City programs, projects, and groups that deal with environmental sustainability and resilience issues.

**In order to live up to this recommended vision and general goal statement, the City will need to specifically prioritize the following:**

- 1. Protection of many mature trees during residential and non-residential redevelopment.** Loss is significant, and the community will need to support changes in the City Code to start to reverse this.
- 2. Mixed-use/special exception projects that integrate green space, including canopy trees and landscaped gathering areas.** Projects completed and approved in the last 5 years have a significant lack of green space (data is available). Future projects must be designed with more green space to attract people to our business districts, create a sense of place, and contribute to the environmental sustainability of the City.

3. **Integration of urban forestry into long-term and city-wide planning for commercial and mixed-use development as well as land use and transportation.** While the Arborist and Tree Commission provide advice on project designs, there is no overall process for including tree and green space preservation in long-term City planning for sustainability and environmental resilience.
4. **Creation of attractively landscaped city entrances** (both on streets and at W&OD crossings) to help create a unique sense of place and reinforce the City's designation as a "Tree City USA."
5. **Improvement of public education on and support for green space and tree preservation.** Increased community awareness of the huge benefits of mature tree canopy in the City could lead to higher prioritization of tree canopy in City planning and development.
6. **Review and streamlining of the City Code** to make tree preservation requirements and policies clear for property owners.

#### Influencing Mixed Use Redevelopment (MUR)

We used greenspace data to advocate for tree canopy and greenspace in MUR developments. City leadership leveraged our advocacy to obtain cash voluntary concessions (VC) including \$10,000 for Founders Row and \$20,000 for the Insight project. Both were short term gains in the face of strategic defeat for our urban forest advocacy. We continue to advocate our preference for native plant species.

#### FCCPS and Tree Canopy for New High School Project

➤ We are encouraged by the commitment of FCCPS to tree canopy and greenspace in the new George Mason High School campus project. Our January 2018 letter to Dr Noonan and FCCPS leadership encouraging tree canopy and greenspace is attached. Review of the plan is ongoing, and more specific details on the project's tree removal and preservation are being requested, but the TC appreciates that the overall proposed canopy coverage exceeds 20%, there is a Memorial Garden with substantial trees planned in front of the new high school, and it appears that there will be overall good species diversity onsite.

#### Specimen Trees

With the support of the Tree Commission, City Staff has submitted a "Resolution Designating Four New Falls Church Specimen Trees" to the City Council.

## Red Oak Bacterial Leaf Scorch

We have identified a problem of epic proportions affecting Red Oaks in the City. Bacterial leaf scorch is a systemic disease that has no known cure. Decline usually occurs slowly over a period of ten years or more from the first onset of symptoms but in young trees and in species sensitive to moisture stress, such as sycamore, death can occur sooner.

A variety of management practices can successfully extend the longevity of infected trees. These include treatment with antibiotics and water stress reduction through mulching, irrigation, and growth regulation. These management practices are very successful; however, annual treatments with antibiotics are needed to keep this disease suppressed and the tree alive.

This is what it looks like on a Red Oak.



Red Oaks are among the most popular of our canopy trees though it also been found in white oak.

➤ The Public Works Department's Urban Forestry team is putting together a plan to address managing a portion of the species population. Once the data have been assembled, the Tree Commission will request Council provide emergency funding for the program.

## Mature Trees and Citizen Concerns

This past year we saw a marked increase in citizen concerns over the City's apparent inability to protect mature trees as residential sites undergoing redevelopment have resulted in the removal of mature tree canopy. Several citizens attended Tree Commission meetings to personally express their concerns and to seek our support. In addition to contacting the City Manager and Arborist, they have also written Members of Council.

The City is very fortunate to have its wonderful mature trees, which provide shade, fresh air, improve water quality, and provide wildlife habitat. This mature tree canopy did not happen by accident. It is a result of citizen activism through the Tree Commission and VPIS to plant over 600 trees in the past 15 years. It is the result of using every authority granted to the City by the General Assembly to protect and promote trees. And is the result of the City's dedicated Arborist and Greenspace crew that work to protect the health of trees every day.

