



DOCKET ITEM #10

MPA #2009-0001-Urban Forestry Master Plan

Issue: Urban Forestry Master Plan	Planning Commission Hearing:	June 2, 2009
	City Council Hearing:	June 16, 2009
Description: Amendment to the City's Master Plan to adopt the Urban Forestry Master Plan.		
Staff: Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities		

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:

I. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission initiate on its own motion an amendment to the City's Master Plan, adopting the attached Urban Forestry Master Plan as a chapter to the Master Plan.

II. DISCUSSION

The attached Urban Forestry Master Plan is the result of the work of the 12 member Urban Forestry Steering Committee appointed by City Council in May 2004 to address growing concerns about the City's policies and procedures for the management and preservation of trees on both public and private property. Specific concerns included an increase in the number of trees being removed on public and private property, utility line clearance practices, and the replacement and planting of new trees. The mission of the Urban Forestry Steering Committee and goal of the Urban Forestry Master Plan was to characterize and quantify the current state of Alexandria's Urban Forest, and to identify strategies to improve its density, health and diversity.

The scope of work for the Urban Forestry Steering Committee included five primary areas of interest that were identified through meetings and input from City staff, as well as the goals and strategic recommendations set forth in the *Alexandria Open Space Plan* and *The City of Alexandria Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Strategic Master Plan*. They are to:

- Review City policies, programs and services for the planting, maintenance, and removal of publicly owned trees located along City streets, in parks, and on other public lands, and recommend needed changes;
- Review City ordinances, regulations and procedures that address the protection and preservation of trees located on public or private land and recommend changes;
- Promote programs that will enhance the public's awareness of trees and the benefits they provide to all of us individually, and as a community;
- Assist in the implementation of Goal 12 of the *Alexandria Open Space Plan*, Expand Citywide Street Tree Program and Protect Existing Trees and Woodland Areas: and
- Protect, restore and enhance the urban forest and beautification of the city, Strategy Recommendation Policy 1.5 presented in *The City of Alexandria Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Strategic Master Plan*.

The Urban Forestry Master Plan presents 52 short, mid, and long term recommendations to stem the decline and loss of the City's tree canopy and to improve the City's Urban Forest. The recommendations were developed in response to key challenges identified by the Urban Forestry Steering Committee with the assistance of The Davey Resource Group, interaction with City residents, and the cooperation of City leaders, administration, and staff in the Departments of Planning and Zoning, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities and Transportation and Environmental Services. The key challenges identified include: the City's decreasing tree canopy cover; development and other pressures that are negatively affecting tree health and longevity, and further limiting the space available for trees to be planted and grow to maturity; the absence of a citywide tree management plan that has goals, objectives and performance measures; a current city program that is reactive not proactive, including a planting and tree care program that is limited and primarily focused on street trees; and, a lack of public education and outreach.

In order to meet these challenges, the Urban Forestry Master Plan recommends that the City adopt American Forests' tree canopy goal of 40%, plant more trees, provide better care for existing and new trees, create a proactive and accountable management program, and to provide public education and outreach that encourages the preservation and expansion of the urban forest. Many of the recommendations presented can be implemented at little or no cost to the City. Other recommendations including the planting of an additional 400 trees annually, pruning an additional 4000 trees annually, hiring additional tree and horticulture crew staff to meet the maintenance demands identified in the City's parks and school grounds, and the development and presentation of public education opportunities will require a significant increase in the level of funding provided for the City's arboriculture and horticulture programs. The recommendations are ambitious, but realistically achievable. Some need immediate attention; whereas other can be phased in over time.

The Urban Forestry Master Plan addresses one of the critical issues first identified for action during Alexandria's first Environmental Summit held in 1997. The problem is straightforward: every year, the City of Alexandria is losing tree canopy because of development, storms aging and urban pressures. If we are to enjoy the environmental, economic and aesthetic benefits of our urban forest, we must learn how to better manage it and invest in its maintenance and preservation. The plan responds to the issue by identifying and assessing current conditions, and by recommending actions to address these conditions.

STAFF: Richard J. Baier, Interim Director, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
John Noelle, City Arborist

ATTACHMENT: Urban Forestry Master Plan

RESOLUTION NO. MPA 2009-0001

WHEREAS, under the Provisions of Section 9.05 of the City Charter, the Planning Commission may adopt amendments to the Master Plan of the City of Alexandria and submit to the City Council such revisions in said plans as changing conditions may make necessary; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities has brought forward an amendment to the 1992 Master Plan for the adoption of the Urban Forestry Master Plan as a chapter; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities has analyzed the proposed amendment and presented its recommendations to the Planning Commission; and

WHEREAS, a duly advertised public hearing on the proposed amendment was held on June 2, 2009 with all public testimony and written comment considered; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission finds that:

1. The proposed amendment is necessary and desirable to guide and accomplish the coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the City; and
2. The proposed amendment is generally consistent with the overall goals and objectives of the 1992 Master Plan; and
3. The proposed amendment shows the Planning Commission's long-range recommendations for the general development of the City; and
4. Based on the foregoing findings and all other facts and circumstances of which the Planning Commission may properly take notice in making and adopting a master plan for the City of Alexandria, adoption of the amendment to the 1992 Master Plan will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the residents of the City;

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NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Planning Commission of the City of Alexandria that:

1. The following amendment is hereby adopted in its entirety as an chapter of the 1992 Master Plan of the City of Alexandria, Virginia in accordance with Section 9.05 of the Charter of the City of Alexandria, Virginia:

Addition of the Urban Forestry Master Plan

2. This resolution shall be signed by the Chairman of the Planning Commission and attested by its secretary, and a true copy of this resolution forwarded and certified to the City Council.

ADOPTED the **2nd day of June, 2009.**

John Komoroske, Chairman
Alexandria Planning Commission

ATTEST:

Faroll Hamer, Secretary