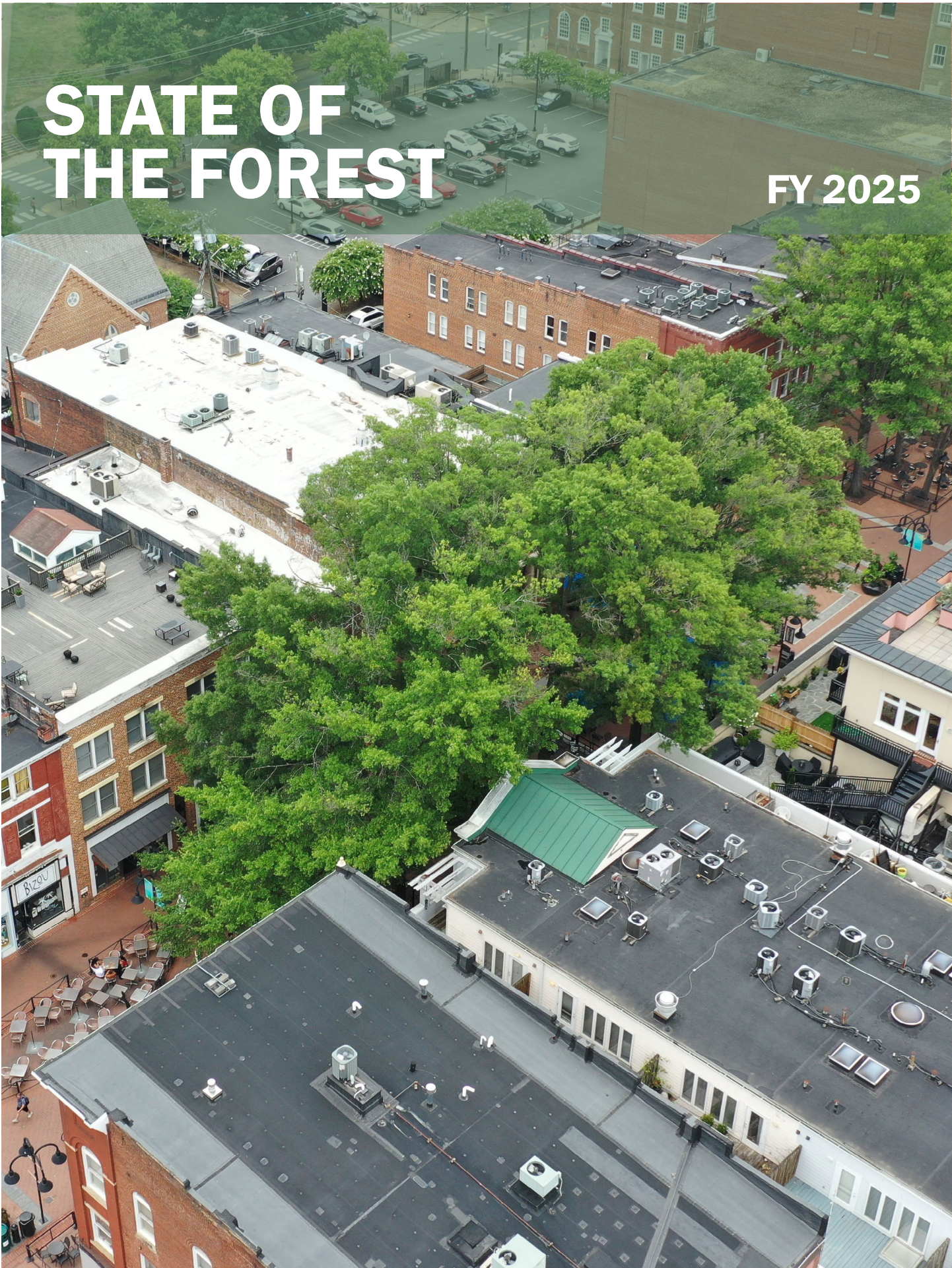


STATE OF THE FOREST

FY 2025



Downtown Mall Trees (Image source: Wolf Josey Landscape Architects)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



*White Oak in Forest Hills Park,
(Image source: Charlottesville
Area Tree Stewards)*

The *State of the Forest* is an annual report published by the Charlottesville Tree Commission, which:

- Is tasked with advising City Council, the Planning Commission, and City staff on policy and programs related to tree planting and preservation
- Advocates for and educates the public about the value of the urban canopy, its enhancement, and preservation
- Attends to concerns about canopy equity across city neighborhoods

This FY 2025 report presents data on tree plantings and removals, preservation work, invasive-species management, and new initiatives across public and private lands. It highlights that Charlottesville has a relatively large mature canopy, but that it is low quality and increasingly vulnerable to age-related decline, heat stress, development pressures, and invasive species. The report also notes that opportunities to plant new large trees within the city are limited.

In addition to these findings, the report outlines Tree Commission initiatives focused on improving consideration of tree preservation during development, mapping vulnerable unbuilt parcels, supporting updates to environmental codes and policies, and advancing equity-centered planting strategies. This work aims to help the city balance increased housing density with efforts to build a more resilient and equitable Charlottesville.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations from the Tree Commission to City Council in support of tree preservation and planting are presented below:

Preserving Downtown Mall Trees - The 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).

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: Visualizing the Precarity and Value of Privately-owned Urban Forest 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.

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.

