THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE

Staff Report

Council Meeting Date: October 27, 2020

Subject: Urban Forestry Commission: Zero-Net Loss Tree Canopy Resolution

Staff Resource(s): Ben Woody, Director, Development Services Department
Nancy Watford, Site Development Engineering Coordinator

Action Requested: Adoption of Resolution establishing a Zero-Net Loss Urban Tree Canopy Policy.

Background:

- The resolution was drafted and proposed by the Urban Forestry Commission and recommends establishing city policy and programmatic goals to supplement the Tree Canopy Protection Ordinance.
- The resolution establishes a tree canopy coverage goal of 50% by 2040.
- The 2018 Urban Tree Canopy Study determined existing coverage to be 44.5%.
- The resolution supports the future establishment of a Comprehensive Urban Forestry Program.
- The resolution supports building strong community partnerships to achieve canopy goals, establish a forestry program, and promote urban forest stewardship.

Council Goal(s):

- A Clean and Healthy Environment
- A Well Planned and Livable Community

Committee(s):

- Urban Forestry Commission - August 17, 2020, Recommend approval; September 21, 2020, Revision adopted.

Pro(s):

- Promotes tree canopy cover which provides a number of ecosystem services, including shade, reduced erosion, and habitat diversity.
- Supports the findings of the 2018 Urban Tree Canopy Study.
- The 50% tree canopy coverage goal by 2040 aligns with Asheville Greenworks' canopy coverage goal and supports the city's existing partnership with the organization.
- Aligns with the *Living Asheville Comprehensive Plan* themes of 'A Livable Built Environment' and 'Harmony with the Natural Environment'.

Con(s):

- The city will need to partner with an outside contractor to conduct periodic urban tree canopy studies to establish measurable metrics.
- Achieving the tree canopy coverage goal requires sustained and ongoing community-based partnerships.

Fiscal Impact:

- None at this time.
- Potential future costs for establishing and staffing an Urban Forestry Program.
- It is estimated an urban forestry master plan may cost as much as $250,000, and a full-time urban forestry position is approximately $80.000 annually.
- If this occurs, it would likely be in FY22 or 23 budget year(s).

Suggested Motion:

- Motion to adopt a resolution establishing a Zero-Net Loss Urban Tree Canopy Policy.

Attachment(s)

- Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. 20 - _____

RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING A ZERO-NET LOSS URBAN TREE CANOPY POLICY FOR THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE, NC

WHEREAS, our urban forest provides a multitude of environmental benefits including: improving air quality, water quality, and soil quality; reducing storm water runoff, erosion, sedimentation, and flooding; providing shade, evaporative cooling, and a diversity of habitats for wildlife and pollinators; reducing ambient air temperature as much as 20 degrees in the summer months; and

WHEREAS, our urban forest provides a multitude of social and public health benefits that include: reducing heat-related illnesses; reducing illnesses such as asthma, attention deficit disorder, and obesity; reducing the length of hospital stays; reducing noise pollution; reducing stress, and reducing exposure to harmful UV rays; and

WHEREAS, our urban forest provides a multitude of economic benefits including: improving retail and tourist environments; increasing property values; decreasing storm water treatment costs; reducing energy consumption and electricity costs; and

WHEREAS, Asheville's urban forest sequesters 65,000 tons of carbon each year, valued at $3,000,000 per year, and reduces storm water runoff by 18 million gallons a year, along with providing shading and evaporative cooling, strongly contributing to Asheville's energy transition goals and climate resilience; and

WHEREAS, an urban forest canopy analysis commissioned by the City of Asheville and the Asheville Urban Forestry Commission documented a canopy loss of 6.4%, or 891 acres of trees over a 10-year period (an area larger than Central Park in New York City) with a subsequent loss of environmental, social and economic benefits and values; and a NASA study documented a substantial on-going spike in the urban heat island effect, particularly in areas with marginalized communities; and

WHEREAS, it is critically important to reverse this trend to provide a healthy environment and environmental equity; to make Asheville as climate resilient as possible; and to provide for a sustainable future;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE THAT THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE WILL:

1. Employ policies, practices, scientifically managed programs and partnerships to establish a zero-net loss of urban tree canopy while maximizing its ecological benefits and reducing risks; maintaining the urban forest canopy at no less than the current (2018) level at 44.5%, with a goal to increase canopy cover to 50% by 2040.

2. Establish a Comprehensive Urban Forestry Program as soon as practical that includes updated ordinances, a professional urban forester, and an urban forest master plan to help guide the future of Asheville's urban forest and green infrastructure in an effective and efficient manner.

3. Conduct City operations, establishment and maintenance of public infrastructure, rights of way, facilities, and park projects in tandem with the objective of the protection, replacement, and maintenance of trees, using state-of-the science technology and best management practices.

4. Develop partnerships to educate the public and private sector on the benefits and values of our urban forests and urban forest conservation to build broad community support and participation in the stewardship of Asheville's urban forest.

   Read, approved and adopted this 27th day of October, 2020.

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City Clerk Mayor

Approved as to form:

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City Attorney