



# State of the Forest FY 2025

Charlottesville Tree Commission

April 20, 2026

## Presentation Overview

### I. City & Community Urban Forestry Work

- Tree Plantings and Removals
- Tree Preservation and Reforestation Projects

### II. Tree Preservation Initiatives

- Engagement with the City to Support Tree Preservation
- Vulnerable Parcels: Visualizing the Precarity and Value of Privately-owned Urban Tree Parcels
- Canopy Collective: Advocating for Opportunistic and Innovative Tree Planting on Public Land



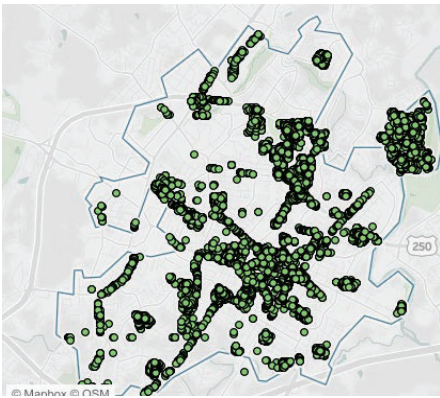
# Presentation

## Common Themes

- Urban canopy and **forest health threatened** by multiple factors
- **Limited space for planting** large shade trees on public lands
- Increased emphasis on **tree preservation and restoration** of urban forests
- Focused attention on remaining **vulnerable parcels** on private land
- **Innovative tree planting** strategies on public land
- Effective city coordination with **non-profit and community partners**



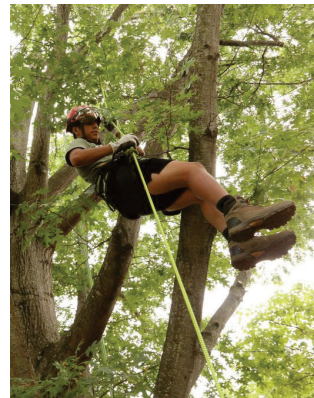
## I. City & Community Urban Forestry Work



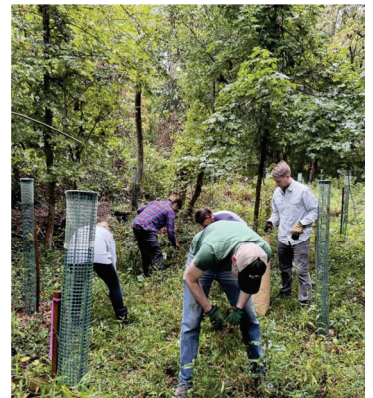
City of Charlottesville Parks and Recreation Department  
Tree Inventory Dashboard



Seedling from ancient Bald Cypress planted in Tree Steward Woodland in McIntire Park by Robin Hanes and Nadia Shoeb



ReLeaf Cville Tree Preservation in Action



Rivanna Conservation Alliance volunteer tree planting

# Tree Plantings & Removals, FY 2025

## Trees Planted on Public Property

**133** Urban Forestry Annual Planting  
(city-wide)

**38** Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards  
(McIntire, Pen Parks)

**14** ReLeaf Cville  
(Meade Park and Woolen Mills)

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**185 TOTAL**

## Trees Removed from Public Property

**64** Urban Forestry Tree Removals  
(city-wide)

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**64 TOTAL**

## Trees Planted on Private Property

**340** Utilities Fall and Spring Tree Giveaway  
(city-wide)

**39** Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards  
(10th & Page)

**140** ReLeaf Cville  
(Woolen Mills)

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**519 TOTAL**

**704** TOTAL Reported number of trees planted on public & private properties in FY 2025.

## Takeaways: Trees Planted and Trees Removed

### Importance of Preservation

- The number of trees planted and removed by the city does not include trees removed and planted during development, often with large shade trees replaced with young trees.
- Due to limited public land available for planting large shade trees, and loss of mature trees due to development and environmental pressures, preservation of mature trees on public and private land is increasingly imperative.



