Urban Forest Master Plan
ASHEVILLE

Summary of Public Engagement

January - May 2026

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Executive Summary

Asheville's urban forest delivers a wide range of environmental, social, and economic benefits to the community. Because 79% of the urban forest is located on private property, meaningful community involvement is essential to the development of Asheville's Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP). This includes all residents, public agencies, large landholders and business campuses, institutions, the development community, foundations and nonprofit organizations.

For this reason, it is vital to actively include the community in the process of developing Asheville's UFMP. The goals of the engagement campaign were to bring the community together in dialogue, to learn about the public's priorities related to tree canopy and to understand current local challenges and potential solutions.

This document provides an overview of the outreach and engagement campaign as well as a summary of findings. The project was facilitated and managed by the City of Asheville, together with project consultant Urban Canopy Works.

From January through May 2026, public input was gathered through nine engagement methods:

1. UFMP Roadshow
2. Virtual Public Meeting
3. Public Workshops
4. Stakeholder Workshops
5. People and Environment Recovery Board
6. Community Partners & Focus Groups
7. One-on-One Interviews
8. Online Survey
9. Student Survey

A Note on Data Limitations: *Although outreach efforts were extensive, the results detailed in this report reflect the specific perspectives of those who chose to participate. As such, these findings should be viewed as a collection of community priorities rather than a statistically-representative sample of all Asheville residents.*

Public Engagement Opportunities	Number of Events	Participants / Interactions
UFMP Roadshow	7	300
Virtual Public Meeting	1	50
Public Workshop	1	60
Stakeholder Workshops	2	75
People & Environment Recovery Board	3	11
Community Partners & Focus Groups	3	40
One on One Interviews	22	22
Online Survey	Open 5 Months	1,661
Student Survey	1	159
Social Media Outreach - Forestry Fridays	23 posts on City platforms	Average reach of approx. 800 users per post
TOTAL	**37**	**2,375+**

Across these ten engagement methods, input was collected from more than 2,375 members of the Asheville community. **Nine themes** emerged from the public engagement process. A summary of these findings is provided here, while the full report includes a more detailed analysis and representative public comments.

- **Theme 1:** Participants expressed significant concern regarding the loss of mature trees and advocated for preservation priorities.
- **Theme 2:** Participants frequently identified a need for proactive, ongoing tree planting efforts.
- **Theme 3**: Respondents noted the utility of trees in mitigating urban heat, improving air and water quality, and supporting climate resilience.
- **Theme 4:** Participants suggested that existing tree protection regulations require strengthening and more consistent enforcement.

- **Theme 5:** Respondents identified damaged riparian areas as a priority for restoration, planting, and enhanced protection.
- **Theme 6:** Participants emphasized the importance of healthy ecosystems and wildlife habitat, highlighting invasive species management as a critical need.
- **Theme 7:** Respondents connected tree canopy to public health outcomes and advocated for equitable access to its benefits across all neighborhoods.
- **Theme 8:** Participants identified a need for enhanced education, centralized access to information, and increased community collaboration.
- **Theme 9:** Respondents emphasized the importance of balancing urban growth with the preservation of Asheville's natural character.

The input summarized in this report will be used to build Asheville's UFMP.

Avenues of Input

Information on each of the avenues of input follow. Findings from all avenues combined can be found in the report section *Findings & Recurring Themes*.

Avenue #1: UFMP Roadshow

- November 2025 - May 2026
- Combined total of +/- 300 attendees

In an effort to "go where the public already is," the project team put out an offer to the community to come to any groups or clubs across Asheville to explain the project, enter into a dialogue on Asheville's community trees and provide a forum to collect input. Asheville's urban forester attended seven events through this initiative, reaching approximately 300 people directly. At the conclusion of each event, notes were compiled on the dialogue overall, and attendees were asked to submit their comments via the online survey. The Roadshow included the following meetings:

November 2025

- *Bee City USA*
- *Rhododendron/Horney Heights Neighborhood*
- *Asheville Garden Club*

December 2025

- *Tree Protection Task Force*

January 2026

- *Sierra Club*

March 2026

- *UNCA Urban Forest Ecology*

April 2026

- *Kenilworth Resident Association*

Avenue #2: Virtual Public Meeting

- Approximately 50 attendees
- January 28, 2026 6 - 7 p.m. Virtual Meeting on Zoom

The virtual public meeting was open to all and provided an introduction to the UFMP project, including a thirty-minute presentation on the importance of the urban forest and the process of developing the master plan. Approximately 50 community members attended the virtual meeting. Following a 15-minute presentation, the meeting was opened-up for group discussion and Q&A. A recording was made available for later viewing, and housed on the plan website.