LETTER FROM OUR URBAN FORESTER

Dear Charlottesville Community,

In my four years serving you all, Charlottesville has come to expect and encourage rapid population growth leading to a scarcity of space for both people and trees. We must keep advocating for planting and preserving trees amid the pressing need to expand housing. As a rapidly-growing medium-sized city, Charlottesville is in a unique position to lead tree preservation efforts, additionally bolstered by being a city with both a Climate Action Plan and a Comprehensive Plan. We have the interest and expertise to manage our canopy, and we'll have the added support of a newly-created Zoning Inspector, Oak Bradshaw. He will be overseeing tree permitting and compliance regarding tree planting, preservation, and removal regulations during development processes across the city.

Looking at the fiscal year ahead—and out at our shared canopy—**preserving the trees we have is absolutely key.** Our oldest trees are under heavy stress from heat, developmental pressures, soil compaction, and insects/pathogens. Invasive species, which the city and its community partners do their best to manage, add additional stress to large-canopy trees across our neighborhoods.

We are crucially short of spaces with the soil volume to accommodate large shade trees. While we do have room to plant new small trees, there are limited suitable sites to plant large trees besides our public parks and schools. In those landscapes, we're also constrained to maintain multi-use lawn spaces. Given these limitations, it is imperative that we preserve shade trees for their ecosystem services, historic value, and community benefits.

Saving trees is more cost-efficient than removing them. When looking at the cost of saving versus removing trees, removal costs far exceed the cost of tree maintenance and care. In terms of working with, not against, development in the city, we will continue building an evidence-based case (potentially supported by parcel-based metrics for earlier involvement and collaboration) when it comes to tree preservation and site planning.

Finally, there has been substantial progress on a new Urban Forest Management Plan, expected to be completed in Fall of 2026, supervised and drafted by Eocene. The Management Plan is a living document that provides an adaptive approach aspiring to restore Charlottesville's urban canopy and urban forest, maintain an intact and healthy forest canopy, and provide ecological services across the City. This adaptive plan will help steer street tree maintenance programs and help make informed decisions on where to focus annual tree installations. Draft findings reveal a wide disparity of canopy cover among Charlottesville's 19 neighborhoods, ranging from 21% (10th & Page) to 60% (Fry's Spring).

Citywide, our trees' condition mandates more attention, care, management, and funding to ensure a more robust and equitable canopy.

Sincerely,

Steven Gaines, Urban Forester
Charlottesville Parks and Recreation

I. CITY & COMMUNITY URBAN FORESTRY WORK

This section provides a snapshot of the urban forestry work completed by Charlottesville City Parks and Recreation and community partners in FY 2025. Tables 1 - 6, provide further details on tree planting, removals, preservation and reforestation efforts and outcomes.

Planting and preserving vigorous urban tree canopy is critical to meeting the challenges of climate change—including the dangers of increased heat and flooding—as well as to providing the green infrastructure for healthy, flourishing neighborhoods. The majority of the City’s Urban Forestry’s resources that are focused on protecting and enhancing the urban tree canopy are devoted to the targeted removal of hazardous and dying trees, the preservation and protection of our valuable mature trees, and the restoration of our urban forests.

A. TREE PLANTINGS AND REMOVALS

Trees Planted on Public Properties in FY 2025

Table 1 details tree planting numbers on **public properties** over the course of FY 2025. Tree locations and species selections planted in city schools, parks, and ROWs are chosen based on observations by the Urban Forester with the aid of GreenPrint 1.0 data on planting space and in consideration of the right species for the right site.

Organizational Entity	Number of Trees	Location
Urban Forestry Annual Planting	133 2" caliper trees	City-Wide (ROW, Schools, Parks)
Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards	32 1-2" caliper trees	McIntire Park
Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards	6 saplings	Bennett’s Village site in Pen Park
ReLeaf Cville	8 1" caliper trees	ROW Riverside Drive Public Housing
ReLeaf Cville	6 1" caliper trees	Meade Park
TOTAL	179 1-2" caliper trees 6 saplings TOTAL: 185	

Table 1: Tree Plantings on Public Properties

Comparison of Trees Planted and Trees Removed, FY 2017-2025

Although it is impossible to track the overall number of trees planted and removed in Charlottesville as a whole, it is possible to track the number of trees planted and removed on city properties, as tallied over the years in Table 2 below. It should be noted that trees planted are young trees, which will take 20 years to mature to the point where they are providing significant ecosystem services. By contrast, those removed are disproportionately

mature trees that have, over their lifetime, provided significant ecoservices, but which now must be removed due to disease, storm damage, or structural failure. The high number of removals during the FY 2023 and FY 2024—and the corresponding lower number of removals in FY 2025—were due in part to the ravages of the emerald ash borer infestation and its relative abatement in FY 2025.

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Trees planted	70	161	132	151	23	139	162	181	133
Trees removed	131	167	108	142	118	??	180	130	64
Total	-52	-6	+26	+9	-95	??	-48	+51	+69

Table 2: Trees Planted (2" caliper) vs. Trees Removed 2017-2025



City planting of a 2" caliper oak tree in 2025 (Image Source: Steven Gaines)

Trees Planted and Removed in FY 2025 on City Properties, by Neighborhood

For the first time, we are able to provide statistics for trees planted and removed for each neighborhood. Table 3 shows the percentage of tree plantings and removals (out of the city-wide total), as well as the number of trees planted by location and by size.

