



A Message from the Director

Investing in Columbus' trees is more important than ever. Trees are a solution to extreme heat, flooding and poor air quality. A recent study found some neighborhoods were 13 degrees hotter than others, meaning some Columbus residents are disproportionately at risk from heatstroke and other heat-related health impacts.

Since the Urban Forestry Master Plan was approved in April 2021, we have made strides toward accomplishing the goals set out in the plan. In 2023, we updated protections for public trees for the first time in over 30 years. We also invested in inventorying all 139,000 street trees and completed a historic analysis of tree canopy change from 2011-2021 across Columbus and Franklin County. In 2024, we piloted the Columbus Tree Assistance Program to fund tree planting on private property, resulting in 101 native trees planted by local partners.

While we've made progress, only 30 percent of our trees are located on public property and our reach is limited. That's why a key focus to improving Columbus' tree canopy will require a focus on private trees.

What we choose to do together to preserve, protect and grow trees on private property may not result in developing new code. Rather, we may explore and renew existing policies and procedures that serve our tree canopy goals. We will partner with the development community to examine and build real-world solutions to preserve and grow tree canopy on private land. All options are on the table, and this research report is the first step toward learning from other larger cities across the country and how we can balance the many needs of our community.

Trees are a vital part of residents' well-being, and make our City more walkable, vibrant and resilient. We urge every resident, business owner, community leader and City department to work with us toward these important goals.

Thank you,

Bernita A. Reese

Director, Columbus Recreation and Parks Department