Avenue #3: Public Workshop

- Approximately 60 attendees
- March 21, 2026 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

A public workshop for the UFMP was held at the North Carolina Arboretum where over 60 community members attended. The public workshop provided a forum for the community to explore current conditions in Asheville, and to identify challenges and solutions to the most pressing issues. In addition to promoting online and at various public meetings/events, invitations were sent to neighborhood representatives and coalitions in an effort to encourage strong neighborhood participation. The workshop began with a presentation to share information, and then attendees had guided group discussions to reveal the community's top priorities.




Photos from Asheville UFMP Public Workshop at the NC Arboretum on March 21, 2026

Avenue #4: Stakeholder Workshops



- 75 member stakeholder group
- 2 sequential workshops on February 20, 2026 and March 20, 2026

At the beginning of the plan development process, the project team worked to recruit members to form a stakeholder group. This group represented organizations across a wide spectrum of Asheville's community.

These workshops were designed as a forum for the community to collectively explore current conditions in Asheville, and start to identify challenges and solutions to the most pressing issues. The stakeholder group was made up of representatives from non-profits, City and County staff, utilities, development, architects/engineers, green industry professionals, foundations, schools and campuses, and more. The two sequential workshops were designed to collectively explore current conditions in Asheville and start identifying community goals, as well as challenges and their solutions. This forum-style workshop format provided an opportunity for the community at-large to self-evaluate the sustainability of Asheville's urban forest.




Selection of photos from Asheville UFMP Stakeholder Group at the first and second workshops in February and March 2026.

Avenue #5: People & Environment Recovery Board

- 11 Members
- Received three updates during the project launch and discovery process: December 1, 2025, February 9, 2026, and April 13, 2026.
- The Recovery Board will continue to receive updates and provide comments in June and August as plan development begins.

The Asheville City Council established four Helene Recovery Boards to support the TS Helene recovery process, increase transparency in policy making and provide an additional mechanism for community input. These boards include representatives from existing advisory boards and diverse community stakeholders who provide broad-based input that enhances Council decision making and builds public trust. The People & Environment Recovery Board received three updates on the UFMP throughout the discovery process, and will continue to be involved as the development of the plan continues.

Avenue # 6: Community Partners & Focus Groups

- 40 Members
- Community Partners: Introduction to the UFMP. February 7, 8 attendees
- Community Focus Group: Development. May 7, 4 attendees
- Community Focus Group: Academic. May 21, 7 attendees

A Community Partners group was formed early on in the UFMP process, made up of members of organizations such as local environmental non-profits, NC Arboretum, Asheville Botanical Garden, Buncombe County extension office, and more. The

Community Partners met once at the onset of the project to learn about the UFMP and process of plan development and share their priorities. Towards the end of the Discovery phase, two smaller focus groups were formed to further explore issues in the development community and the academic realm.

Avenue #7: One-on-One Interviews

The consultants at Urban Canopy Works conducted 23 one-on-one interviews to explore specific areas of urban tree canopy and tree management in Asheville. These included interviews with City staff, non-profit community partners and representatives from organizations across the community (all are listed below). Interview findings provide more information that will be used to help develop the plan.

Academic Community Focus Group

Asheville Botanical Garden

Asheville GreenWorks

City of Asheville Parks & Recreation

City of Asheville Public Works

City of Asheville Urban Forestry Operations

City of Asheville Planning & Urban Design

City of Asheville Urban Forestry Commission (3)

Development Community Focus Group

Ecoforesters

Economic Development Coalition

Land of Sky

MountainTrue

North Carolina Arboretum

NC Cooperative Extension

Olin Studio

RiverLink

Sasaki

Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

Stumps Sprouts Tree Consulting

Western Carolina University

Avenue #8: Online Survey

- Online community survey live November 2025 through March 2026 at www.AshevilleNC.gov/trees
- Total Submissions Received: 1,616

Throughout the project, extensive information on the UFMP process, Asheville's trees and canopy cover, and more was provided via the UFMP website www.AshevilleNC.gov/trees. An eight question survey designed to better understand

the community's priorities, thoughts on challenges and more, ran from November 2025 through March 2026. A total of 1,616 submissions were collected and addressed the following topics:

1. Overall impressions of trees
2. Most important roles of trees
3. Biggest challenges with trees
4. Opportunities associated with the planting of trees
5. What prevents you from planting trees
6. Top priorities for trees after Hurricane Helene
7. Management activities that the City should focus on
8. What else would you like to tell us? (460 comments received)

Avenue #9: Student Survey

- Total Submissions Received: 159

The City of Asheville collaborated with Asheville High School to capture youth opinions and ask students to respond to the survey. The survey link was provided and 159 students filled out the survey. These responses have been incorporated throughout the summary of engagement.