Neighborhood	% Planted of Total	% Removed of Total	Trees Planted in Rights of Way	Trees Planted in Parks	Trees Planted in Schools	# of Small Trees Planted	# of Medium Trees Planted	# of Large Trees Planted
10th and Page	2%	20%	1	1	0	0	1	1
Barracks/Rugby	0%	2%	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bellmont	14%	8%	7	10	0	4	2	13
Fifeville	14%	8%	8	5	0	7	2	4
Fry Spring	5%	2%	0	2	0	0	0	2
Greenbrier	5%	2%	0	0	6	2	4	4
Johnson Village	0%	17%	0	0	0	0	0	0
JPA	4%	0%	4	0	3	3	2	3
Lewis Mountain	3%	0%	4	0	0	0	2	2
Little High	0%	3%	0	0	0	0	0	0
Locust Grove	5%	7%	5	0	0	0	2	2
Martha Jefferson	6%	3%	7	0	0	2	1	4
Meadows	8%	2%	21	0	0	3	3	16
North Downtown	11%	24%	16	2	0	0	3	10
Ridge	10%	0%	8	6	0	4	6	1
Rose Hill	5%	0%	6	0	0	6	0	1
Starr Hill	2%	0%	1	1	0	0	1	1
Venable	6%	0%	4	2	3	5	0	3
Woolen Mills	0%	2%	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	100.00	100.00	92	29	12	36	29	67

Table 3: Trees Planted and Removed on City Properties, by Neighborhood

What is absent from the above tables is data concerning trees planted and removed through development projects. Together, both Neighborhood Development Services and Parks and Recreation have the capacity to report this data, along with data from the tree removal permit process. In future State of the Forest reports, we hope that such information can be added to the above data to allow for trend recognition within neighborhoods that can steer both tree planting and preservation efforts.

Trees Planted on Private Properties

Because more than 80% of land in Charlottesville is privately owned, the health and extent of the tree canopy in Charlottesville also depends on planting trees on private properties. We can not account for all trees planted in Charlottesville, but Table 4 details reported tree planting numbers on **private properties** over the course of FY 2025.

Organizational Entity	Number of Trees	Location
City Public Utilities Energy Saving Program: trees and shrubs	100 240	Fall 2024 Tree Giveaway Spring 2025 Tree Giveaway
Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards: 1-2" caliper trees	39	10 th and Page Neighborhood
ReLeaf Cville: 1" caliper trees	140	Woolen Mills
TOTAL	519	

Table 4: Public Utilities and Nonprofit-administered Tree Plantings on Private Properties

The total reported tree plantings on public and private properties during FY 2025 is 704.

B. TREE PRESERVATION AND REFORESTATION PROJECTS

In light of the limited amount of public land in the city on which to plant large shade trees and the long time-span to achieve tree maturity, the proactive work of caring for young trees, preserving mature trees – including the Downtown Mall trees – and undertaking larger-scale invasive control and reforestation projects has assumed greater importance in Charlottesville’s overall forest management program.

Tree Preservation Efforts on Public and Private Properties

Parks and Recreation has dedicated increased time and resources to the care and preservation of both newly established and mature trees on public lands. This involves the labor-intensive work of pruning, mulching, mowing, watering (especially in periods of drought), disease/pest treatments, and invasive species control. Statistics on tree pruning and pathogen and insect infestation mitigation are given below in Table 5. Pruning and other preservation measures are critical to improve long-term structural integrity, maintain health, reduce risk of storm damage, and ensure safety. These proactive preservation measures are especially imperative for trees that, because of particularities of

their location, will be exceptionally difficult to replace (e.g., in cemeteries and very small, restricted rights of ways).

This is the first year that the number of trees pruned surpassed the number of trees removed, due to the increased emphasis on preservation and to the fact that fewer Ash trees are now being removed.

Preservation Measures	Number of Trees	Locations
Tree pruning	306	City-wide
Tree pruning, inspections, and treatments for pathogens/insect infestations	55 Willow oaks	Downtown Mall Trees
Stem injections to arrest insect infestations	36 Ash trees	City-wide
Stem injections to arrest insect infestations	7 American elm trees	City-wide

Table 5: FY 2025 tree preservation measures undertaken city-wide on public land

With regard to **private lands**, a new program initiated by ReLeaf Cville—with a 3-year grant from the Virginia Department of Forestry—has likewise focused on the preservation of mature trees—in particular, in high heat-index, low canopy neighborhoods in Charlottesville. This past year, ReLeaf treated 48 trees in the Fifeville neighborhood, offering free pruning, disease/pest treatments, and invasive species control.

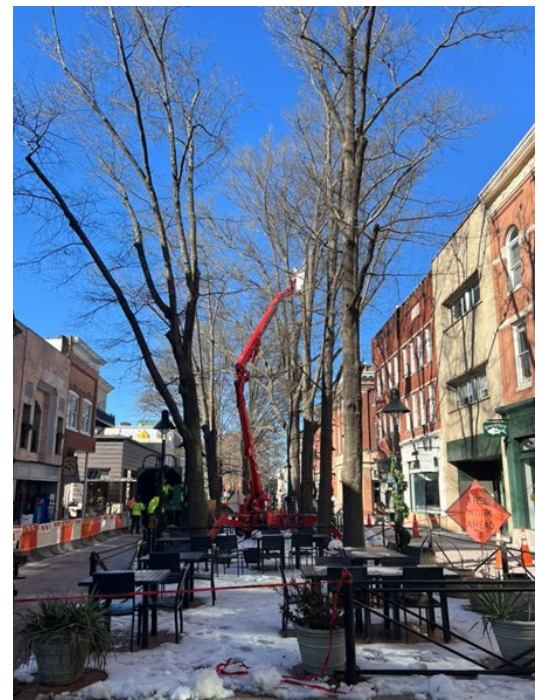
Preserving Downtown Mall Trees - The Downtown Mall Tree Management Plan

