

Pennsylvania 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.

Pennsylvania’s Priority Strategies

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

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1. Advance policies and planning to protect tree canopy at the state and local level.

Pennsylvania has few statewide protections for urban tree canopy. Education and advocacy is needed to elevate trees as a statewide priority. In addition, trees do not get special consideration or prioritization within the municipal planning code (MPC). While there is reticence to attempt MPC changes, this could be an effective way for local governments to feel they have the authority to protect trees without legal ramifications. In the meantime, municipalities are enabled to enact some policy and ordinance changes to strengthen tree canopy protection, and these options should be shared.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
<p>Create a set of PA-specific municipal code and ordinance templates to protect tree canopy, allowable under current law (such as buffer ordinances, street tree ordinances, etc). Include existing ordinances that have held up to legal scrutiny and that align with regulatory requirements in municipal, borough, township, city, and county codes.</p>	<p>American Planning Association - PA chapter (help develop templates/guides)</p> <p>Planning Commissions, CCAP, PSATS, PSAB, PML (distribute material to municipalities; provide TA)</p> <p>Environmental Advisory Committees</p>
<p>Share existing planning and regulatory guidance with municipalities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Templates or models developed in step one, above - Language in Chesapeake Bay Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan regarding modernizing local planning and zoning to conserve critical forests and habitats (with specific examples) - Guidance for local governments in considering forests in comprehensive plans contained in the "Sustaining and Improving Forest Land through Comprehensive Plans" document - Bureau of Forestry's forest plan which includes goals for communities and proposed changes in policy and planning, and could be a good mechanism for sparking regulatory change 	<p>DCED (building a new planning team that, once structured, can assist)</p> <p>Phase III WIP County Action Plan workgroups (share the planning and zoning recommendations in the WIP)</p> <p>Planning Commissions (distribute material to municipalities; provide TA)</p>
<p>Inventory conservation interests in Pennsylvania that might be willing to participate in education and advocacy efforts to build support in the Legislature for funding existing or new programs</p>	<p>Lead TBD</p>

<p>(e.g. PA Keystone Fund and the Clean Streams Fund, which includes funding for urban forestry and buffers). Host a convening of these entities to discuss advocacy priorities and possibilities.</p>	
<p>Meet with the American Planning Association PA Chapter to discuss potential specific changes within the municipal planning code that would allow for definition and goals around forests, woodlands, and buffers. APA request to present at the State Planning Board or ask Governor's Office to task the Board with incorporating APA's suggestions into an official policy document and assist with the legislative development process.</p>	<p>American Planning Association - PA chapter</p>

2. Provide technical assistance and education for communities and policy-makers.

PA communities need direct technical assistance to develop and implement tree canopy programs. Decision-makers at all levels need digestible information regarding the critical need to value and expand urban tree cover.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
<p>Pilot a “swat team” technical assistance program. Build on DCNR’s “community tour” model, which aims to connect communities with resources and also offers grant-writing assistance (which has proven to be effective). Target this assistance to smaller and/or lower-resourced communities.</p> <p>Based on the outcomes of this pilot, identify (1) what types of technical assistance will achieve greatest impact, and (2) ways to scale up TA models to add capacity in communities.</p>	<p>PA DCNR</p> <p>PSU Extension</p> <p>Western Pennsylvania Conservancy</p>
<p>Implement the PA BOF’s planned county / regional forester pilot. Convene partners to provide input on designing this model for maximum effectiveness.</p>	<p>PA BOF</p> <p>PSU Extension</p>
<p>Create a technical advisory group for decision-makers. Share the Chesapeake Bay Program’s Local Government Guide tree canopy educational materials and modules. Integrate this with the action item in Strategy 3 – ask the CBP Local Leadership Workgroup (PA contacts) to coordinate an outreach and education campaign using existing resources.</p>	<p>CBP Local Leadership Workgroup</p>

3. Pursue opportunities to generate additional funding for urban tree canopy, and to use existing sources more efficiently.

Pennsylvania’s goal of adding 2.2 million trees by 2025 will require significant additional funding, and there is an opportunity to advocate for not just federal funding but also state funding. Additional funding is especially needed to address staffing and capacity issues in state agencies, local municipalities, and nonprofit partners as they collectively implement urban forest priorities.

