

Charlottesville Urban Forest Management Plan 2026



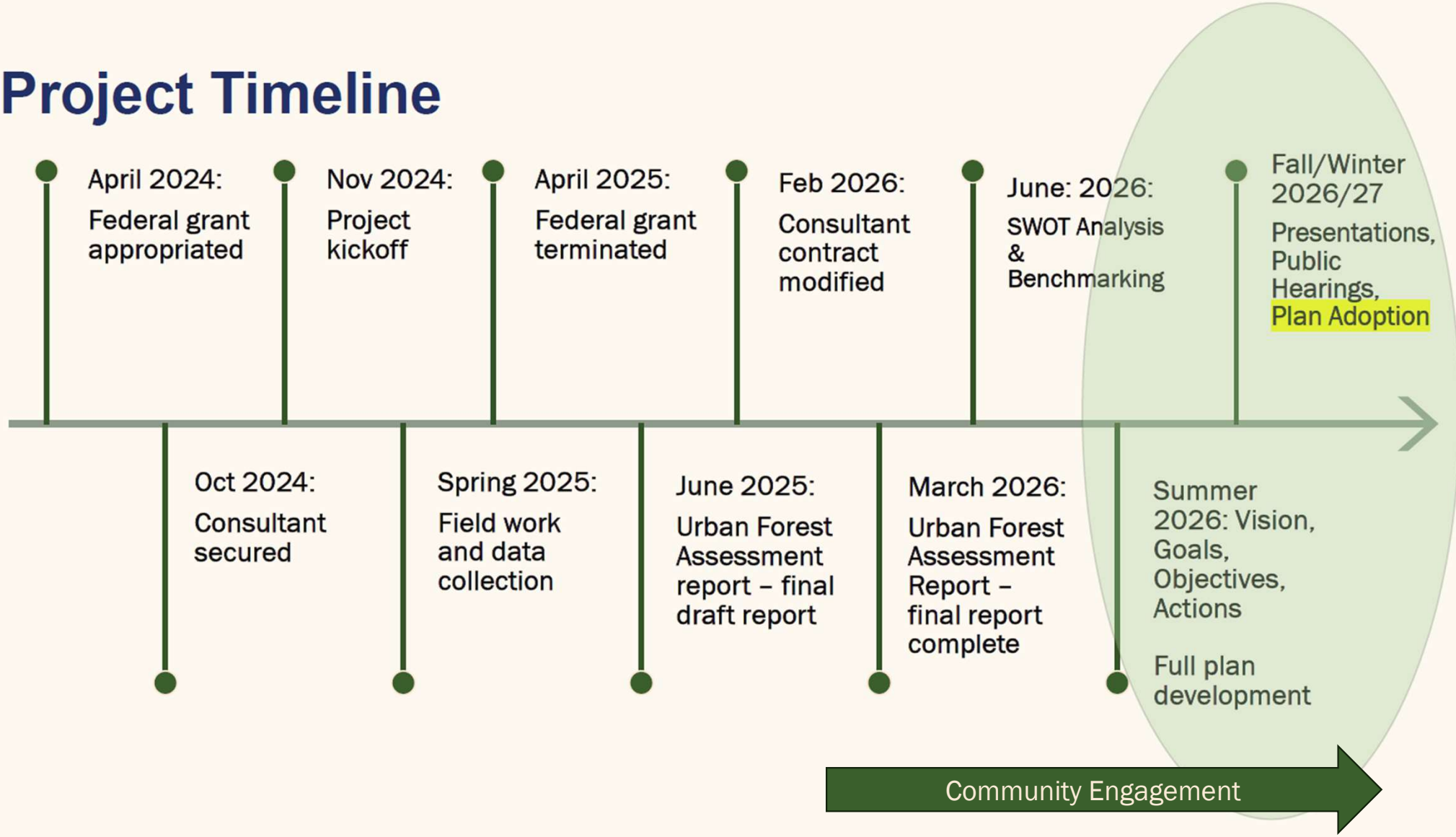
Agenda

1. Project Summary
2. Elements of the Plan
3. What do we have?
4. What do we want?
5. How do we get there?
6. What are we doing now?
7. Next Steps