As we near the Downtown Mall’s 50th anniversary, the City of Charlottesville has the opportunity to reinvest in our Downtown Mall trees and the vibrant social life they shelter and shade. As a result of a shifting environment, rising temperatures, and declining mall infrastructure, the Mall’s aging willow oaks have begun to decline and, in some cases, have had to be removed. Wolf Josey’s Management Plan details short- and long-term goals to protect and preserve existing trees, and to support the development of a cohesive and durable canopy and tree groves along the city’s bustling Downtown Mall. Short- and long-term goals include:

- Restore the Mall’s historic intent and visibility of the original design
- Protect existing trees, replace declining groves
- Address infrastructural issues (metal tree grates, sub-surface conditions)
- Diversify tree selection for greater resilience

RECOMMENDATION:

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



Left: The Downtown Mall Tree Management Plan, available online [HERE](#); Right: Annual pruning on the Downtown Mall Trees (Image Source: Steven Gaines)

Invasive Species Management and Forest Restoration Projects

As is amply evident throughout the city, the destructive effects of invasive vines have taken a major toll on our mature trees, strangling and smothering them, and ultimately killing them. To counter these devastating effects on large swaths of our urban forest, in the Fall of 2023, Steven Gaines and Parks and Recreation initiated an ambitious comprehensive plan for invasive species management and reforestation with native trees and ground cover species to be carried out on the city's **public properties**. This project has continued through FY 2025. It must be emphasized that, in addition to newly reforested areas, the maintenance of previous years' efforts—in order to control invasive species long term—must be continued over multiple years, thus cumulatively adding to the acreage that must be attended to each year.

Parks and Recreation has addressed tree-devouring invasive vines through a combination of methods (forestry mulcher, goat browsing, and chemical treatments), followed by replanting treated areas with seedlings and groundcover installations. Over the FY 2023 and 2024, Parks and Recreation has implemented restoration activities on approximately 42.17 acres, installed 1,375 tree seedlings, and liberated hundreds of trees from invasive vines. For details on the parks, trails, cemeteries, and other areas benefitting from these reforestation efforts, see Table 6.

Adding to these efforts, the Rivanna Conservation Alliance (RCA) has carried out extensive forest restoration efforts along the Rivanna River as part of their Forest Health and Resilience Project, planting an additional 1103 seedlings in Riverview and Pen Parks, as also noted in Table 6.

Organizational Entity	# Acres Restored	# Seedlings Planted	Location
Urban Forestry Parks and Recreation FY2025	17.62	115 1-2 year seedlings Plus hundreds of mature trees liberated	Parks, trails, and cemeteries city-wide
Urban Forestry Parks and Recreation FY2024	24.55	1260	Parks, trails, and cemeteries city-wide
Rivanna Conservation Alliance FY2025	Undetermined	1103 seedlings	In Riverview and Pen Parks
Total over 2 years	42.17	2478 seedlings	

Table 6: Forested acres restored, seedlings planted, and mature trees liberated in Charlottesville



Left: Before invasive removal at Sunrise Elementary School; Right: After invasive removal (Image Source: Steven Gaines)



Left: Before invasive removal at Riverview Park; Right: After invasive removal (Image Source: Steven Gaines)

The Charlottesville Invasive Plant Partnership (CHIPP) addresses the urgency to preserve mature trees in our city canopy by focusing on the scourge of invasive vines that afflict properties in the city that are in **private hands**. CHIPP is a coalition of governmental and non-profit community groups¹ that is building neighborhood-based collaborative teams trained to identify and safely liberate neighborhood trees from the adverse strangling and smothering effects of invasive vines.

In the FY 2024 State of the Forest, CHIPP had just taken its first steps to engage two neighborhoods—Kelly Town and Little High—that had expressed a willingness to help develop and participate in a pilot program with CHIPP. Working together with our pilot neighborhoods, CHIPP has made considerable progress in crafting a program—consisting of the steps outlined below—that can now be adjusted to accommodate the circumstances in other neighborhoods.

In both neighborhoods, we have:

- **Met with neighbors in a meeting and/or a walk** to learn about their neighborhood, the trees they love, the areas of most concern, and how we can work together to liberate neighborhood trees from invasive vines.
- **Partnered with neighbors to conduct a survey** of all neighborhood properties, recorded the number of trees with invasive vines on each property, and left a door hanger with information about invasive vines, how to treat them, and how to contact the neighborhood CHIPP liaison.
 - Of the 364 properties in Kelly Town, we found 151 (41.48%) had trees with invasive vines, and this did not include the HOA forested common areas in Robinson Woods, Amherst Commons, Madison Place, and Westwood Circle that have all been consumed by English Ivy and other vines.
 - Of the 295 properties in Little High (not including those in the City Walk development), we found 147 (49.83%) had trees with invasive vines on them.
- **Conducted a training for neighbors** on how to ID invasive vines, what tools and precautions are needed when cutting vines, and how to cut vines effectively and safely.
- **Conducted workdays** with combined teams of neighbors and CHIPP volunteers.
 - Counting both the training workday in Robinson Woods Commons and one additional workday in Madison Place Commons, these teams **liberated a total of 224 trees in Kelly Town**.
 - Counting the training workday at The Farm and 7 workdays composed of neighbor/CHIPP teams or individuals, **a total of 327 trees were liberated in Little High**.
- **Created a Google form for both survey and workday data collection**. Data collected

¹ CHIPP's partners include: the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont, Blue Ridge PRISM; Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards; Charlottesville's Office of Sustainability, Parks and Recreation, and Tree Commission; Piedmont Master Gardeners; ReLeaf Cville; Rivanna Conservation Alliance; the Rivanna Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists; and the Virginia Native Plant Society.

in the field for each property is automatically submitted to a spreadsheet, which, in turn, can be translated into a neighborhood map with a pin drop for each property observed to have trees with invasive vines. This will allow us to track our progress in each neighborhood.