# Tree Preservation & Reforestation Projects Overview

- Tree Preservation Efforts on Public and Private Properties
- Preserving Downtown Mall Trees
- Invasive Species Management and Forest Restoration Projects
- Charlottesville Invasive Plant Partnership (CHIPP)



An area of Moore's Creek riparian forest after City's restoration efforts

## Tree Preservation Efforts on Public & Private Properties, FY 2025

### Public Properties:

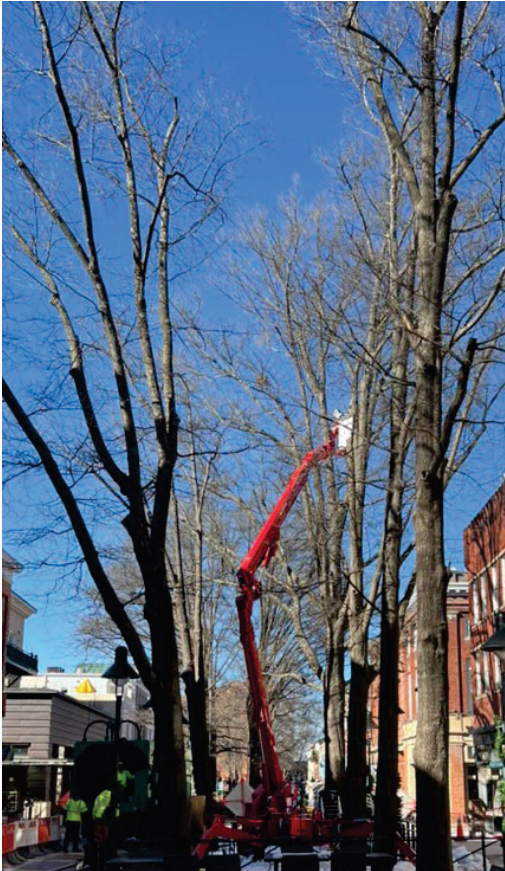
| Preservation Measures   | Number of Trees      | Locations           |
|---|----------------------|---------------------|
| Tree pruning  | 306                  | City-wide           |
| Tree pruning, inspections, and treatments for pathogens/insect infestations | 55 Willow oaks       | Downtown Mall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

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

**Note:** 2025 was the first year that the number of trees pruned surpassed the number of trees removed on city properties.

### Private Properties:

ReLeaf's FY 2025 Tree Preservation program treated 48 trees on private properties in Fifeville.



Winter pruning of Downtown Mall Trees  
Image source: Steven Gaines

# Preserving Downtown Mall Trees: *The Downtown Mall Tree Management Plan*

**Problem:**

- Our beloved aging willow oaks on the downtown mall are declining due to environmental stresses and deteriorating underground infrastructure. A number have already had to be removed.

**Solution:**

- Wolf Josey’s Downtown Mall Tree Management Plan—approved by the city—outlines the short- and long-term steps necessary to support a cohesive and durable sequence of tree groves at the heart of our city’s vibrant social life.

**Opportunity:**

- The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mall provides an opportunity to reinvest in our downtown mall trees.
- The Downtown Mall Tree Management Plan remains unfunded, threatening the health and continuity of the tree groves that shade the mall.



Wolf Josey Landscape Architects,  
The Downtown Mall Management Plan (cover)

**RECOMMENDATION:**

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

## Invasive Species Management & Reforestation Projects

| Organizational Entity                      | # Acres Restored | # Seedlings Planted   | Location                                |
|--|------------------|---|---|
| Urban Forestry Parks and Recreation FY2025 | 17.62            | 115 1-2 year seedlings<br>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              |
| <b>Total over 2 years</b>                  | <b>42.17</b>     | <b>2478 seedlings</b>   |   |



Sunrise Elementary School Restoration before invasive vine removal (above right) and after (below right)  
Image source: Steven Gaines

# Invasive Species Management & Reforestation Projects

## Riverview Park Restoration: Example Project

Forest restoration efforts at Riverview Park have been coordinated with the streambank restoration project. The removal of invasive vines and shrubs has returned 1.5 acres of usable park space that can now be accessed and enjoyed by the public (and local wildlife).



Riverview Park Restoration before invasive vine removal (left) and after (right)  
Image source: Steven Gaines

## Charlottesville Invasive Plant Partnership (CHIPP)

### Problem:

- City invasive management efforts address only public properties, therefore not addressing the problem of invasives on more than 80 percent of Charlottesville's properties.