➤ Because of the many benefits that mature trees provide to the community, listed below, the Tree Commission recommends that City staff find ways to protect more mature trees during residential redevelopment.

**IMPORTANT BENEFITS OF THE CITY'S URBAN FOREST,  
PARTICULARLY ITS MATURE TREE CANOPY:**

- Reduces erosion, flooding and need for storm drain pipes by absorbing stormwater runoff
- Cleans polluted air by absorbing carbon dioxide and trapping dust, ash, pollen and smoke
- Cools summer air, reducing the heat island effect and the need for A/C and buffering the local effects of climate change
- Encourages community activity by providing shade and beauty during walking, exercise and social gatherings
- Provides diverse habitats for wildlife and native plants
- Reduces blood pressure and stress and improves mental health, asthma and focus
- Increases property values by beautifying residential yards and commercial properties
- Screens traffic and busy urban areas to increase safety and privacy

Downtown Plaza

Landscaping work is ongoing on the Downtown Plaza. The TC was disappointed that there was no formal opportunity for review by Boards and Commissions, or, assuming no Code requirement for one, that Planning Staff did not seek input from stakeholders, including the community at large, on significant changes to this space. The TC submitted the following memo to planners and continues to advocate for native plants and an additional shade tree in the Plaza.



# Falls Church Tree Commission

**DATE:** December 29, 2018

**TO:** Bob Young, Acting Chair,  
Economic Development Authority

**FROM:** Tree Commission Chair

**SUBJECT:** Revitalizing the Downtown Plaza

---

The Tree Commission has reviewed the drawings for the revitalized plaza and supports the general concept of designing this space to provide attractive gathering area for Falls Church citizens. It is our understanding the improvements to the Plaza are to be completed by "Watch Night", December 31<sup>st</sup>, therefore our recommendations are unlikely to have a short-term impact. However, for the sake of consistency, we are providing recommendations in hopes of having a longer-term impact.

The following recommendations would improve the overall aesthetics and environmental attributes for the Downtown Plaza area. Our recommendations include:

***Plant a tree in the corner of the Plaza (see red circle, below).*** Trees in poor condition have already been removed leaving a single canopy tree. While this tree and the street trees on Broad St will provide some shade, we are concerned the heat island effect may render the site unusable in hot weather without additional shade. We propose a tree in the general area identified below (red circle below). It will add to the overall attractiveness of the site and add to the overall canopy of the city.

***A Preference for native plants.*** In our previous comments on the plaza, the EDA was very receptive to our preference for native plant species. We echo those comments in encouraging native plants in the landscaping plan for the plaza. We are certain that the Arborist can recommend specific plantings so that we don't have to plant again when the non-natives do not survive.

We look forward to working with the City to make the Downtown Plaza a valuable greenspace and gathering spot for residents.

Cc: Members of City Council  
Wyatt Shields  
Jim Snyder  
Kate Reich  
Cory Firestone Weiss



## Plan Reviews

Big Chimneys Park, Don Beyer Volvo and GMHS/WFC.

## West Falls Church Project

Tree Commission provided suggested language for the draft Request for Proposals (RFP) that sought to encourage offerors “to propose sustainable landscape designs for the West Falls Church project site that provides for opportunities for informal outdoor use and contributes to a sense of place for the community while meeting FCC canopy cover and greenspace requirements to:

- Reduce building energy use
- Capture surface water for improved stormwater management and,
- Create a welcoming environment and sense of place for the community”

The Tree Commission subsequently provided clarifying language to require “at least 15% tree canopy coverage.”

In June 2018, together with the Environmental Services Council, we co-sponsored a memo encouraging Council and the City to set ambitious, performance-based environmental targets for the WFC project. Stopping short of requesting a certain minimum canopy coverage, the final language was a disappointingly vague “Incorporate sustainable landscape designs that integrate open space with canopy cover to assist the City in meeting its greenhouse gas goals, including potential greenspace connection with nearby sites” and “Manage Stormwater on the site (without purchase of nutrient credits) in a way that integrates green infrastructure, low impact and sustainable landscape designs, and tree canopy coverage.”