Left: CHIPP Invasive training session in Little High; Right: Invasive removal workday in Kelly Town (Image source: CHIPP Photo Archive)

In addition, CHIPP has engaged in a number of educational and capacity-building endeavors. To this end, CHIPP has presented our program and goals at a number of city events, attended or tabled at various neighborhood events, trained 21 volunteers who are prepared to train neighborhood volunteers in safe and proper invasive species control methods, and created a number of educational and communication tools.

CHIPP continues to grow! We are currently initiating a new CHIPP program in the Fry's Spring neighborhood, and we are engaged in preliminary conversations for programs in the Greenbriar neighborhood and with the Locust Meadows HOA, whose Commons cover 15.28 acres of forested land along Meadow Creek.

What Can the City Do to Help?

CHIPP has encountered over and over again terrible tangles of invasive vines adversely affecting larger and smaller swaths of urban forest—particularly on rental properties, on properties with absentee landlords overseen by management companies, on the back side of commercial properties, in the common areas of HOA developments, on properties held for years by developers waiting to develop, and on derelict properties. The lack of attention to the adverse effects of these invasive vines on private properties has had serious, visible consequences for the state and health of our tree canopy across the city.



One of the many forested parcels in the city with trees destroyed by invasive vines (Image source: Susan McKinnon)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 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).

Contact CHIPP at: cvillechipp@gmail.com

Join us on our Instagram platform! [@cvillechipp](https://www.instagram.com/cvillechipp)

II. TREE COMMISSION INITIATIVES

In support of the emphasis on tree planting and, increasingly, on tree preservation, the Charlottesville Tree Commission has been working on three initiatives, which we outline in the sections below.

A. ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CITY TO SUPPORT TREE PRESERVATION

The Tree Commission met with city staff in September to discuss potential paths to engage a range of stakeholders in preserving large trees. In the short term, the Tree Commission is developing a tree preservation guide that charts opportunities for tree preservation presented throughout the development process. In the longer term, there are opportunities for engagement with other preservation initiatives that we look forward to participating in.

Tree Preservation Guide

In Spring 2025, in the course of further development of the Kindlewood property, an additional city-owned 50-year-old Pin Oak in the public right of way on Garrett Street was lost when utility lines were cut across the tree's roots. With no likelihood of survival, at the city's request, the tree was cut down. This event precipitated a letter from the Tree Commission to the city on May 21, which outlined priorities for tree preservation (the "Garrett Street Letter," see Appendix 1).

Mature trees, like those lost in the public right of way around the Kindlewood site, provide exponential value to the city landscape. New tree plantings cannot replace these lost trees in terms of the benefits they provide or the cost to bring new trees to maturity. Notably, the Kindlewood development neighborhood is already experiencing lower-than-average tree canopy coverage. The further loss of tree canopy for this neighborhood will mean higher temperatures, lower air quality, and fewer benefits for health and well-being that are associated with access to nature.



Left: Aerial showing location of Garrett Street tree removal; Right: Utility trenching immediately adjacent to tree forcing its removal (Image source: Steven Gaines)

In brief, the letter proposed the following steps to preserve large trees in the city:

- Updates to city administrative guidance for the preparation of site plans and tree preservation plans
- Identification of opportunities for assistance from certified arborists
- Clarification of the process for the newly required tree removal permits
- Consideration of new adoptions for bonding to protect mature trees during construction
- Mechanisms for the enforcement of local requirements supporting tree preservation
- Revision of the stormwater fee use and structure to emphasize tree preservation
- Revaluation of existing and adoption of new incentives for tree preservation on private lands

The tree preservation guide will include a recommendation to map a site's mature trees before design even begins, so that design will occur within the context of the trees that exist on-site and not imagine the site to be a blank slate. With this mapping, architectural designs can include scaled drawings of trees for preservation and critical root zones to avoid. During construction, steps can be taken to ensure adequate buffers and mechanisms for protection that include silt fencing and the use of other best management practices. Post-development measures include measures for long-term care and maintenance. As the guide will emphasize, the city can provide help and assistance at all stages of development to support tree preservation as prioritized in its comprehensive and climate action plans. Lastly, the guide will provide links (via QR codes) to the tools and materials that the city has in place to provide tree preservation support.

An initial draft is underway. The Tree Commission hopes to engage the local development community in creating the guide. It is intended as a resource for this community, and their insights on how it could be most useful would be invaluable.

Ongoing Collaborations with the City

The Tree Commission also hopes to continue to partner in future city discussions related to the development of local code provisions and planning guidance that support tree preservation in balance with other city priorities. These include increasing the canopy credit provided for retention of mature trees, developing local code provisions and planning guidance to include a consideration of tree preservation, and restructuring the stormwater fee to incentivize the reduction in impervious surfaces and to support green infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 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.