### Mission:

- CHIPP is a partnership of city departments and community groups dedicated to building neighborhood teams to manage invasive vines on trees that are on the city's private properties.

### Partners:

- 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.



CHIPP partners host the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual CHIPP Open House in City Space during National Invasive Species Awareness Week  
Image source: CHIPP Photo Archive

# CHIPP Neighborhood Program & Outcomes

## CHIPP's Neighborhood Program

- Meet with neighbors to decide strategy
- Conduct a survey of neighborhood properties with invasive vines
- Train neighbors how to cut vines effectively and safely
- Conduct work-days to cut vines on neighborhood properties

## Results of CHIPP Neighborhood Efforts So Far

- **2 pilot programs:** Kelly Town and Little High
- Educational doorhangers/**leaflets distributed**
- Dozens of **neighbors trained** in invasive management
- **224 trees liberated** from invasive vines in Kelly Town
- **327 trees liberated** from invasive vines in Little High

*During a workday, CHIPP and Kelly Town volunteers liberate trees from invasive vines  
Image source: Susan McKinnon*



## What Can the City Do to Help?



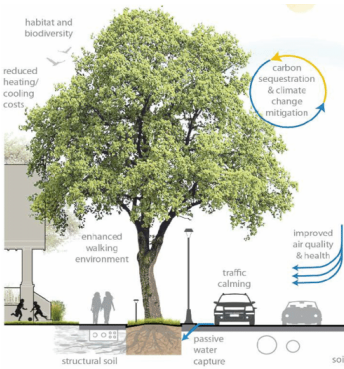
*One of the many forested parcels in the city with trees destroyed by invasive vines  
Image source: Susan McKinnon*

## 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).*

## II. Tree Commission Initiatives Overview

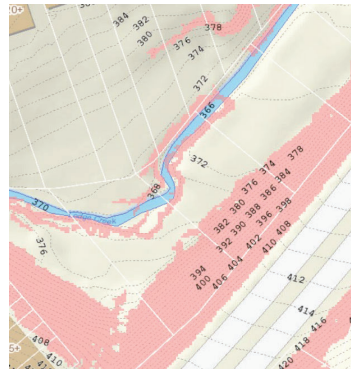
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Tree Preservation, Valuing Mature Trees  
Source: Oak Bay Urban Forest Management Strategy, Diamond Head Consulting



Tree Preservation, Garrett St. Mature Tree Damage



Vulnerable Parcels, Example of unbuilt parcels with critical slopes and watercourses, Charlottesville GIS



Canopy Collective, CHS courtyard site for innovative planting

## Mature Tree Preservation

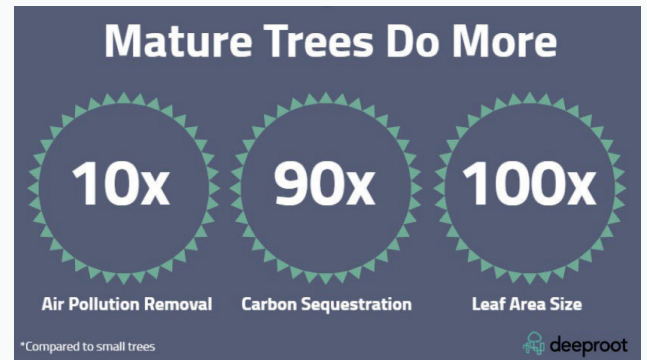
- Mature trees provide exponential value to the city's landscape compared to new plantings
- Yet only a small percentage of urban trees reach maturity (as high as 2/3rds are lost within 10 yrs of planting\*)
- Preservation of trees provides a return on investment for landowners + the wider community