Reach of Public Input Process

The engagement process was extensive and varied, with multiple ways for the community to share their thoughts, concerns, hopes, and priorities for Asheville's urban forest. Overall, these engagement efforts reached over 2,000 community members.

Engagement opportunities included virtual meetings, in-person meetings, small and large group meetings, individual interviews, and an online survey. The UFMP Roadshow offered an additional opportunity to participate without asking people to come to additional meetings.

Understanding Who Responded to the Survey. Demographic data was collected through voluntary self-identification in the survey, providing insight into the participants reached, as shown in the race/ethnicity, age, and household income charts below.

However, because these results reflect only the specific perspectives of those who chose to participate, this was not a statistically-valid survey and results should not be

viewed as a representative sample of the entire Asheville population. Participants were also asked whether they owned or rented their home, as housing status has been shown to have a significant impact on how trees are managed on private property.

Race/Ethnicity (774 responses)	%
White	90
Prefer not to answer	5
Hispanic or Latinx	2
Asian	1
American Indian or Alaska Native	1
Other	1
African American or Black	1
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.4
My race is unknown to me	0.4

Age (782 responses)	%
Over 75	9
66-75	24
56-65	14
46-55	15
36-45	20
26-35	13
Other	5

Household income (748 responses)	%
Over $125,000	20
$50,000- $125,000	40
$30,000- $49,000	13
$15,000- $29,000	5
Under $15,000	2
Prefer not to answer	20

Housing Situation (758 responses)	%
Own	77

Housing Situation (758 responses)	%
Rent	19
Others	4

Participants were asked how interested they are in trees and the urban forest. Interest can affect how people think, feel and respond so understanding interest helps interpret survey results more accurately. In this case, 49% of respondents indicated that they are extremely interested and knowledgeable about trees and 48% of respondents indicated that they love trees and want to learn more about them while only 3% of respondents indicated that they have concerns about problems that trees cause, or that trees are not a priority for them. Since the vast majority of respondents are highly engaged and interested in trees and the urban forest, data collected is coming from a section of the community that prioritizes this topic.

How interested are you in trees and the urban forest? (Select one)	Responses	Percent of Responders
I'm extremely interested and knowledgeable about trees.	575	49%
I love trees and want to learn more about them.	562	48%
I am concerned that trees cause problems (e.g., property damage, falling limbs, allergens).	15	2%
Trees are okay, but I have more important things to focus on.	14	1%
None of the above	8	0%
I dislike trees.	1	0%

Recurring Themes

Every response and input received across all avenues of outreach was cataloged and grouped by theme. Each theme is listed in order of those most frequently heard, and is described in more detail on the subsequent pages.

Theme 1: Participants expressed significant concern regarding the loss of mature trees and advocated for preservation priorities.

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of protecting existing trees and limiting removal, frequently citing storm damage and development pressures as primary concerns.

This included the following subthemes:

- **Preserve Asheville's Identity.** Many cited the tree losses that are occurring are taking away the very asset that attracts people to live in or visit Asheville
- **Stronger City Regulations Needed to Enforce Preservation.** Many believe that protections for trees during development are not adequate, especially high-value mature trees.
- **Preservation is Key for Storm and Climate Resilience.** The need for mature trees and woodlands to provide storm and climate resilience came up many times, especially because of trees' role in reducing heat and improving air and water quality.
- **Preservation is Key for Conserving River and Streambanks.** There were also repeated calls for preservation of trees and vegetation along riparian areas to prevent future erosion of essential streams and riverbanks.

From the Stakeholder Group on Tree Loss and Preservation. This group emphasized prioritizing the preservation of mature trees and especially larger wooded areas. The need for funding was highlighted, with suggestions including increased regulations, tax incentives, easements, or assigning an organization that is able to preserve smaller tracts of canopy in more developed areas of the City. A selection of notes from group discussion:

- *We desperately need an urban forest land trust to hold small parcel conservation easements.*
- *Hard to protect or preserve high quality trees with new development*
- *We need a fund to buy mature urban forests like UNCA's millennial campus and the forest at Ravenscroft. Value of a forest vs value of individual scattered trees (trees live in community)*
- *Preserving mature trees. Especially with climate change.*
- *Protecting high quality trees*
- *Tax incentives for homeowners to retain trees - tax relief for retaining trees - bond or startup*
- *Orgs to preserve smaller tracts of mature canopy*
- *Absentee owners of property with managers that cut trees/clearing*