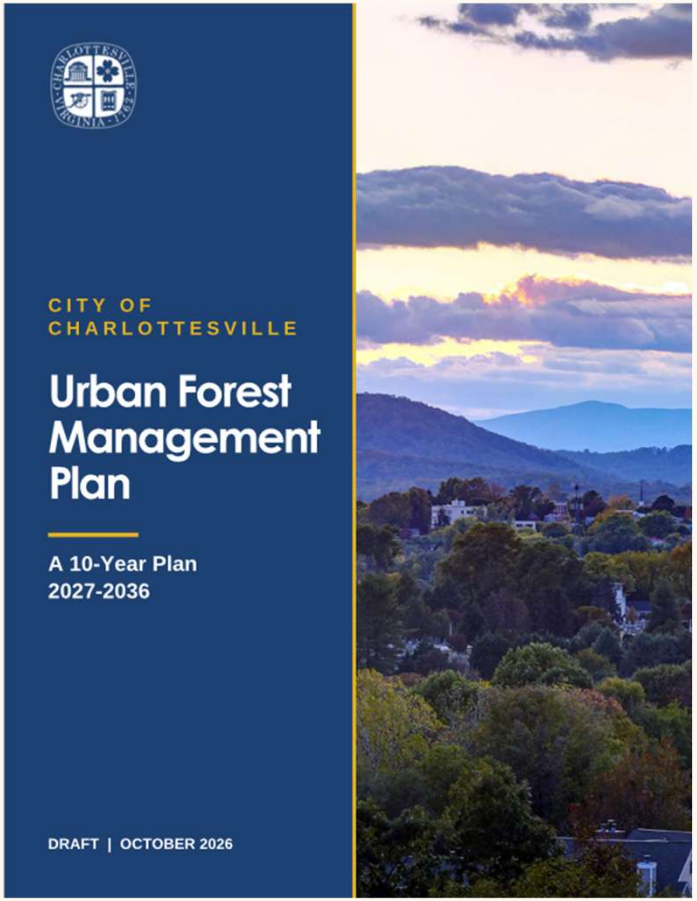
Project Scope & Goals

- In 2024, the City was **awarded grant funding** through the Inflation Reduction Act via the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service to support this project.
- Scope: A comprehensive review and update of the City's 2009 Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP), including robust urban forest assessment.
  - **Reflect current approaches** toward environmental stewardship, expanded sustainability goals, and commitments to equity and inclusion.
  - **Integrate a range of current materials relevant to urban forest management** (e.g., Climate Action Plan, Comprehensive Plan).
- Goals: **Update the current urban forest management plan to integrate climate action goals**, specifically targeting increased and equitable urban canopy coverage and greater stewardship capacity. This approach includes both **public and private properties**.
  - Project recognizes the need and opportunity to tackle a more **relevant, adaptive, and inclusive** approach to the management of our urban forest.

Project Timeline



Elements of the Urban Forest Management Plan



- Introduction
- Urban Forest Assessment
- Program and Policy
- Vision, Goals, Objectives
- Action Framework
- Monitoring and Adaptive Management
- Appendices

What do we have?



Urban Forest Assessment



Components

Tree Canopy Analysis

- Spatial analysis and aerial photography to capture insight about Charlottesville's canopy.

Street Tree Study

- Inventory involving 200 randomly selected 200 street segments.
- Trees were observed for species identification, relative age, relative health, and structural defects.

Vegetation Assessment

- Stratified random sampling of public and private properties
- Collected data on overstory and understory species composition, presence of invasive vegetation, and relative age and health of the urban forest across the City.

Urban Forest Assessment



Key Takeaways

Tree Canopy Analysis

- 2025 canopy coverage is 46%; ~10% decline from 2006
- Neighborhood canopy cover varies widely; plantable space also varies widely across neighborhoods
- Urban heat is directly linked to canopy cover
- Does not reflect health, diversity, or invasives

Street Tree Study

- Low number of street trees per centerline mile
- High rate of planting where possible
- Strong diversity
- Limited available space to plant large trees