B. VULNERABLE PARCELS: VISUALIZING THE PRECARITY AND VALUE OF PRIVATELY-OWNED URBAN FOREST PARCELS

Many of the largest unbuilt parcels remaining in the city are also sites with outsized ecological value and sensitivity, and once built upon, their existing value can never be reproduced. The Tree Commission urges that greater attention be given to ensuring the protection of vulnerable aspects of these sites, leading to development proposals adapted to work with and around particular, important site constraints. An important first step to understanding our collective, urban ecological assets, and how the remaining unbuilt parcels contribute to this network, is to identify and visualize these parcels in map format with corresponding site information.

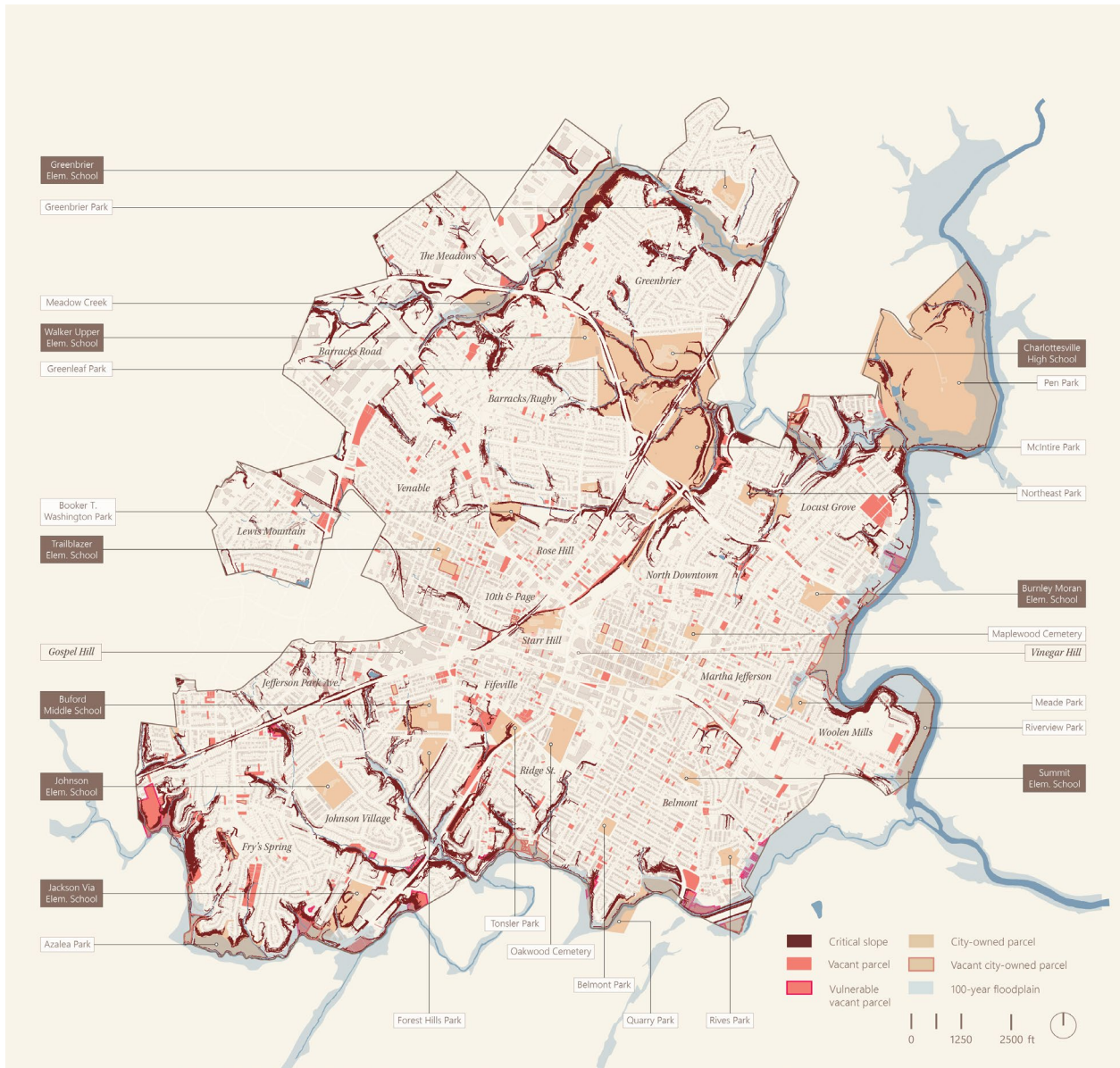
As Charlottesville is undergoing significant, rapid development, it has an opportunity to balance the critical need for more built density to address the current housing shortage and the concurrent need to bolster the city's ecological health and natural infrastructure with smart, sustainable development practices. While we strongly support maxing out high-density development in already-impacted sites, we suggest that a shift in expectations for maximum build-out on greenfield sites will be an important factor in ensuring the livability of our city into the future.

The Commission is working to map the remaining currently forested parcels that are unbuilt and, as such, poised for development. This effort highlights forested parcels located in floodplains, riparian buffers and/or including critical slopes, along with urban forest patches of significant size or connective importance, recognizing simultaneously the substantial ecological services these parcels provide to the city's hydrological, urban forest, urban shade and wildlife systems and their vulnerability to destruction due to development. If these parcels are identified before plans are in place for development, and their protection is prioritized, design choices can be made early in the site study process to facilitate both the creation of housing and the protection of urban forest systems. We plan to use GreenPrint 1.0—which communicates the importance and extent of natural infrastructure in the city—as a resource. We intend to produce maps that highlight unbuilt, privately-owned parcels that GreenPrint 1.0 assigns high ecological value, checking that we update findings with urban changes since 2017.