From the Public Workshop on Tree Loss and Preservation. Tree preservation and protection came up at the public workshop as well, with suggestions of better

enforcement of tree protection during development and better tree maintenance to focus on longevity of existing mature trees. Some group notes include:

- *Greater incentives needed to preserve existing trees*
- *Prioritize City funding toward big/mature trees*
- *Stewardship of trees at public and private is not effective*
- *Lack of tree maintenance; lack of focus on longevity*

From the Survey on Tree Loss and Preservation. Preservation-related needs were the two top responses when asked about current priorities in Asheville, both following Helene and in city operations overall, as shown in the two question responses below. It was also a primary theme in the open-ended comments as well.

*Note on quantities and percentages: The following survey questions asked responders to rank their top three responses, so these results represent the quantity and percent of responders that chose each of these options as one of their three responses.

After Tropical Storm Helene, which of the following do you think are the top priorities for trees in Asheville? (Rank your top three)	**Responses**	**Percent of Responders**
We should prevent mature, healthy trees from being removed	900	80%
We should preserve more trees during development	852	76%
More trees need to be planted	816	72%
Trees in parks and public spaces need more care	256	23%
We need financial assistance for tree care on private property	148	13%
More oversight is needed for trees on private property to ensure compliance with local regulations	111	10%
Other	47	4%
Trees in Asheville are fine as is	22	2%
None of the above	8	1%
Trees caused problems during the storm, so we need fewer trees	6	1%
No opinion/I rarely think of trees	4	0%

Similarly, respondents said that priorities for city management of trees should

include management and protection of trees during development, and increasing the budget to care for existing trees.

What tree management activities should the City of Asheville prioritize? (Rank your top three)	Responses	Percent of Responders
Improve management and/or protection of trees during construction projects	912	82%
Increase budget for maintenance and care of public trees	759	68%
Increase the overall number of trees planted	659	59%
Ensure sufficient space to grow trees	393	35%
Choose the best locations for new tree plantings	336	30%
Other (please describe) where are these	44	4%
Current tree management is sufficient. No changes are necessary	14	1%

Tree preservation and protection came up the most often in the open-ended survey question as well. When asked *"What else would you like to tell us?"*, the need for tree preservation was cited by 73% of survey respondents, especially after the damage caused by Hurricane Helene, and in light of the growth and development pressures facing Asheville. Just over 25% of comments also mentioned the upcoming loss of the UNCA Woods property as an example of a larger tract of woodland that should be preserved.

Sample comments received:

- *'Protecting and preserving the city's urban tree canopy should be a top priority for city government, including elected officials. This basic premise should be part of the discussion when considering development to get the right balance between improving the city's housing needs and the overall economic stability with providing residents the benefits of a green infrastructure and climate resilience.'*
- *'Planning and implementing an Urban Forest Master Plan is crucial to identifying the ordinance language, policies and procedures necessary to achieve the premise that protecting and preserving the urban tree canopy is crucial. This is so pivotal and there will be only one shot at putting together an Urban Forest Master Plan, that must be done right, with all of the research, information and community input available to us."*

From the Student Survey on Tree Loss and Preservation. Respondents from the student survey shared their top tree priorities after tropical storm Helene and prevention of mature, healthy trees from being removed was the second top priority.

One student's open ended comment was, "One day nature and urbanization will learn to live in harmony. If we can not as a community learn to combine urban life and nature then humanity is doomed."

Theme 2: Participants frequently identified a need for proactive, ongoing tree planting efforts.

Respondents expressed a strong preference for proactive tree planting efforts to increase the urban forest, citing various environmental and community benefits. Responses varied as to why planting more trees is a priority, but the overall sentiment about increasing the number of trees was a common topic of discussion and comment.

This included the following subthemes:

- **Plant More Native Species.** Desire to prioritize planting native species was shared. Reasoning included supporting biodiversity, providing wildlife habitat, lowering maintenance costs, and environmental resilience, related both to climate and pests and diseases..
- **Plant with a Goal to Increase Shade and Lower Temperatures.** Increasing the amount of shade provided by trees was brought up as a priority, with emphasis on lowering temperatures, increasing walkability, and creating liveable outdoor conditions.
- **Replanting Riparian Areas Damaged by Storm.** Riparian areas came up multiple times as an important location for tree planting to replace what was lost and to ensure future storm resilience.
- **Opportunities to Plant on Private Property.** It was also recognized that private property provides significant planting opportunities as well, and property owners benefit from tree giveaways and other methods to help get trees planted.