### Benefits Trees Provide:

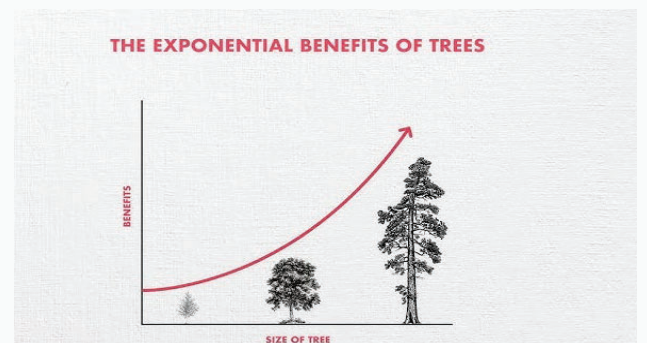
**Environmental:** stormwater capture, carbon sequestration, air + water pollution reduction, biodiverse habitat

**Health:** reduced urban heat island impact, disease prevalence, stress, and childhood asthma

**Social + Economic:** improved social cohesion, crime rates, tourism, and commercial vibrancy



Source: [deeproots.com](http://deeproots.com)



Source: [Halifax Regional Municipality](http://HalifaxRegionalMunicipality)

\*E.G. McPherson. 2014. "Monitoring million trees LA: tree performance during the early years and future benefits." *Arboric Urban For*, 40: 286-301. [10.48044/jauf.2014.027](https://doi.org/10.48044/jauf.2014.027).

# Key Take-Aways for Tree Preservation Efforts

- 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 adopted tree removal permit requirement
- 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
- Advocate for the local authority to require bonds to protect mature trees during development and heightened mechanisms to enforce local tree protections

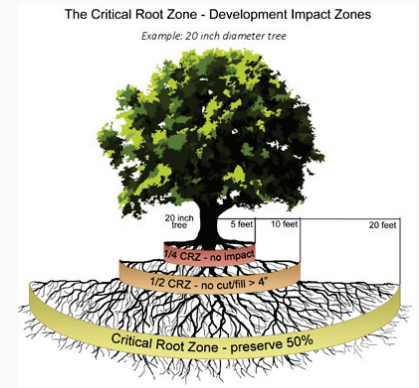
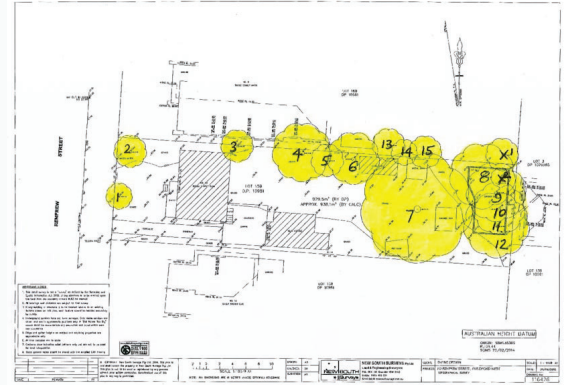


Image right: Austin, TX, critical root zone

# Development of Local Guide to Tree Preservation

## Highlighting opportunities for tree preservation throughout the development timeline



- Document your site's arboreal assets
- Draw trees' critical root zones to scale



- Design project within the context of the arboreal landscape (not a blank slate)
- Prioritize tree preservation within the site plan and in the development approval process



- Construction details showing tree protection fencing (see city detail), trunk protection, pruning/air spading, wood chip mulching, irrigation, and other preservation measures
- Relocate trenching away from critical root zones
- Additional BMPs



- Methods of preservation (tree preservation fencing, timing of disturbance, root pruning/air spading, wood chip mulching/irrigation)
- Long-range planning for preservation and monitoring to ensure trees survive
- Carry out pruning and other mature tree maintenance during winter dormancy

# Tree Commission Partnering in Future City and Community Planning Discussions

- Increasing the canopy credit provided for retention of mature trees
- Developing local code provisions and planning guidance to include a consideration of tree preservation
- Restructuring the stormwater fee to incentivize the reduction in impervious surfaces and to support green infrastructure



