

# URBAN FORESTRY MASTER PLAN 2022 PROGRESS REPORT



## About the Urban Forestry Master Plan

The Columbus Urban Forestry Master Plan (UFMP) is the first Citywide, strategic plan to invest long-term in Columbus' trees. Approved by Columbus City Council in April 2021, the UFMP will guide the entire Columbus community to prioritize, preserve and grow our tree canopy. We have three tree canopy goals: 1.) Reach Citywide Tree Canopy Cover of 40% by 2050, 2.) Stop the Net Canopy Losses by 2030 and 3.) Invest in Equitable Canopy Across All Neighborhoods by 2030. We will accomplish these goals through four strategies: community coordination and collaboration, best practices, dedicated resources and stronger policies. This report details the progress made to date on these four strategy areas.

## Community Coordination and Collaboration

### Columbus Tree Coalition Beginning

The board of Green Columbus, a local nonprofit seeking to improve equitable environmental outcomes for the people of central Ohio, voted to organize a Columbus tree coalition. They plan to begin in summer 2023.

See UFMP Action Item 1.1; Goals 1, 2 and 3

### Increasing Communications with the Community

Columbus Recreation and Parks Department staff presented information on the Urban Forestry Master Plan (UFMP) and its implementation progress to community organizations nine times in 2022. The department also partnered with a capstone class at The Ohio State University's School of Environment and

Natural Resources; students researched and presented to staff the logistics of private tree planting programs, as well as private tree protection ordinances.

See UFMP Action 3, Action Item 10.1; Goal 2

### Collaborating with Regional Partners

The department partnered with Franklin County to assess tree canopy change from 2011-2021 across the county, Columbus and 41 other political jurisdictions in Franklin County. The department received a Conservation Stewardship award from Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District for this project. The City of Columbus was also recognized as a Tree City USA for the 43<sup>rd</sup> year.

See UFMP Action 3, Goal 2

### Supporting Active Participation by Volunteers and Partner Organizations

Columbus Recreation and Parks joined in a community-led effort to increase tree canopy in the South Side. Columbus City Council funded local nonprofit Green Columbus to purchase and install trees on private property. Partners include Ohio State, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, United Methodist Church for All People and residents. The department hosted Green Columbus for a fall tree giveaway at Barack Community Center in the South Side; City staff transported 400 trees from Green Columbus' nursery and promoted the event. All 400 trees were given away to residents!

See UFMP Action Items 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, Goal 3

## Best Practices

### Prioritizing Tree Planting Based on Equity

The department's Forestry staff planted 4,500 street and park trees in 2022. Forty-nine percent of those trees were planted in areas of Columbus that ranked

as priorities in the UFMP equity analysis, meaning they have low tree canopy and high need. In addition, more than 2,400 native trees were planted at Stockbridge Park in the Far South community. Reforesting Stockbridge Park provides critical tree canopy to one of the City's highest-need communities. Using grant funds, the department purchased the 11-acre addition to the park from Columbus City Schools in 2020, demolished the building and parking lot in 2021 and installed an urban forest with a paved walking path in 2022.

See UFMP Action Items 6.2, Goal 3

### Proactive Care of Public Trees

Inspecting and pruning street trees on a cycle of seven to 10 years significantly improves tree health. The department transitioned 10 Forestry staff to the capital budget, which frees up space in the operating budget so more pruning crews can be hired in the future. This is crucial since the City has struggled with having enough crews to implement a pruning cycle; like any infrastructure, regular inspections and care are important for to ensure our trees are pruned and healthy. The department also ordered approximately \$3 million of equipment to replace aging log trucks, bucket trucks, chippers and more, which will allow Forestry to continue handling tree emergencies, plant new trees and care for public trees more efficiently.

See UFMP Action 8, Goals 1, 2, 3

### Best Practices Manual

In 2022, the department drafted a Tree Technical Manual to accompany public tree code updates, guiding the City in national best practices for trees on public property. The manual is currently under review by other City departments. It will carry the force of code but be updated more frequently. The manual will cover the approval process to impact a public tree, mitigation required for public trees, tree protection during construction, standards for tree planting, maintenance and removal, as well as lists of recommended and prohibited street tree species.

See UFMP Action 9, Goal 2

## Dedication of Resources

### City, Grant and Donation Funds

The department is requesting \$2 million for the UFMP in the 2022 capital budget, building on the \$3 million allocated in the past two capital budgets. Federal grant funding supported the public tree inventory. Private donors contributed to the UFMP implementation fund at Columbus Recreation and Parks Foundation, including the Crane Group, which donated \$75,000 over a three-year period for tree plantings in priority areas.

See UFMP Action 11, Goals 1, 2, 3

### Key Leadership and Staff Hired

A new City forester was hired, Steve Horhut. He

is a master arborist and a consulting arborist, bringing expertise to growing Forestry operations. The department also worked with the Civil Service Commission to reclassify two key Forestry job classes. As part of UFMP implementation, six full-time staff were hired: four laborers at the nursery, one regional arborist and one Forestry tech 2. The Forestry tech 1 and 2 positions are vital positions for the management of all of the City's public trees, which will allow the City to do more proactive tree care.

See UFMP Action 12, Goals 1, 2, 3

### Essential Tree Data

Columbus is 95 percent complete with its street tree inventory data collection. This information is key to proactively managing a healthy urban forest. The urban tree canopy assessment will show changes in Columbus and Franklin County's canopy from 2011 to 2021. Volunteers collected temperature data in August to generate maps of the City's urban heat; the project was funded by a federal grant.

See UFMP Action 12, Goals 2 and 3

## Stronger Policies

### Updating Public Tree Code

Using public input collected in January 2022, the department drafted public tree code updates. An accompanying best practices manual and the code updates passed departmental review. The department is now working through implementation logistics with other City departments.

See UFMP Action Item 15.1, Goal 2

## 2022 City Forestry Numbers



**4,500** trees planted



**2,089** trees pruned



**1,250** hazardous trees removed



**991** tree emergencies handled



**5,144** requests for tree planting or care received

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