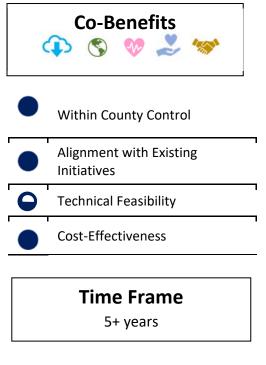## Recommendation #12

No Net Loss Tree Conservation Regulation and Policy to Maintain and Expand Street Tree Canopy and Forest as a Land Cover.

Description:

To maintain its 52% tree cover through 2030 and increase tree cover to 55% by 2050, the county should establish No Net Loss regulations for tree preservation, replacement, and mitigation. The Woodland and Wildlife Conservation Ordinance should be strengthened by inclusion of specific requirements for addressing climate change impacts through preserving existing woodlands, especially mature forests, and expanding the urban tree canopy. To protect vulnerable neighborhoods from excess heat and flooding, the county should perform a County-wide Tree Shade Study to identify priority areas for stewardship grants. The County should develop tree stewardship programs that enable residents to plant and maintain trees where they are most needed.

Co-Benefits

● Within County Control

● Alignment with Existing Initiatives

◐ Technical Feasibility

● Cost-Effectiveness

Time Frame
5+ years

Proposed Measurement & Tracking:

On annual basis track and map the following:

● Annual tree canopy coverage changes linked to land use and land disturbance activities (see Recommendation #21: Floodplain Preservation) exemptions, variances, waivers, etc.

● **$GtCO_2$** sequestered through trees saved vs. GCO_2 lost from tree cover, land disturbance analysis to track if County is achieving positive sequestering towards its CAP emission reduction goals. Also, calculate total $GtCO_2$ sequestered in County year to year.

● Number of violations(with permit case number) and exemptions granted from the Tree Conservation Plan (TCP). For violations, identify enforcement actions taken with tracking of any fee-in-lieu and off-site tree planting provided to satisfy violation(s).

● Location and amount of Regulatory Green Infrastructure losses and gains based on subwatershed.

Capacity and Funding:

1. Allocate and dedicate budget to hire additional DoE staffing to provide ongoing GIS mapping, reporting, and analysis.

2. Allocate funding for consultant services and dedicated program funding to engage residents for county-wide Tree Shade Study which will also require additional DoE staff for the Tree Conservation Program.

3. Allocate funding facilitation expert for interagency discussions to achieve consensus, seek approvals, modify policy, design guides, and Code of Ordinance language.

4. Allocate funding to expand DPW&T street tree program to hire full time staff to serve as certified arborist and horticulturists to support ongoing tree planting and maintenance operations in the public ROW.

5. Allocate and sustain funding for an Urban Forestry program to enforce a revised Tree Preservation Ordinance, issue violations, and inspect construction sites for natural resource protection compliance. Urban Forestry Program would be tasked with the following:

   - Monitor, track, and inspect for long term compliance of permitted landscape plans, tree installations, and mitigation projects located on private and commercial properties.

   - Perform county-wide tree inspections and preservation enforcement countywide(includes support within the municipalities).

Implementation Steps:

Step 1: Establish a County No Net Tree Loss policy to maintain 52% overall County tree canopy coverage through 2030. Expand coverage to 55% by 2050. Enforce via permitting requirements and County Council to revise Prince George's County Code of Ordinance to strengthen and require more on-site tree preservation.

Step 2: Revise Subtitles and Divisions of the Prince George's County Code of Ordinance to reduce allowable exemptions and variances granted. Also, a minimum of one-to-one acre tree cover replacement must be required based on the total site area disturbed regardless of Zone. There should be no exceptions to the loss of Regulatory Green Infrastructure Areas to accommodate land development activities with only limited road crossing permitted. Fee-in-Lieu rates must be reassessed(increased as needed) based on on-site tree preservation rates.