➤ The Tree Commission is nonetheless encouraged by the initial presentations made by the Falls Church Gateway Partners that portray an inviting space with a significant number of trees, landscaping and greenspace.

## Education and Outreach

A collaboration with the Tree Commission, City Arborist and the Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS) resulted in the publication of “Trees in the City of Falls Church”. The booklet is a celebration of trees as an important component making up the character of Falls Church and is an update to a 1990 Village Society publication of the same name.

Funded and produced by VPIS, the booklet presents a snapshot of most frequently seen species and photos to help identify and enrich your knowledge in the process. It also provides information on the history of VPIS, the Neighborhood Tree Program, Arbor Day and Tree City USA as well as the VPIS tree label project and the City’s Specimen Tree Program.

In late 2018, we began the process of changing the name from “Tree Commission” to “Urban Forestry Commission.” The name better reflects our mission to advocate for a wide range of flora and fauna in the community. The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) seeks to promote healthy urban forests in Falls Church City through leadership, awareness, and advocacy to enhance the beauty and prosperity of the community. The UFC defines the urban forest as the collection of natural and planted trees plus other native woody plants that grow within our city. The urban forest includes the habitats and ecosystems that support fauna and promote biodiversity. Our urban forest plays an important role for our community by filtering air and water; providing shelter to animals; moderating local climate; slowing wind and stormwater; and shading homes and businesses. Our urban forests are critical in cooling the urban heat island, and potentially reducing the number of unhealthy ozone days.

➤ We hope to complete the approval process of name changing by mid-2019.

➤ The Tree booklets are available at City Hall, the Mary Riley Styles Public Library and may be viewed at [www.VPIS.org](http://www.VPIS.org).

## **Letter to Dr Noonan.**

**DATE:** January 11, 2018

**TO:** Dr. Peter Noonan, Superintendent of Public Schools; Members of the School Board; Members of the Planning Commission

**FROM:** Tree Commission -- Barbara L. Tesner, Vice Chairman 

**SUBJECT:** Tree Canopy Requirements for Mason High School project

---

The George Mason High School campus project presents a significant opportunity for the City to fulfill the environmental values expressed in its Comprehensive Plan. As part of this effort, the Tree Commission strongly recommends that the School Board include a minimum 20% tree canopy requirement in any school project RFP. Our recommendation is based on existing City

school models and the necessity of sustainable, healthy green spaces and trees in a school environment.

To help ensure the minimum 20% tree canopy requirement, the Tree Commission further suggests that the City zone the school's portion of the property residential and designate the land as Parks and Open Space, consistent with the zoning Thomas Jefferson Elementary's zoning and land use designation. In fact, both Jessie Thackrey Preschool and Thomas Jefferson Elementary sit in residential zones and were therefore subject to the Residential Zoning requirement of 20% tree canopy when built or expanded. A non-residential or business zoning designation for the Mason-Henderson campus would depart from this precedent and restrict the City's ability to require ample campus green space, both on the current George Mason project and on future Mason or Henderson redevelopment projects.

The residential canopy requirement on our school campus will also ensure that campus landscaping extends beyond just the periphery and translates into student and community health benefits. Multiple studies show improved academic focus and recovery from stress and fatigue for students with access to outdoor gathering spaces with trees and other landscaping.<sup>1</sup> In addition, an environmentally sustainable school design should naturally include generous outdoor spaces for students' ecological education and interaction. These features can be achieved in a cost-effective manner, as we have seen in neighboring Arlington County, which clearly requires and implements green space around its schools.

Falls Church City values trees and green space and should expect and require significant quantities of both around all City schools. This can best be achieved through an early commitment to landscaping with at least a 20% tree canopy in the RFP and a residential zoning designation for the school campus.

CC: City Manager  
Director, Development Services  
Chairperson, Environmental Sustainability Council

---

<sup>1</sup>For example, <http://willsull.net/resources/Trees-&-Test-Scores-Final-Report.pdf>;  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2015/06/15/why-green-spaces-are-good-for-your-kids-brain/?utm\\_term=.eb7a2fea9f8c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2015/06/15/why-green-spaces-are-good-for-your-kids-brain/?utm_term=.eb7a2fea9f8c)