The study of vulnerable, unbuilt sites we propose would dovetail with the Neighborhood Development Services's project launched last year "Environmental Regulations and Policy Review Project: Existing Conditions and Recommended Areas of Study." In particular, our mapping effort would support aligned objectives with this NDS project to balance the priorities of housing density and stewardship of natural resources as expressed in the Comprehensive Plan and to increase community resilience in the face of increased heat and flood risk. We would suggest building on this initiative's strong momentum, offering mapping in support of the City staff's stated objectives and potential outcomes.

The parcels we are focused on—critical slopes, floodplains, and forested parcels—are already subject to city oversight. However, while the critical slopes ordinance requires a special exception to build on slopes greater than 25%, this waiver is rarely withheld from proposed projects. Floodplains are even more vulnerable to development pressure, as they may be built

on with a permit and a variance. And larger parcels of urban forest are only nominally protected in the site planning process through the tree removal permit, but insufficient incentives prevent developers from pursuing more extensive protection.



Preliminary mapping of vulnerable parcels containing to floodplains and critical slopes (Map source: Canopy Collective)

The remainder of large-scale parcels for potential development in the city contain a high degree of ecological sensitivity. Additional information to contextualize the ecological value of these vulnerable parcels in site plan review would allow the city to make more informed decisions early in the review process. Seeing how a parcel under review may be one of a limited number of remaining tracts with critical slopes, floodplains, and/or contiguous forestland will help weigh specific development plans against larger sustainability goals that have been set by the city. If the dialogue around each parcel begins with an assumption that every site should be

able to be built out to the utmost capacity, regardless of site sensitivities, our city's long-term ecological health and sustainability will always be the loser.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 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.

C. CANOPY COLLECTIVE: ADVOCATING OPPORTUNISTIC AND INNOVATIVE TREE PLANTING ON PUBLIC LAND

Emerging from the urban shade advocacy work of the Tree Commission, Canopy Collective formed in 2025 to identify, design, and implement tree planting efforts that focus on cultural attunement, provision of social spaces, and canopy equity.

Canopy Collective has identified sites of great potential in the city on publicly-owned land. The city currently expends resources to maintain these sites—mostly paved or turfgrass—though they provide no programmatic or environmental benefits. These sites are extensive throughout the city and create a maintenance burden while neglecting to ameliorate stormwater quantity or quality, provide biodiversity, shade, or outdoor space for residents' use.

Canopy Collective recommends prioritizing planting in three types of sites:

Shade Equity / Neighborhood-embedded Sites

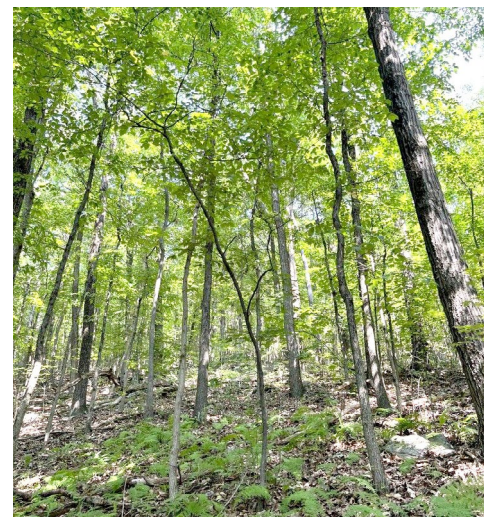
High-heat index is a critical marker and side effect of shade inequity and guides an imperative to prioritize planting efforts in the 10th & Page, Starr Hill, Fifeville and Meadows neighborhoods. The highest heat and lowest canopy coverage areas in the city align with neighborhoods also disproportionately burdened by health and economic disadvantages per EPA designated measures and the City's Historic Black Neighborhoods (as mapped in the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center's exhibition "Pride Overcomes Prejudice"). The collection of city-owned properties on this land can both amend the shortage of canopy in these areas and serve as a pilot for residential adoption of new planting efforts. In addition, a key city-owned parcel in this area is the City Yard lot.

Public Visibility & High-Heat / Downtown Core Sites

The city's landholdings in heat-burdened downtown include many smaller, mostly paved lots. We see exciting potential for implementing new planting efforts that align with the green infrastructure and increased tree canopy goals expressed in the Sustainability Plan and Climate Action Plan. Public visibility of these sites make them perfectly suited as demonstrations of alternative planting methods and value in complex, constrained urban contexts. As evidenced in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and San Francisco among many other settings, temporary, or "pop-up," installations offer low-commitment outreach, education and visibility in public settings.

Education, Recreation & Flexibility: Schools & Parks

Recreational and educational settings offer prime opportunities where planted spaces can foster youth connection with the natural world. In discussion with Parks and Recreation, Canopy Collective is evaluating school and park grounds to determine where current lawn areas could make way for planting designed to tailor social, educational, and recreational use while bolstering sustainability. We are currently working on and fundraising for "Growing Oasis," a collaboration with the Arts Department at Charlottesville High School, to conduct a co-design of the school's inner courtyards and introduce innovative planted spaces, bringing shade, biodiversity, and critically supportive social spaces into the school—much needed for the mental health and wellbeing of the school community.