American Elm  
at Summit Elementary School

## 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.**

# Vulnerable Parcels: Visualizing the Precarity and Value of Privately-owned Urban Forest Parcels

## Problem

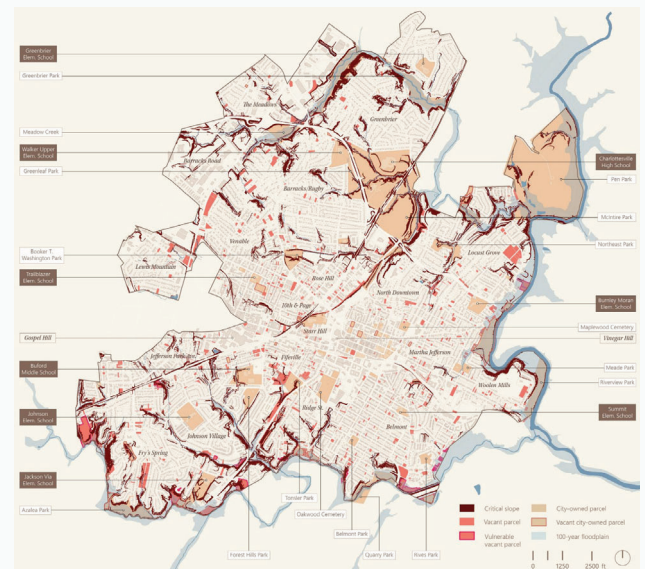
- Remainder of large-scale parcels for potential development contain a high degree of ecological sensitivity.
- Protections for ecological resources are insubstantial.
- Development assumption for greenfield parcels is typically maximum build-out, regardless of value of natural infrastructure.

## Proposal: Map Vulnerable Parcels

- Visualize remaining forested, unbuilt parcels located in floodplains, riparian buffers, and containing critical slopes.
- Recognize 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.

## Aims

- Allow for design choices early in site study process to support creation of housing AND the protection of urban forest systems.
- Provide context to inform city decisions early in the review process for each parcel.
- Assist in weighing specific development plans against larger sustainability goals set by the city in Comprehensive Plan and Sustainability Plan.



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

## What Can the City Do to Help?



Example of floodplain forest character  
Image source: Shanti Levy

### 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.*

## Canopy Collective: Advocating for 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.

### Problem

- Extensive publicly owned paved and turfgrass sites create a maintenance burden while providing no benefit to stormwater quantity or quality, biodiversity, shade, or outdoor space for residents' use.

### Proposal: Innovative Planting Installations

- Pilot planting projects on public parcels that model sustainable practices, increase city's tree canopy, and offer high quality outdoor space for resident's use.



Examples of unused city owned lawn areas at CHS, Sixth St, Tonsler Park, Tall Oaks Elementary

# Sites of Opportunity: Prioritize 3 Types

## 1. Neighborhood Embedded Sites / Shade Equity

- Heat-index, the key marker of shade equity, leads to an imperative to plant in 10<sup>th</sup> & Page, Starr Hill, Fifeville and Meadows neighborhoods, areas also disproportionately burdened by health and economic disadvantages per EPA designations.

*Introduce plantings that align with neighborhood's cultural landscapes.*

## 2. Downtown Core Sites / Public Visibility & High-Heat

- Downtown is one of the hottest areas in Charlottesville.
- The city owns several mostly-paved lots in highly visible locations.

*Introduce public installations that offer public space and green infrastructure, potentially as temporary, pop-up parks.*

## 3. Schools and Parks / Education, Recreation & Flexibility

- Lawn areas are larger than necessary for programmatic use
- Potential to align plantings with educational opportunities .

*Introduce planting tailored to social, educational, and recreational use while bolstering sustainability.*

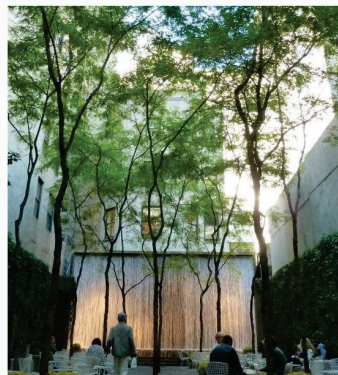
*Specific Example Sites: 412 10 ½ St. NW (top),  
207 First St. South (middle),  
CHS courtyard A (bottom)  
Images source: Canopy Collective*



# What Can the City Do to Help?



*Introduce qualities of Piedmont Forests into public spaces*



*Offer shaded social spaces (above: Paley Park, NYC)*



*Pilot public temporary forests downtown (above: San Francisco Pop-Up Forest)*



*Create plantings that invite play, engagement and biodiversity*

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- *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.*