

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA



Agenda Date:	April 21, 2025
Action Required:	Adopt Resolution
Presenter:	Kristel Riddervold, Director of the Office of Sustainability
Staff Contacts:	Steven Gaines, Urban Forester Dan Frisbee
Title:	Resolution of Intent to Participate in the Biophilic Cities Program

Background

The City of Charlottesville, Virginia ("City"), has long-standing commitments to sustainability, environmental stewardship, and community health and wellness. The City has a rich and varied diversity of ecosystems that provide benefits to residents, workers, businesses, visitors, and the diverse species with whom we share our City and our region. The City's Comprehensive Plan includes the Priority Area "Keep Charlottesville green, make it greener, and protect the natural environment and the many benefits it provides." The opening paragraph of the Chapter 7 (Environment, Climate, and Food Equity) Community Vision Statement is "Charlottesville will be an environmental leader, with healthy air, water, and ecosystems, as well as ample, high-quality, and accessible open space and natural areas, and a preserved and enhanced tree canopy. The Rivanna River and other waterbodies will be celebrated and protected, and environmentally-sound community access will be enhanced".

The City has been encouraged to apply to participate in the Biophilic Cities Program ("Program"), which was initiated at the University of Virginia in 2011. The Program is a global network ("Network") of cities, scholars, and advocates working to build an understanding of the value and contribution of nature in cities to the lives of urban residents. The Network places nature at the core of design and planning, and works to create opportunities to learn about and connect with nature. Cities that join the Network can work with other Biophilic cities across the globe, participate in Network events, contribute policies and plans to a resource library, and more. Currently, sixteen (16) U.S. cities are members, with four (4) from Virginia (Arlington, Norfolk, Richmond, and Reston).

Discussion

Biophilia, a term popularized by the renowned biologist E.O. Wilson, refers to the innate connection of humans to the natural world. Examples of biophilia include:

- The sense of peace and well-being experienced when spending time in nature;
- The attraction to natural landscapes, like forests and oceans;
- The enjoyment of animals and plants; and

- The preference for natural materials and designs in architecture and interior design.

A Biophilic City is one that contains abundant biodiversity and nature that works to conserve that nature, as well as creatively insert new forms of nature, and fosters connections to the natural world. It understands and celebrates that its role is to provide habitat for many different forms of life, and advocate for humane co-existence. There are many clear and tangible benefits that flow from fostering urban connections to nature. These benefits include economic growth, positive educational impacts, and healthier, happier, and more productive cities. Nature in the city, moreover, helps to make cities and urban neighborhoods more resilient and livable, and this nature provides extensive and economically valuable ecosystem services.

The City has already incorporated Biophilic principles into a number of major policy documents and programs that embody the City's related values and priorities, including the Comprehensive Plan, the Rivanna River Corridor Plan, the Climate Action Plan, the Development Code, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the Urban Forest Management Plan, and the Water Resources Protection Program.

Through a number of existing efforts, the City is already a Biophilic City, with numerous ways in which residents and visitors can already interact with and benefit from nature across the City.

- The City has a commitment to a healthy and robust urban forest as well as its network of water resources, an appreciation for native species and diversity, and an understanding of the role of nature in addressing and responding to the climate crisis.
- Nature elements are found in 2,300 acres of parks, school grounds, natural areas, landscape beds, medians/rights of way, and urban plazas/streetscapes.
- The City has been a TREE CITY USA since 2006, has an active Tree Commission, funds an active urban forestry program (tree planting, restoration, invasives management), and is working on a comprehensive update of its Urban Forest Management Plan.
- The City has tackled a number of nature-based solutions including stream restoration projects, forested wetlands, rain gardens, other green stormwater infrastructure, and pollinator gardens with consideration for appropriate, native plants.
- Biophilic design has been integrated into various public projects, including several LEED-certified facilities and public spaces.
- The City's Development Code includes requirements to protect and maintain environmental quality.
- An extensive and growing bike/pedestrian trail network offers a variety of opportunities to travel through and experience the City's urban and natural areas.
- Community gardens and urban farms offer hands-on experiences that also address food access interests.
- The community also benefits from numerous community-based organizations whose missions involve environmental conservation, restoration, education, engagement, stewardship, inspiration, sustainability, human and environmental well-being, and more.

Additional and intriguing efforts to further Biophilic Cities objectives are being explored and access to the global Network will provide opportunities to discover strategies and solutions. Additionally, there

is strong community interest in ongoing regional approaches to this work, building on past collaborations and developing a regional Biophilic framework.

To become a Partner City, cities must submit an official Resolution, narrative statement, and list of municipal indicators by which Biophilic qualities can be assessed and progress can be evaluated over time. Partner Cities designate a specific Staff person (proposed to be the Office of Sustainability Director) who will serve as the City's Biophilic Cities Network Contact and Coordinator. Initial membership is for two (2) years; partner status is renewable for subsequent periods of two to five (2 - 5) years.

Alignment with City Council's Vision and Strategic Plan

This action is in direct alignment with City Council's Strategic Plan Framework's outcome areas of Climate Action, Recreation, Arts, and Culture, and Partnerships, as well as the Comprehensive Plan.

Community Engagement

The Priority Area in the City's Comprehensive Plan is the outcome of intensive community engagement efforts. Similarly, the development of the Climate Action Plan and Parks and Recreation Master Plan were the result of extensive community engagement, supporting related principles. Both City Programs, and various community partners, have and will continue to offer ongoing engagement and volunteering opportunities related to connecting with and valuing nature in the City.

Budgetary Impact

There is no financial impact on the City's General Fund.

Recommendation

City Staff recommends City Council adopt the attached Resolution of Intent to Participate in the Biophilic Cities Program.

Alternatives

Continue locally-driven and biophilia-inspired efforts, without connection to this global Network.

Attachments

1. Biophilic Cities Resolution
2. Biophilic Cities 04212025