Vegetation Assessment

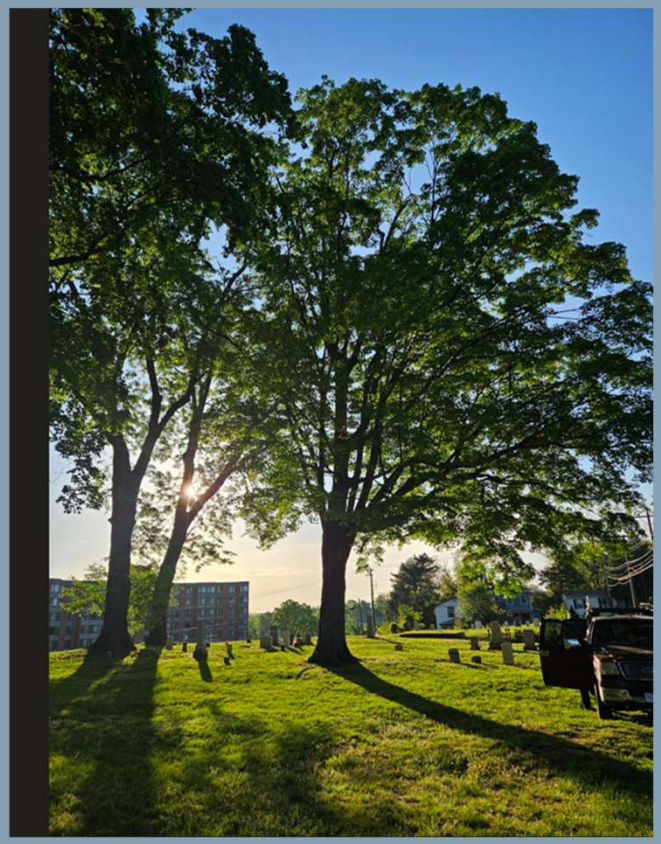
- Invasive trees make up 6% of the urban forest
- Invasive plants detected in 82% of plots
- Private property trees contribute 83% of the canopy and have more available space to plant medium and large trees

Program & Policy Context

- Status review of 2009 UFMP objectives
- Review of related City plans; identified opportunities for alignment
- Regulatory framework for tree conservation
- Program Benchmarking
- Staff and Community Partners Input (SWOT Analysis)
- Community Survey

What do we want?





Vision Statement – Charlottesville's Urban Forest

Every Charlottesville neighborhood has a healthy, resilient tree canopy that provides environmental, health, and economic benefits to its neighbors and visitors. The City, its partners, and the community work together across public and private land to protect, grow, and sustain the urban forest in the face of a changing climate.

Urban Forest Canopy Goals

- **10-year goal: 47% with an emphasis on avoiding loss and on forest quality**
- **2050 goal: 50%**
- **Neighborhood specific goals based on planting availability**

Neighborhood	Current Canopy (%)	Canopy Goal (%)
10th & Page	21	38
Barracks / Rugby	67	67
Barracks Road	32	38
Belmont	34	45
Fifeville	46	49
Fry's Spring	60	60
Greenbrier	59	59
Jefferson Park Avenue	33	43
Johnson Village	59	59
Lewis Mountain	47	52
Locust Grove	46	49
Martha Jefferson	41	46
North Downtown	34	42
Ridge Street	39	51
Rose Hill	31	44
Starr Hill	25	34
The Meadows	32	42
UVA	39	50
Venable	47	50
Woolen Mills	46	48

Note: Current canopy and canopy goals are rounded to the nearest whole percent.



Management Plan Goals

Goal 1:

Grow & Diversify Charlottesville's Trees and Forests

- **Objective 1.1:** Direct a majority of tree planting investments to neighborhoods identified as highest priority through the UFMP planting prioritization model, which accounts for existing canopy cover, heat vulnerability, stormwater value, socioeconomic factors, and available planting space.
- **Objective 1.2:** Increase street tree stocking citywide from the current 66% toward the recommended 75-80% minimum, concentrating new plantings in the largest open sites within priority neighborhoods.
- **Objective 1.3:** Diversify species composition in new plantings so that no single species, genus, or family dominates the canopy, prioritizing climate-ready native species chosen for heat, pest, and drought resilience.



Goal 2:

Conserve & Manage the Public Urban Forest

- **Objective 2.1:** Lead by example on City-managed land, meeting the same standards the City asks of private development and actively restoring canopy and native forest.
- **Objective 2.2:** Pursue acquisition of forested or environmentally significant private parcels to prevent canopy loss on properties that could otherwise be subject to future development, sale, or conversion.
- **Objective 2.3:** Manage City trees on a planned and proactive basis, guided by consistent standards for inspection, maintenance, removal, and planting.
- **Objective 2.4:** Control invasive species on City-owned lands and rights-of-way, prioritizing areas where removal delivers the greatest canopy and environmental benefits.
- **Objective 2.5:** Treat trees removed from City land as a resource rather than waste.



Goal 3:

Support Stewardship of Private Trees & Forests

- **Objective 3.1:** Increase participation in existing programs and expand technical and financial assistance for private property tree planting, preservation, and care.
- **Objective 3.2**: Increase tree canopy on private property through collaboration with nonprofit partners and private property owners.