From the Stakeholder Group on Tree Planting. Tree planting with a purpose was the emphasis with this group. Trees for pedestrian shade, equitable access, wildlife value, and more were all brought up as important reasons to plant. Some workshop notes include:

- *More people-focused approach to planting priorities*
    - *50% shade on sidewalks/canopy corridors*
    - *Equitable access to treed areas*
    - *Better systems in transitional areas between public/private spaces*
- *Better planting practices are the norm*
    - *Improvements to recommended species list*
        - *More prescriptive and more information so the right trees go in the right areas*
        - *Greater proportion of canopy being long-lived varieties*
- *Should there be a preference for species that increase habitat and offer a home for more species*
- *Use the city's fee-in-lieu money to partner with private landowners who lost trees from Helene. Also, use that money to plant more trees in parks and along the rivers. They can be smaller trees to stretch the money further.*
- *Revegetating flood plain*
- *Planting aquatic buffer*
- *Focus on area with low canopy cover for re-vegetation efforts, such as along the rivers*

From the Public Workshop on Tree Planting. Discussion at the public workshop also centered around purpose-based plantings. Removing lawn in favor of trees, reforesting storm damaged riparian areas, planting natives, and planting on private property all came up. Some notes include:

- *Less lawn and more plantings that create a habitat*
- *Increase native plantings and less grass in public parks. There are some good examples to expand city-wide*
- *Reforestation of riverfront with resilient plantings*

- *Plant trees intentionally*
- *Plant trees to stabilize, plant trees in their habitat, sidewalk trees,buffer - "tree lot"*
- *Incentivize private property owners to plant and maintain*
- *City would be partnering with state to plant in DOT ROW's*

From the Survey on Tree Planting. Survey respondents chose wildlife value and habitat as the most important reason to plant trees, by almost a 20% margin. Community health also rated high at 64% Also, as shown in the survey charts above, respondents chose tree planting as second in importance only to preservation.

What opportunities, if any, do you associate with the planting of trees? (Rank your top three)	Responses	Percent of Responders
Providing habitat for birds and other wildlife	995	87%
Supporting community health	736	64%
Beautifying the environment	736	64%
Spending time outdoors	467	41%
Planting a legacy	286	25%
Meeting new people (for example, attending a tree-planting workday)	98	9%
None of these apply	12	1%

Many open-ended comments also stressed the importance of planting trees, rating in frequency second only to preservation. Sample comments include:

- *"Speak for the trees! Plant more. Their roots help with erosion."*
- *"Increasing the number and quality of tree plantings will go far toward preserving the character of our city which will inspire more tourism and revenue. We need to push hard for tree care."*
- *"Prioritizing replacing trees lost along the river."*

From the Student Survey on Tree Planting. Respondents from the student survey shared that their top priority post storm is planting more trees.

One open ended response shared "There is a large incentive to gain community service hours for highschoolers. If there were to be tree planting opportunities it

should be marketed to high school kids. This could cut down on labor costs and give teenagers an incredible learning experience."

A second open ended response shared "I think that there should be more native trees planted. I think that the public needs more awareness about the importance of native trees in our area. I also think that we should prioritize conservation of the beauty of our area over development. As a community, we need to think ahead for what Asheville will look like in the future. I also think that we should have a central park in Asheville that prioritizes the city's natural beauty."

Theme 3: Respondents noted the utility of trees in mitigating urban heat, improving air and water quality, and supporting climate resilience.

Participants identified trees as a primary solution for reducing urban heat, improving air and water quality, and enhancing local climate resilience. Trees play a significant role in mitigating the urban heat island effect and combating the broader impacts of climate change. Respondents recognize trees as part of climate resilience.

This included the following subthemes:

- **Trees are an Effective Tool to Lower Heat.** It was recognized that trees are a critical element to combating the Urban Heat Island Effect. Planting and preserving trees cools the air through evapotranspiration.
- **Urban Heat Increases as Asheville Develops.** Many expressed concern that as Asheville continues to develop and densify, the Urban Heat Island Effect will intensify.
- **Climate Change Will Result in Higher Temperatures.** Many cited that climate change predicts higher temperatures so tree preservation and planting need to be prioritized as a solution to combat rising temperatures.

From the Stakeholder Group on Climate Resilience. Participants discussed that urban heat and poor air quality impacts everybody. Trees were mentioned as not being instantaneous. Instead, they are able to provide a simple path forward over time. As the climate changes and temperatures rise, shade is a critical element to the city's infrastructure and participants emphasized that it is important to plan for the future and for the changing climate using trees as a tool to combat the potential negative effects.