Opportunities for action	Who’s involved
<p>Investigate ways for PA DEP to change its internal funding programs so that they complement other sources of funding and provide more long-term, dedicated funding, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use PA DEP funding for WIP implementation for urban tree canopy (need to find out the degree to which this is already happening) - Shift from agricultural block grant funding to filling in gaps in other areas (this change is already planned to come in the next couple of years) - Change PA Keystone Fund to direct more funds to the Clean Streams Fund - Tap opportunities to use Act 167 stormwater management planning for counties (NEED DETAIL), potentially tying into municipal policies and ordinances related to stormwater <p>Include a consideration of how state funding priorities coordinate with the Governor’s policy priorities. To support this investigation, convene a strategy session (led by PA DEP) among counties, nonprofit partners, and other key voices to provide input on changes that are needed as well as how to identify and articulate trees’ co-benefits.</p>	<p>PA DEP (already leading this effort; convene a strategy / input session)</p> <p>Nonprofit partners (CBF etc)</p> <p>Counties (provide input to DEP)</p>
<p>Build better connections between state agencies (especially PA DEP and PA DCNR) and local implementers to more effectively communicate existing state funding opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage the leaders of the Phase III WIP County Action Plan workgroups. Urban trees are missing here, even though it’s focused on the WIP. Outreach to CAPs and introduce them to DCNR staff. - Seek to speak at convenings and do outreach to League of Cities / Counties. 	<p>PA DEP</p> <p>PA DCNR</p> <p>Phase III WIP County Action Plan (CAP) workgroups</p> <p>League of Cities / Counties</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Re-engage the relationship between DEP and the PSATS (township supervisors); historically there was frequent communication but that dropped off during the pandemic. - Make connections with and support the efforts of Conservation Districts. Every district has a conservation specialist. - Present at the regional MS4 conference to share low-hanging fruit for urban tree canopy - Leverage the resources of the CBP Local Leaders Workgroup, especially the local government curriculum for the Bay which includes a tree module. This group's role is to help distribute material to local networks and make these connections. Engage the Local Leaders Workgroup contacts in PA to have the discussion about launching a coordinated local government outreach strategy, using all the great existing materials out there. 	<p>PSATS</p> <p>Conservation Districts</p> <p>CBP Local Leaders Workgroup</p> <p>CBF (has presented at MS4 conference in the past; help with outreach)</p>
<p>Include trees as a recognized component of PA's carbon sequestration portfolio. PA is a new member of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a market-based program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This could help PA meet its obligations as part of RGGI and provide some baseline funding that's more predictable and sustainable, making it profitable <i>not</i> to remove forests.</p>	<p>Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)</p>
<p>Investigate the potential to provide stormwater utility discounts for green infrastructure.</p>	<p>Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association</p>

4. Provide incentives for tree canopy preservation and maintenance.

Meeting Pennsylvania’s tree canopy goals will require effective preservation and maintenance on both public and private land.

Opportunities for action	Who’s involved
<p>Conduct a needs assessment to determine the unmet demand in local governments for technical assistance related to preservation, planting and maintenance (for example, updating codes, conducting tree inventories, writing management plans, accessing seedlings). Use the results to determine layers of intervention, including initial outreach and “first-step” implementation ideas.</p>	<p>PABOF (has already started a needs assessment with a diversity of communities identified through environmental justice screening)</p>
<p>Pilot a mini-grant program to fund tree maintenance in municipalities. This is currently being explored by DCNR in collaboration with Chesapeake Bay Trust and/or with funding from US Forest Service. Use results to build the case with funders about the importance of funding maintenance.</p>	<p>DCNR (developing a mini-grant program) CBT / USFS (funding partners)</p>
<p>Conduct program evaluation to assess how existing state funding programs can better connect to the Governor’s policy priorities and be more effective in incentivizing tree canopy preservation and maintenance, especially Phase 3 WIP and the PA Keystone Tree Fund. Identify changes to existing funding / technical assistance programs that could leverage what’s already working and make more progress.</p>	<p>PA DEP</p>
<p>Convene a workgroup to investigate the potential for tree preservation tax incentives on private land, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State property tax incentive program for preservation of existing and planting of new trees - Homeowner tax credit for carbon sequestration, urban heat mitigation, and/or stormwater mitigation 	<p>Lead TBD</p>