City of Charlottesville
Parks and Recreation and Office of Sustainability

PLANNING COMMISSION

Subject: Draft Urban Forest Management Plan

Staff Contacts: Steve Gaines, Parks and Recreation, Urban Forester
Rob Mathes, Parks and Recreation, Landscape Manger
Kristel Riddervold, Director, Office of Sustainability

Date: November 24, 2026

Background

The core goal of this project is to update the current Urban Forest Management Plan ('UFMP') to integrate climate action goals and equitable implementation, specifically targeting increased and equitable urban canopy coverage and greater stewardship capacity. This approach includes both public and private properties. Implementation of the UFMP will be primarily led by the City and will also require partnerships with community-based organizations who are already active in urban forest and tree management in the City.

The City's initial UFMP was completed in 2009 and is part of the Comprehensive Plan in the Plan Appendix. In 2024, the City was awarded grant funding through the Inflation Reduction Act via the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service to conduct a set of data collection activities and update the UFMP. In November of 2024, the project kicked off with consulting support from the firm Eocene Environmental Group. Although the federal grant was terminated in April 2025, the City identified internal funds to work with Eocene to modify the project scope and continue the UFMP update. Both the Urban Forest Assessment (the data component of the project) which was completed in 2025 and community engagement that occurred during spring/summer 2026, including a dedicated project page on Connect Charlottesville, informed the draft UFMP. Key findings from the Urban Forest Assessment and community engagement are included in the attached presentation.

The draft 2026 UFMP is a comprehensive update of the City's 2009 UFMP and reflects current approaches toward environmental stewardship, expanded climate and sustainability goals, and commitments to equity and inclusion. It also aims to integrate a range of current plans relevant to urban forest management, such as the Climate Action Plan, Comprehensive Plan and forthcoming Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan. The updated UFMP is intended to be adopted as an amendment to the City's Comprehensive Plan, replacing the original 2009 version. Charlottesville's draft plan is complete and is currently being shared with the community for public review and comment via the Urban Forest Management Plan page on Connect Charlottesville. The comment period will close on November 30.

The purpose of this presentation is to present the draft Urban Forest Management Plan to the Planning Commission.

Staff Analysis

The attached presentation provides an overview of the development of the UFMP, including history and background of the project, key takeaways from the 2025 Urban Forest Assessment and 2026 community engagement efforts, the plan vision, goals and objectives, and next steps.

The draft UFMP establishes a short term citywide urban forest canopy goal of 47% in 10 years, with an emphasis on forest quality (healthy native species) and equitable canopy distribution. The Plan also has neighborhood-specific canopy goals, which used existing canopy cover, heat vulnerability, socioeconomic factors, and available planting space to prioritize Plan implementation. The Plan features five goals, each with supporting objectives and actions, to be initiated over the next ten years. These Plan recommendations address prioritization of resources to reach lower canopy and high heat neighborhoods first, increasing street tree stocking, management of public land and the public urban forest, collaborating with community members and partner organizations to support stewardship of private trees, expanding outreach and education, and building and growing overall program effectiveness.

The strategies and actions in the UFMP are largely intended to be led by the City. However, since most of the city's urban forest and tree canopy are located on private property, collaborating and coordinating with community members and partner organizations will be essential for successful plan implementation.

The development of the UFMP was informed by multiple rounds of stakeholder meetings and engagement to collect input from community members, partner organizations, City staff, and subject matter experts. The Plan recommendations, including policy and regulatory opportunities, were developed based on relevant elements of the 2009 UFMP,

local context, the most recent Tree Commission 2025 State of the Forest report (including the Commission's set of recommendations), the Urban Forest Assessment, lessons learned from peer communities, and community member input.

This presentation is intended to share the draft plan with the Planning Commission and seek initial endorsement or suggested changes. A work session was held with City Council in November. Specifically, we are looking for feedback guided by the following questions:

- Are there any topics or objectives missing that belong in this plan?
- Does the approach of establishing both citywide goals and neighborhood level goals meet the intent of Comp Plan Environment Strategy 6.1, which provides guidance for how to update the UFMP?
- Do the approaches of expanding the scope of the plan to include both public and private property as well as leveraging the efforts of local organizations meet the intent of Comp Plan Environment Strategy 6.3, which provided guidance for increasing tree canopy on private land?

After the public comment period closes at the end of November, project staff will work to integrate feedback and will bring a final draft of the plan to the Planning Commission for a public hearing in January 2027. Staff will seek the Commission's recommendation to Council for plan approval and amendment to the Comprehensive Plan at that meeting.

Staff Recommendation

Staff is asking for the Planning Commission's feedback and initial endorsement of the draft Urban Forest Management Plan.

Attachments

A. Draft Urban Forest Management Plan
B. Presentation for November 24, 2026