Goal 4:

Expand Communication, Outreach, & Engagement

- **Objective 4.1:** Build understanding of urban forestry's role among City decision-makers.
- **Objective 4.2:** Increase public awareness of urban forestry programs and how to engage with them.
- **Objective 4.3:** Deliver place-based education and engagement across Charlottesville's neighborhoods.
- **Objective 4.4:** Work together with City staff, nonprofit partners, and community groups like CCS to make outreach more effective and avoid repeating efforts.
- **Objective 4.5:** Coordinate with the green industry in Charlottesville to enhance cooperation among nurseries, contractors, arborists, utility providers, and neighboring jurisdictions, such as Albemarle County.



Goal 5:

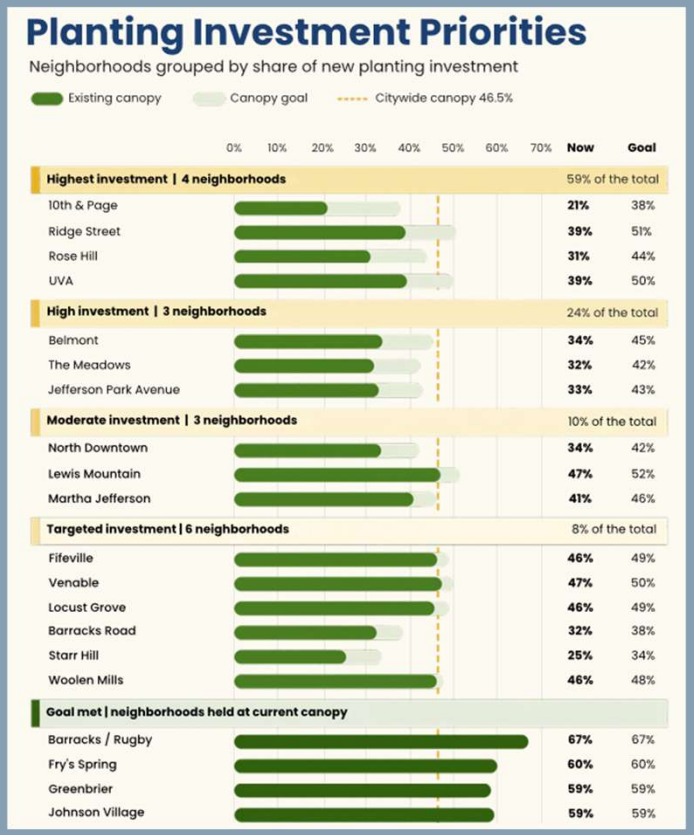
Build & Grow Program Effectiveness

- **Objective 5.1:** Align the staffing, data, and funding resources required to implement and sustain the UFMP.
- **Objective 5.2:** Manage tree risk on City property and rights-of-way through a documented approach to risk assessment, response, and storm coordination.
- **Objective 5.3:** Establish a standing interdepartmental coordination structure that brings Urban Forestry, Public Works, Utilities, and Neighborhood Development Services into regular dialogue on tree-related decisions to help prevent avoidable tree loss.
- **Objective 5.4:** Build the training, knowledge, and skill base of those who care for Charlottesville's trees, from current City staff to people entering the field, including students, veterans, and non-traditional candidates.
- **Objective 5.5:** Identify and engage in state and local policy opportunities
- **Objective 5.6:** Develop individual management plans for neighborhoods, parks, and schools

How do we get there?



Action Framework



- **Planting Investment Priorities**
- **Implementation Phasing**
- **Policy and Regulatory Recommendations**

Are we getting what we want?



Monitoring & Adaptive Management

- Is the canopy growing where it is needed most?
- Are our streets more tree-lined?
- Is our tree population getting more varied and resilient?
- Is the City managing trees and risk on a schedule instead of reacting to problems
- Are we growing and caring for canopy on City land?
- Is more forest being protected?
- Are neighbors planting and caring for trees on their own property?
- Are partners and the community taking part?
- Does the program have the people it needs?
- Is the City ready to use what the State allows?

What are we doing now?