Revise Subtitle 25: Trees and Vegetation and related Divisions:

- Eliminate the Tree Canopy Requirements by Zone and require all projects to comply with the Woodland and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Ordinance regardless of zoning.
- Increase minimum thresholds for Conservation, Afforestation, and Tree Canopy Coverage of Woodland and the Wildlife Habitat Conservation Ordinance. Determine on-site tree preservation and tree coverage based on county-wide climate resiliency and carbon sequestration targets(TBD).
- Require that calculation of required tree cover, preservation requirements, and other mitigation measures be based on the Gross Tract Area, not the Net Tract Area.
- Require additional impact mitigation measures or fees to account for ecosystem services lost based on a ratio of size, density, of trees lost vs. size, species of replacement trees.

Revise Subtitle 32(Water Resource Protection and Grading and other related Subtitles):

- Prevent removal of trees and site disturbance activities before issuance of Final Grading Plan. Current code permits tree logging, tree removal, and land disturbance over an entire project site with only a Rough Grading Permit.

Step 3: Revise the Prince George's County(M-NCPPC) [Environmental Technical Manual](last updated 2010) to address climate change impacts and increase required natural buffers(forest, riparian, and wetland).

Step 4: Increase violation and penalty fees to help pay for enforcement. Require the use of fee-in-lieu funds for replacement tree loss, maintenance, and equity considerations within the same sub-watershed as violation.

Step 5: County will be required to create a publicly accessible annual report of tracking and monitoring data on tree canopy cover, associated ecosystem values, and factors contributing to canopy loss. All exceptions, exemptions, variations and zoning amendments by the Planning Board, County Council and DPIE should be included in the annual report. M-NCPPC and DoE must collaborate on tracking metrics and mapping practices.

Step 6: Identify and prioritize areas that need tree canopy and natural resource area expansion. Use the results of thermal mapping (Recommendation #19) and, when it becomes available, the results of the Tree Shade Study will build on DoE tree canopy and vulnerability analyses to identify vulnerable/priority areas.

- Perform additional analysis in tandem with Tree Shade Study to inform and identify the prioritization of underground utilities to establish a healthy urban tree canopy in Equity Emphasis Areas and climate resilient priority areas of the County.
- Prioritize natural resource programmatic and tree conservation programmatic efforts to reach at-risk, historically disadvantaged populations.

Step 7: Expand existing incentives for residents and local businesses to add additional new trees. With initial investment from the Woodland Conservation Fund, the County will create a Prince George's County Climate Resiliency Land Conservation Trust (see Recommendation #21: Floodplain Preservation).

Equity concerns:

According to a new [American Forests Study][1], we need to plant 31.4 million trees per year in cities to advance Tree Equity and slow climate change.

How can this recommendation be implemented to lead to equitable outcomes?

- Focus on new tree planting and existing tree preservation efforts in low to medium household and Equity Emphasis Areas, especially the inner beltway communities. Prioritize programmatic efforts within communities already experiencing flooding or extreme temperatures from lack of tree canopy or significant impervious areas.
- Prioritize infrastructure improvements, such as undergrounding overhead utilities in equity areas, to build energy resiliency and support a long-term healthy street tree canopy towards a more livable community.

[1]https://www.americanforests.org/our-work/urban-forestry/how-many-urban-trees-do-we-need/

Helpful Resources:

- **Resource**:
  - Groundworks USA; [Climate Safe Neighborhoods](#)
  - The online resource highlights housing discrimination links to climate change. Provides 9 urban case studies and recommendations for using mapping and data to build resilience to extreme heat and flooding.
- **Resource:**
  - American Forests; [Tree Equity Score](#) (TES)
  - The online tool simplifies full Tree Equity on a scale of 0 to 100 for all 150,000 neighborhoods and 486 municipalities in urban America. It helps address climate change through the lens of social equity, attract new resources, and inform technical decisions and progress tracking.
- **Resource**:
  - Casey Trees; [Tree Report Card](#)
  - Online tool to track trees against baseline measurements, including details on the amount, distribution, health, and diversity in age and species of trees in the canopy in parks and built-out environments. Used by Washington, D.C.
- **Resource**:
  - New York Times; '[How Decades of Racist Housing Policy Left Neighborhoods Sweltering](#)'
  - Article on redlining policy impacts on urban neighborhoods.
- **Resource: The Economic Values of Nature: An Assessment of the Ecosystem Services of Forest and Tree Canopy-April 2015**
  [Ecosystem-Services.pdf (lowimpactdevelopment.org)](#)