From the Public Workshop on Climate Resilience. Participants at the public workshop discussed environmental resilience and the need to prioritize and address

the ecological benefits that trees provide in combating heat island effect and climate change. A vision for the future of a healthy city with healthy waterways was shared.

From the Survey on Climate Resilience. Comments from the survey centered on the role that trees play in mitigating the urban heat island effect and weathering the broader impacts of climate change. Comments captured the recognition of trees as part of climate resilience and as a simple yet powerful tool to lower temperatures. As seen in the survey results below, lowering heat levels is seen as the most important role that trees play in the community with 701 responses and 60% of participants.

What do you think are the three most important roles of trees in our community? (Rank your top three)	**Responses**	**Percent of Responders**
Lowering heat levels	701	60%
Air quality/cleaner air	683	58%
Provide wildlife habitat	612	52%
Reducing stormwater runoff/providing cleaner water	600	51%
Beauty and appearance	356	30%
Improving mental health	296	25%
Improving physical health	47	4%
Providing food/fruit/nourishment	46	4%
Addressing/remedying past unfair and discriminatory practices	26	2%
Increasing property values	26	2%
Privacy/Screening	25	2%
Lowering energy bills	20	2%
Reducing crime	5	0%
I do not believe trees provide any benefits	1	0%

Comments from the survey:

- *Urban heat will worsen as Asheville grows and the climate changes. We must fight for our trees to keep Asheville resilient in the face of new challenges and natural disasters.*
- *Trees are imperative to a healthy city, protecting water and air quality, reducing stormwater runoff, and reducing the urban heat island effect. We need to preserve what we have and plant more.*

- *Trees are one of the simplest, most powerful ways to make a city healthier and more livable. They cool down hot streets, cut energy use, and give people shaded places to walk and gather. Their leaves help clean the air, their roots absorb stormwater that would otherwise flood roads, and their presence makes neighborhoods feel calmer and more welcoming.*

From the Student Survey on Climate Resilience. One open ended comment in the student survey shared that they appreciate the amount of trees in Asheville compared to other cities they have visited because the number of trees helps protect against extreme temperature fluctuations.

Theme 4: Participants suggested that existing tree protection regulations require strengthening and more consistent enforcement.

Stakeholders and public participants suggested that existing tree protection regulations require strengthening, specifically noting a need for more consistent enforcement. This includes concerns with preservation, planting, and lack of long-term care for newly planted trees, affecting their survival and growth.

Better regulations that support more tree preservation, more tree planting, better planting requirements that put the right tree in the right place, and better enforcement to make sure regulations are followed successfully were all topics that came up frequently across engagement types.

This included the following subthemes:

- **Require protection of more trees.** Participants often noted that too many trees are removed for development projects, and there was a desire to preserve and protect more trees and wooded stands of trees.

- **Ensure better species are chosen and adequate space is provided.** Better species include more natives, more shade trees, and trees that fit the location. Providing better space for trees also came up, such as larger tree wells, bump-outs, and planting strips. Maintenance after planting was also noted as an area that needs improvement.

- **Better enforcement of regulations during development.** Enforcement came up often in discussion, with the public noting that existing regulations often are not followed. Adequate tree protection is not followed through and protected trees are damaged. New trees are often poorly planted, or are often

a poor species choice for the location. Adequate follow up care is not provided, and required trees often die and are not replaced.

From the Stakeholder Group on regulations and enforcement. The stakeholder group shared that preservation requirements could be strengthened in order to retain more trees. Recommendations were made to update the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to update the TCP to improve tree protection. Recommendations were also made to make policy changes to landscape standards and an updated tree list.

Stakeholders also shared that the City of Asheville needs to be held to the same standards as developers and residents. A comment was made that if all of the work from this plan applies to all groups, the project will be deemed a success. Some notes from the workshops include:

- *Better design around the urban canopy based on existing conditions so trees don't have to be removed or replanted.*
- *Updating zoning regulations to incentivize more sustainable development and tree preservation.*
- *Better species for new plantings for development. More and better enforcement mechanisms, monitoring, maintenance, etc. Reporting violations - accountability.*
- *Better design around the urban canopy based on existing conditions so trees don't have to be removed or replanted. Better codes and standards.*

From the Public Workshop on regulations and enforcement. Discussion at the public workshop also centered around the need to preserve existing trees and that enforcement and legislation could be mechanisms to achieve greater preservation. Some notes include:

- *Greater incentives needed to preserve existing trees.*
- *No rules about keeping trees intact until construction begins.*
- *Why certain cuts are done without knowledge of the public - clear cuts unknown to citizens.*
- *No rules about keeping trees intact until construction begins.*
- *Replanting accountability (related to development).*

- *City ordinances that require more and better trees in parking lots specifically.*
- *Tree topping enforcement.*
- *Make policies public information.*
- *Regulations with accountability. City staff should do better with following through on enforcing regulations.*
- *Enforceable tree ordinance.*
    - *Volunteer corp-trained-to gound truth permit applications then report to staff*

From the Survey on regulations and enforcement. Survey respondents emphasized that developers must abide by regulations concerning tree preservation and planting during construction projects. There is a desire for increased tree protection during development.

Sample comments from the survey:

- *"To start, greater oversight and compliance with city ordinances to protect mature trees from removal for development is a must. Being able to pay a fee-in-lieu instead of preserving mature growth on a development site contributes to the decrease in Asheville's tree cover. Simply planting a new tree does not compensate for the ecosystem services provided by a mature tree."*
- *"Protecting and preserving the city's urban tree canopy should be a top priority for city government, including elected officials. This basic premise should be part of the discussion when considering development to get the right balance between improving the city's housing needs and the overall economic stability with providing residents the benefits of a green infrastructure and climate resilience."*
- *"Planning and implementing an Urban Forest Master Plan is crucial to identifying the ordinance language, policies and procedures necessary to achieve the premise that protecting and preserving the urban tree canopy is crucial. This is so pivotal and there will be only one shot at putting together an Urban Forest Master Plan, that is must be done right, with all of the research, information and community input available to us."*

From the Student Survey on regulations and enforcement. The student survey respondents shared that the top tree management activity that the City of Asheville should prioritize is to **improve management and/or protection of trees during construction projects.**

Theme 5: Respondents identified damaged riparian areas as a priority for restoration, planting, and enhanced protection.

Participants identified the protection and restoration of riparian areas as a high priority, emphasizing the role of trees in stabilizing banks and filtering pollutants. Participants in all engagements shared the need to plant trees along the banks of rivers or streams to protect waterways and improve water quality. Comments focused on the ecological benefits of trees in aquatic buffer zones, and stressed that there is a need for specific measures to protect and retain trees on steep terrain to prevent erosion and landslides. Additionally, there was emphasis on the function of trees and their root systems in filtering pollutants and maintaining healthy local water sources.

This included the following subthemes:

- **Plant trees to protect waterways.** Many shared that trees should be planted along riparian corridors to improve water and soil quality and to stabilize river banks. This will help to prevent future incidences of flooding.
- **Retain trees on steep terrain.** Respondents urged strong enforcement of the steep slope ordinance to control erosion and maintain natural topography.

From the Stakeholder Group on riparian areas. Revegetation storm damaged areas, especially riparian areas where streambanks were eroded was a common theme. Comments included focusing on replanting that promoted better storm resilience, and considering these plantings vital stormwater management infrastructure.

From the Public Workshop on riparian areas. At the public workshop, attendees brought up the need to prioritize restoration and riverbank stabilization. Attendees stressed that assistance for this work on private property was needed as well.

From the Survey on riparian areas. Many comments in the survey touched on the need for tree planting along the banks of rivers and streams, along with protecting and retaining what was already there to prevent erosion. Trees were seen as important to the safety and stability of slopes in the area. Trees and their root

systems were recognized as important towards maintaining healthy water systems. Sample comments include:

- *"Trees are imperative to a healthy city, protecting water and air quality, reducing stormwater runoff, and reducing the urban heat island effect. We need to preserve what we have and plant more."*
- *"In rapidly developing urban areas — especially in the wake of a storm such as Hurricane Helene — preserving and expanding tree cover becomes vital for community resilience. Trees act as a natural buffer: their leaves and branches intercept rainfall and slow its descent, while their roots help absorb water and improve soil infiltration — reducing stormwater runoff and the risk of flooding."*
- *"Prioritizing replacing trees lost along the river."*
- *"Zoning and permitting for buildings on high grade slopes must be narrow and require lots of trees to avoid mudslides."*
- *"The City of Asheville should prioritize not only the protection of mature trees and forests, but the re-establishment of a riparian buffer along the French Broad River, where banks have been stripped bare and are continuously eroding. Trees stabilize our streams and rivers. They are crucial for flood-resilience, water quality, and ultimately the protection of our city. "*

Theme 6: **Participants emphasized the importance of healthy ecosystems and wildlife habitat, highlighting invasive species management as a critical need.**

Engagement feedback highlighted that participants prioritize healthy ecosystems and wildlife habitat, with many identifying invasive species management as a critical necessity. Participants repeatedly cited the need to provide for wildlife through many avenues, including preservation, purposeful planting, and control of invasive species. Utilizing native species to provide for wildlife was repeatedly stressed across multiple engagement pathways.