Left: Example of plantings that invite play, engagement and biodiversity (image source: Canopy Collective); Right: Piedmont forests inspired plantings in public spaces could strengthen connection to the natural world (Image source: Canopy Collective)

RECOMMENDATION:

- 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.

END NOTE

The Tree Commission celebrates and supports Parks and Recreation and Urban Forester Steven Gaines' tree preservation and planting projects across the city, in collaboration with dozens of community residents and leaders, stewards, and volunteers. The Commission eagerly invites further opportunities to collaborate with the city, including participating in discussions and work sessions relating to the recommendations discussed above.

These include but are not limited to

- Supporting city- and community-led initiatives in service of our urban forest;
- Considering how to incentivize the management of invasive species on private properties;
- Introducing a tree preservation guide into the site development process;
- Continuing to develop local code provisions and planning guidance that include a consideration of tree preservation on steep slopes, floodplains, and other vulnerable sites;
- Exploring flexibility within the zoning code to accommodate both higher-density housing and tree preservation; and
- Updating of the stormwater fee.

APPENDIX 1 TREE COMMISSION LETTER REGARDING THE GARRETT STREET TREE REMOVAL

21 May 2025

Dear Charlottesville City Councilors, Members of the Charlottesville Planning Commission, City Manager Sam Sanders, NDS Director Kellie Brown, Deputy City Manager of Operations James Freas, and Deputy City Manager Ashley Marshall,

The Charlottesville Tree Commission was deeply disappointed to learn of the avoidable removal of another mature tree at the Kindewood development on April 24, 2025. Despite prior assurances from project engineers and developers that this particular group of street trees would be protected, a 50-year-old Pin Oak (36.9" diameter) was severely damaged, forcing its removal. The removal of a tree of this size cannot be mitigated by planting a young sapling; the loss to our community and environment will be felt for generations.

Tree preservation and affordable housing development are both essential for realizing a future where all of our neighborhoods are healthful, affordable, and climate resilient. The Tree Commission recognizes the critical need to build more affordable housing in our community, and we aim to assist in finding ways to do so while also protecting and enhancing our tree canopy. We know trees provide myriad health, environmental, and climate benefits, and their preservation is vital for maintaining a strong sense of place, neighborhood identity, and place-based memories for residents as we increase housing density and affordability in the city.

Charlottesville has the expertise, the policy frameworks, and the community support to successfully balance the urgent need for affordable housing with the long-term need to preserve mature trees. Charlottesville has both the vision and credentials to be a national leader in urban forestry. We are proud to be a Tree City USA and a city with a robust Climate Action Plan and a Comprehensive Plan that recognizes the importance of the urban tree canopy. But without strengthening our tree protection codes and enforcement mechanisms, we risk undermining our own climate and livability values and goals.

In 2022 and 2023, the city undertook an extensive overhaul of its code, but limited tree preservation protocols continue to result in the removal of trees that could be preserved through updated administrative guidance and code provisions *without any reductions in the quantity of housing built*. We respectfully put forth the following measures in the hope of supporting dialogue on strengthening tree protection:

Site Plan Checklist - Strengthen and clarify the requirements specified in the Site Plan Content Checklist provided by Neighborhood Development Services to include a mandatory tree preservation plan and an arborist-certified conservation checklist (for plans involving trees designated for preservation).

Tree Preservation Plans - Further define the existing preservation plan requirements to include tree canopies, trunks, critical root zones, and tree protection measures drawn to scale (reference "Best Management Practices for Tree Preservation, Transplanting,

Removal, and Replacement”). Support a second Urban Forester position focused on plan review and enforcement of preservation plans.

Tree Removal Permit - Ensure easy access to all tree removal permit materials via city portals, with additional clarity regarding when permits are required. Develop Tree Removal Permit requirements for properties under 6,000 feet.

Bonds for Existing Plantings - Expand circumstances for when a bond is required to cover existing trees indicated for preservation in site plans for 1 year after the completion of construction (see the cities of Falls Church, Fairfax, and Vienna for precedents).

Enforcement, including stronger penalties for violations - As it stands, a misdemeanor classification (punishable by a \$2,500 fine) for the loss of a mature urban tree is not a sufficient deterrent. For example, stronger penalties could include the forfeiture of bonds held for existing plantings.

Stormwater Fee - Explicitly designate green infrastructure, including trees, as stormwater infrastructure to allow city funds raised through the stormwater fee to support green infrastructure development and maintenance.

Incentives for Tree Preservation - Reevaluate the city's current incentive structure for tree preservation to reward developers who retain healthy, large trees on-site and to ensure that preservation of mature trees is seen not as an obstacle but as a shared value and goal. The current incentive structure—where existing trees are allowed to contribute 1.50-4x canopy area toward meeting minimum canopy requirements—is not effective at promoting overall tree canopy cover in the city. Consider, for example, an incentive structure to reduce or waive stormwater fees as an incentive to preserve mature trees.

The tree removal on Garrett Street was more than unfortunate—it highlights systemic gaps in our site planning and tree preservation protocols. As an unequivocal supporter of affordable housing development, the Charlottesville Tree Commission believes this experience can—and should—be a turning point. It is our hope that this event can renew a constructive dialogue towards strengthening tree preservation and bolstering our efforts to build healthful, affordable, and climate-resilient housing.

Sincerely,
The Charlottesville Tree Commission