District of Columbia Tree Canopy Action Plan

Background

In March 2023, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Tree Canopy Funding and Policy Roundtable convened 125 local and state leaders from across the Chesapeake Bay Watershed to address challenges and opportunities in advancing tree canopy goals throughout the region. Centered around the themes of equity, climate resilience, and tree loss, the event featured expert presentations as well as generative discussions to identify data, tools and approaches to strengthen tree canopy outcomes. The Roundtable was intended to lay the groundwork for each Chesapeake Bay state and the District of Columbia to develop a two-year **Tree Canopy Action Plan** that pinpoints priority funding, policy, and programmatic strategies to advance tree canopy goals.

DC's Priority Strategies

The priority strategies presented below were identified by a group of stakeholders from the District who participated in pre- and post-Roundtable tree canopy strategy sessions and/or in discussion sessions at the Roundtable. These strategies were identified as having strong potential to advance tree canopy progress in the District in the near term. For each strategy, action steps and lists of potential partners were identified.

1. Implement a neighborhood-scale approach to implementing tree programming.

DC has rigorous and effective tree policies and implementation strategies in place District-wide. An opportunity for greater impact is to adopt a more equitable hyper-local or neighborhood-scale approach in the delivery of resources such as planting, maintenance, technical assistance, and community engagement efforts.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Assess the degree to which tree replacement fund dollars are being deployed to highest-need neighborhoods to achieve goals. Adjust as needed.	DDOT Urban Forestry Division
Convene a thought group, including local community-based organizations, to assess past efforts to engage neighborhoods, especially those that have not been traditionally engaged. Identify good models for Urban Forestry to follow.	DC Department of Parks and Recreation networks (senior villages, faith-based communities, ANCs, libraries, community gardens programs)
Engage Master Naturalists and DPR Certified Naturalists to serve as neighborhood-scale advocates and liaisons, and to engage residents in helping to provide tree care and maintenance.	DC Master Naturalist Program, University of the District of Columbia DC Department of Parks and Recreation's Naturalist Certification Course

2. Pursue regional and cross-agency coordination.

Both the District and its neighboring counties could more effectively achieve urban tree canopy goals by coordinating policies and stewardship across jurisdictional boundaries. DC is well positioned to serve as a convener in this effort, bringing together both its federal partners as well as MD and VA counties. Within DC, there is opportunity for greater cross-agency collaboration to achieve shared goals.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Convene regional working groups for urban tree canopy strategy coordination. Engage Arlington County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and key federal and nonprofit partners.	DDOT Urban Forestry Division (lead) Arlington County Montgomery County Prince George's County Federal landowners Casey Trees
Develop a District cross-agency working group to move toward greater coordination and to determine whether stewardship and management is being implemented according to relevant agency plans.	DDOT Urban Forestry Division (lead) DPR DOEE DGS DOB

3. Increase planting and maintenance in priority areas: private property, federal land, and medium- to low-density residential, including multi-family dwellings.

Tree planting, preservation and maintenance in the District is especially needed on privately-owned land, federal land, and medium-to-low density residential parcels.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Continue prioritizing resources (including planting, outreach and engagement capacity, etc) to identified priority areas in order to advance equitable tree canopy outcomes.	DDOT Urban Forestry Division
Evaluate national park landscape management quality and authority, e.g. National Park Service or District of Columbia Department of General Services (see report from George Washington University).	DC Department of General Services
Invest in marking and education to improve perception of tree benefits and encourage tree planting and maintenance on private property.	DDOT Urban Forestry Division

4. Increase climate resilience of tree canopy planning and planting decisions.

The District's tree canopy planning and planting decisions need to be informed by climate data and information (e.g. resilient tree species, species that best mitigate urban heat islands, etc).

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Continue to implement [Climate Ready Forests Initiative](#) to understand climate change vulnerability of the District's urban forest and implement management strategies (e.g. use of species best suited to minimizing urban heat island effects and/or to thriving based on projected climate conditions).	DDOT Urban Forestry Division
Continue implementation of planting and maintenance plans responsive to various projected climate scenarios.	DDOT Urban Forestry Division
Seek greater coordination across resilience programs in the District (e.g. weatherization, solar, active transport, RiverSmart).	Sustainable DC DOEE RiverSmart
Continue to prioritize canopy increase in high heat vulnerability areas, an effort underway since 2019 release of heat island data ([https://osf.io/p2emq/)](https://osf.io/p2emq/).	DDOT Urban Forestry Division (in progress)

5. Develop strategies to reduce threats and impacts from invasive species.

Across the District, invasive plants are degrading forest patches. DC needs effective strategies to manage invasive plant and animal species, across all land management organizations including private property owners.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Finalize and share the Standard Operating Procedures for volunteer invasive species management currently being developed.	DDOT Urban Forestry Division (in progress)
Convene a workgroup to study needs and strategies.	DDOT Urban Forestry Division (lead)