

New York 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 to develop a two-year **Tree Canopy Action Plan** that pinpoints priority funding, policy, and programmatic strategies to advance tree canopy goals.

New York’s Priority Strategies

The strategies presented below were identified by a group of stakeholders from New York 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 state in the near term. For each strategy, action steps and lists of potential partners were identified.

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1. Provide technical assistance and training at the community level, especially related to accessing funding and maintaining trees. Focus on technicians and municipalities.

Additional funding for urban forestry will be coming available in New York over the next couple of years, but it can be a challenge for communities to understand what’s available and how to access it. In addition, many under-resourced communities need support applying and being competitive for grants. Assistance is also needed in technical areas, such as matching trees to available sites, conducting tree health assessments, and caring for existing tree canopy (including maintenance and protection to prevent loss during severe weather events).

Opportunities for action	Who’s involved
Create and share written technical guidance for local officials on best practices for targeting, prioritizing, and applying for funding including funds available through NY’s bond act.	Lead TBD Resilient Shorelines program (model for building the case around cost/benefit of investments)
<p>NY DEC inventory community-based organizations and/or contractors who could provide technical assistance and/or training, to help fill the gap in DEC capacity. Include stand-by contractors that other state agencies use. High needs for training and technical assistance: species selection; incorporating trees into projects’ planning stages; maintenance; tree health assessments; using data to strategize priority planting areas; methods to project benefits of UTC investments (including heat mitigation)</p> <p>Convene a conversation with these partners to communicate needs and begin building a coalition.</p>	<p>NY DEC (lead)</p> <p>Technical assistance provider partners (community-based organizations and/or contractors)</p>
<i>Stretch step:</i> Build support for hiring additional NY DEC state foresters, for every region of the state. Draft arguments for why this is needed to do the proactive technical assistance that municipalities need.	<p>NY DEC</p> <p>Coalition of advocacy partners</p>

2. Modify existing funding mechanisms to increase collaboration and flexibility, scale up implementation, and improve outcomes for tree canopy and equity.

Nonprofit partners need flexible, steady funding mechanisms to provide technical assistance and implement projects (this is a prerequisite to accomplishing Strategy 1). Existing funding programs require partners to engage continually in the competitive grant cycle. Municipalities need additional funding for tree surveys, tree management plans, and staff to enforce existing policies. For many communities, match requirements can be hard to meet.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
<p>Compile a list of existing funding sources, including nontraditional sources that could potentially be leveraged because of projects' co-benefits, e.g. FEMA / Dept of Homeland Security (inventories and maintenance for mitigation), Climate Smart Communities program (urban heat islands).</p>	<p>Lead TBD</p>
<p>Convene major funders of tree canopy in the state (public and private) to communicate the need for changes to make funding programs more equitable and effective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not only fund new things; continue to fund projects we know work. - Fund existing technical staff to carry out tree canopy projects. Allow flexibility, acknowledging that community needs differ. - Provide longer-term funding for tree maintenance (staff or contractual). - Reduce barriers for communities to access grant funding (e.g. make applications simpler). - Designate a percentage of grant funds to underserved or EJ areas. - For state funding, require projects to consider climate change resilience and mitigation. - Allow / encourage bundling of projects to make smaller projects more feasible. 	<p>Lead TBD</p>
<p>Convene a workgroup to study the potential to use formulary grants for specific purposes rather than awarding all funding competitively. For example, direct state funding (annual budget, Environmental Protection Fund, etc), to Soil and Water Conservation Districts for tree canopy projects at the local level. Assess the authorizing statutes that would need to be changed.</p>	<p>Lead TBD</p>

3. Share best practices for local ordinances and standards to protect tree canopy given existing state policy context.

New York municipalities need assistance understanding and implementing regulatory protections for trees that are allowable under state law.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
<p>Create and share examples or templates of home rule ordinances that municipalities can use to protect trees, including riparian buffer ordinances as well as ordinances to discourage removal of trees (e.g. mitigation requirements). Existing resources to draw from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arbor Day Foundation: model ordinances - The Green Infrastructure Center: resources around strengthening codes/ordinances - New York State Department of State: model local laws to increase resilience 	<p>NY Urban Forestry Program (sample tree ordinance development in progress)</p>
<p>Provide training for municipalities on implementing tree protection ordinances, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Department of State municipal training group (requires municipalities to take a certain amount of training, including on model local laws) - Chesapeake Bay WIP regional water quality management planning program - Planning Districts (work with towns) - Cornell University Extension (conducts community outreach and education) 	<p>NY Department of State</p> <p>Chesapeake Bay WIP 604(B) regional water quality management planning program</p> <p>Planning Districts</p> <p>Cornell University Extension</p>
<p>Investigate the potential to add tree ordinances to the NYSERDA Clean Energy Communities program, in which the solar permitting law provided funds to municipalities that adopted a local ordinance based on a model for residential solar siting.</p>	<p>Lead TBD</p> <p>NYSERDA</p>

4. Meet capacity and workforce needs for tree canopy planting and maintenance.

There is a shortage of tree care workers and certified arborists in New York, with few educational programs to train urban foresters and municipal foresters. Local forestry staff are stretched thin. Grant-funded projects must pay prevailing wages but urban forestry isn't its own category; this is confusing for arborist companies and presents a barrier to municipalities getting the help they need.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Pilot a regional, county and/or multi-municipal shared urban forester program. Find funding to support this program; share findings and recommendations.	Lead TBD
Convene a coalition of tree care companies and other employers to approach regional community colleges; explain the needed skills and ask them to create training programs.	Lead TBD Community colleges Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES)
Replicate and/or expand existing programs that leverage nontraditional partners (e.g. hazard mitigation, Climate Smart Communities) to access additional funding for career training: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Upper Susquehanna Coalition's hazard mitigation grant-funded training for Highway Departments, Departments of Public Works, Buildings and Grounds, Soil & Water using gamification. Collaborating with DEC Forestry on a pilot project at the state level. - Cornell Cooperative Extension's program that provides trees along with training on tree selection planting and care (to obviate the need for hazard tree mitigation). 	Upper Susquehanna Cornell Cooperative Extension NYS DEC Division of Lands and Forests
Provide written guidance to clear up confusion regarding prevailing wages for grant-funded projects. This would remove a barrier for contractors who are applying to work with municipalities on tree care and maintenance	NYS Department of Labor
Create a template joint procurement contract for municipalities to use when seeking arborist services. Adapt existing Office of General Services' joint procurement contracts.	NYS Office of General Services

5. Amplify marketing and education on tree canopy benefits and care. Focus on private property owners and municipalities.

It is critical to have public buy-in and support for tree preservation and care. Marketing and education can help build this support.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Identify the strategic partners and network nodes that can help (1) develop coordinated marketing messages and/or (2) amplify and deliver these messages.	NY DEC (developing a network of partners within disadvantaged communities regarding extreme heat adaptation) Cooperative Extension HOAs Community organizations
With the coalition identified above, develop a coordinated marketing and communications campaign. Messaging should be consistent, but with nuanced / targeted materials based on the audience (e.g. urban vs. rural) as well as the "trigger" (e.g. summer heat; big storms; economic development; stormwater/flooding; health).	State agencies Cooperative Extension
Deliver marketing material and education; expand and diversity communication methods and audiences.	Soil and Water Conservation Districts (newsletters; newspaper; radio) All partners from above
Continue to develop and widely share material for private property owners on tree maintenance and care. Engage residents as champions and advocates.	Trees New York (Tree Stewards training program) and partners