

2023 Forestry and Beautification Canopy Tree Replacement Proposal

Dear Mayor Compton and Town Councilmembers Dave Cosson, Christine Dibble, Sylvie Favret, Rob Gilmore, Eva Patrone, Barbara Raimondo, and Residents of Washington Grove:

A significant number of older canopy trees on Town property have died in recent years. Their removal has been all the more obvious because of their size, white oaks in particular. The Forestry and Beautification Committee thus shares the dismay of the Mayor and residents over the increasing loss of our beautiful Washington Grove tree canopy. We have already responded by increasing the number of trees installed over the past three years. Our committee has planted 246 trees over the past 12 years. We estimate an overall survival rate of at least 95%. From 2011 to 2019 we planted about 16 trees per year. From 2020 to 2022 we planted about 28 trees per year. This is only possible because we now have two highly knowledgeable team leaders. Both co-Chair, Audrey Maskery, and Jay Everhart, who is a Master Gardener, have been critical to enabling our greater number of tree installations.

In considering Mayor Compton's request to the committee for adding 26-28 new trees per planting season (which would be 52-56 new trees per year) the F&B Committee started by doing a survey of available planting locations. Audrey and Jay spent multiple days over two weeks walking the Town to make both a list and a map of potential tree planting sites. They took into consideration appropriate spacing for each mature tree while allowing for limitations on Town land due to water and sewer lines and overhead power lines. Areas where we know specimen trees are likely to be removed in the near future were also assigned new trees. In total, Jay and Audrey say we have planting sites for about 95-100 new trees. We suggest that planting about 24 trees (75-80% upper canopy) per year over the next 5 years would fulfill the Town's needs. At two years and four years we would do a complete reevaluation of our tree planting sites.

We share your concern over our loss of canopy as the large old trees die, but then we remind ourselves that it takes approximately 65 years to grow an oak to 50 feet of height and commensurate spread. The old oaks we are currently losing are closer to 80 feet tall. No matter how many trees we plant, we will not see the canopy of our current old trees in the near future. However, in 2006 our residential canopy was 59% mature trees and 41% immature canopy trees with 89% of the trees in good health (Dan Landry, 2006 Urban Forest Management Plan). And we have added substantially to the number of immature canopy trees in the past 12 years so we believe our long-term prospects are good.

One area we have been focusing on is to continue increasing the species diversity of our trees. The Landry report points out that in 2006 our residential forest consisted of approximately 39% white oak, 11% red oak, 6% red maple, 9% dogwood and 5% or less of other species. This could be disastrous if a tree disease specifically affecting white oaks was to occur as happened with the American Chestnut tree. Our efforts have focused on planting a variety of species that are native to the mid-Atlantic. We are also quite aware of the effects of climate change, and, therefore, are not planting trees whose southern range is not expected to include Montgomery County in the near future. The decline and death of large old white oaks in recent years due to natural causes is a reminder of how devastating a major infestation could be if concentrated on a single species of tree. Dan Landry's report proposed aiming for 35 % oak trees (but only 8 % white oak), 37%

other canopy trees and 28% flowering understory. In the past 12 years our committee has installed 28% oak (6% white oak), 45% other canopy trees, and 27% flowering understory trees. The Landry report also suggested utilizing some of the faster growing, urban-hardy trees like Pin Oak, Willow Oak, American Basswood, Sweet Gum, American Sycamore, River Birch, and Bald Cypress. Some, but not all, of these are long-lived trees. The F&B Committee has been diligent in buying fewer White Oak and adding other Piedmont native species. We find that nursery centers typically have a large number of trees of a few species at any one time. Over several seasons, a wider range of trees are available. Going forward we will look at using other vendors if we find good trees which are not available through Stadler. We have been exploring other vendors and can research contractors who would pick up trees, bring them to Washington Grove, and plant them. However, this is not a viable option for planting very large numbers of trees. Even though the committee does not actually plant the trees, we would need to continue to select appropriate sites, identify the right tree to plant in each unique site, supervise the planting, and monitor the tree care after that for at least 1-3 years, all of which is labor intensive for our committee.

The Forestry and Beautification Committee recommendation is to continue with our current planting rate of about 24 new trees per year while continuing to increase the overall species diversity. Although Washington Grove now looks different from the “Town within a Forest” many of us moved into 20-40 years ago, the Forestry and Beautification Committee is confident that we are providing what is needed for Washington Grove to continue into the future as the healthy and beautiful “Town within a Forest” we all love.