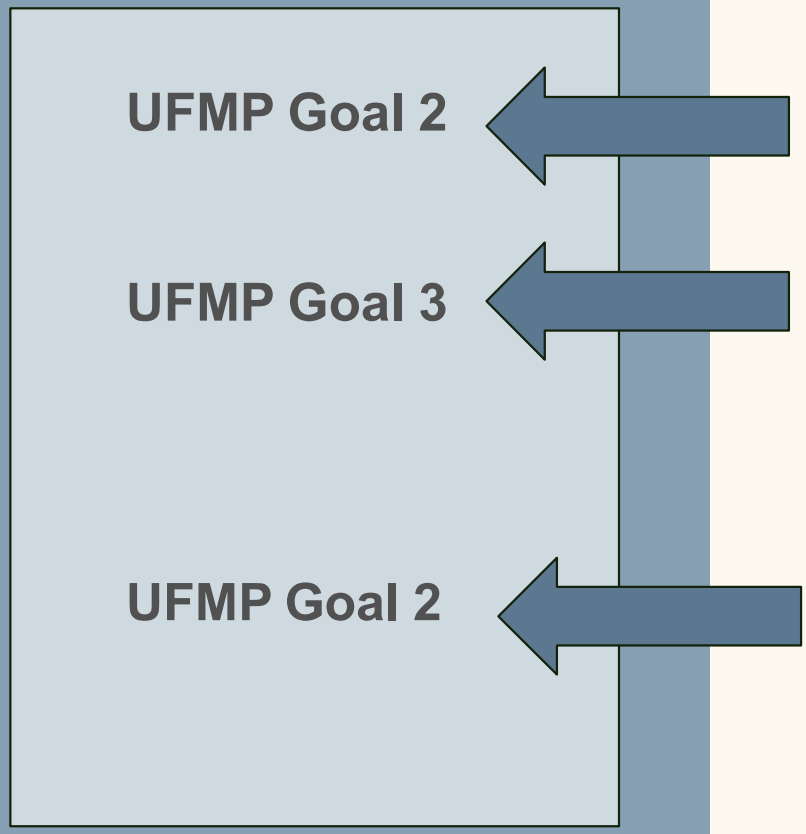


Actions Underway

Best Management Practices for Tree Preservation, Transplanting, Removal and Replacement

- Updating and upgrading Comprehensive Tree List – should improve likelihood of getting the right tree in the right place.
- Updating Tree Preservation Guide (BMPs)
- Creating a user-friendly “pocket guide” for tree preservation and development
- Opportunity to review and update, as needed, the Tree and Landscaping Guide
- Increased monitoring and enforcement of tree related zoning codes (regarding preservation and tree installations) aiming for increased tree survival.

2025 State of the Forest



Tree Commission Recommendations

Preserving Downtown Mall Trees – Downtown Mall Tree Management Plan

- Support both grant funding and annual city budgeting in order to finance all phases of the Downtown Mall Tree Management Plan

The Charlottesville Invasive Plant Partnership: Invasive Control on Private Properties

- Explore the provision of incentives and/or penalties to check the rampant growth of tree-killing invasive vines on private property
- Consider an ordinance to address the overgrowth of invasive vines analogous to the existing ordinance that prohibits the overgrowth of tall weeds on private properties (Code of Ordinance, section 5-149)

Canopy Collective: Advocating Opportunistic and Innovative Tree Planting on Public Land

- Consider proposals for alternative tree planting installations on publicly-owned parcels in low-canopy neighborhoods and downtown areas to pilot best practices and enhance the social and ecological value of publicly-owned land

2025 State of the Forest

UFMP Goals 3 & 5

UFMP Goal 3

Tree Commission Recommendations

Engagement with the City to Support Tree Preservation

Update City site plan guidance to facilitate preservation of mature trees.

- Engage a broad range of public and private stakeholders in steps to preserve mature trees on public and private lands.
- Document successful efforts to preserve trees in concert with site development.

Vulnerable Parcels

Emphasize and potentially expand key restrictions on site plan development to ensure protection of critical slopes, urban forest, and hydrological systems.

- Consider a zoning change to add a design overlay district for these ecologically sensitive parcels.
- Evaluate parcels with critical slopes, urban forest connections, and/or floodplains for potential City acquisition as both parkland/public space and green infrastructure investments, in support of Comprehensive Plan Goal 13.

Next Steps

Council/Commissions	Dates
City Council Work Session	11/16/2026
Meet the Plan: Drop-In Session (City Space 12-2:00)	11/17/2026
Meet the Plan: Drop-In Session (virtual 4-6:00)	11/18/2026
Climate Café (Botanical 9:30-11:00)	11/20/2026
Planning Commission - Presentation	11/24/2026
Planning Commission – Public Hearing & Action	1/12/2027
City Council – Public Hearing (first reading)	2/16/2027
City Council – Action (second reading - consent agenda item)	3/1/2027

Note: Goal is for plan adoption as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan

Planning Commission: Specific 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?
- Does 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?


Thank You