This included the following subthemes:

- **Preserve and Expand Wildlife Habitat.** Participants brought up the importance of preserving and planting native species that provide food and habitat for wildlife, as well as the importance of protecting larger tracts of wooded space.

- **Control of invasives.** This was repeatedly brought up, as many reported the prevalence of invasive species in all areas of the city, but especially lack of control on private property contributing to difficulty in performing successful control everywhere.
- **Healthy understory.** The importance of preserving wooded space was stressed, not just for the trees, but to protect the entire vegetation ecosystem that was critical for wildlife.

From the Stakeholder Group on healthy ecosystems. Discussion in the stakeholder group prioritized controlling invasive species to improve wildlife habitat. Some comments include:

- *There should be a preference for species that increase habitat and offer a home for more species.*
- *Replacement campaigns for invasives- payor incentives property owners to replace invasive species.*
- *There is a need to get ahead of invasive species after the storm.*

From the Public Workshop on healthy ecosystems. Similarly, trees for wildlife value and control of invasive plant control came up frequently in the public workshop. Some comments include:

- *Individual homeowners that have plantings that contribute to stronger ecological quality of life for the neighborhood and the city as a whole. Especially for pollinator plants.*
- *Increase native plantings and less grass in public parks. There are some good examples to expand city-wide.*
- *Control of invasives! Also comes with education. Teach people what plants are native. What not to plant.*

From the Survey on healthy ecosystems. In the open-ended survey comments, wildlife value was mentioned often. When asked to rank the top three most important roles of trees, 52% of respondents chose to provide wildlife habitat as one of the top three roles.

- *"Trees are necessary for the survival of our ecosystems."*
- *"Trees provide countless valuable benefits for us but it is even more important as the habitat of local wildlife. We need to not only maintain what is there but work to restore negatively affected areas caused by human impact. Moving*

forward we should be considering environmental value beyond human benefit. Cutting down and then planting new trees is not a sufficient or equitable plan. We also need to have measures to minimize and mitigate urban sprawl."

- *"Trees provide a wonderful shelter for urban wildlife."*

From the Student Survey on healthy ecosystems. Student respondents expressed concern that a loss of canopy results in loss of habitat for wildlife.

Theme 7: Respondents connected tree canopy to public health outcomes and advocated for equitable access to its benefits across all neighborhoods.

Respondents consistently linked tree canopy to community public health and quality of life, advocating for equitable distribution of these benefits across all neighborhoods. Comments addressed the need to ensure that the benefits of trees and tree canopy are distributed across all neighborhoods, especially in underserved or low-income areas. Participants brought up the need for shade, equitably located greenspace, and pocket parks.

From the Stakeholder Group on public health. Members of the stakeholder group recognized that trees improve quality of life, and that there was a need for funding for improved tree canopy in underserved areas. Suggestions included using abandoned lots to provide pocket parks for walkable access to greenspace and trees.

From the Public Workshop on public health. Attendees brought up the need to plant and preserve trees in low canopy areas to address equity issues. Also mentioned was creating tree havens and pocket parks for the health and benefit of citizens

From the Survey on public health. When asked to rank the reasons for planting trees, 64% of respondents ranked community health as one of the top three reasons to plant trees. When asked to rank the top benefits of trees in the survey, 25% of responders believe that improving mental health is one of the top three benefits of trees. Respondents also identified cost as a barrier to having and caring for trees, ranking this third as an issue preventing them from planting. Survey suggestions included creating and expanding localized green spaces and pocket parks as a way to integrate more nature into urban spaces.

What are the top issues preventing you from planting trees on the property where you live? (Rank your top three)	Responses	Percent of Responders
Nothing prevents me-- I plant anywhere I can	526	47%
Not enough space on the property	388	34%
Cost of planting and/or maintenance	315	28%
Unsure of the best type of size of tree to plant	282	25%
I rent and the landlord won't allow it	200	18%
Unsure of how to care for trees	103	9%
Fear that it will fall or cause damage to my property	86	8%
Too much work/maintenance required	78	7%
Unsure of how to plant a tree	71	6%
Concerns about the mess (leaves, pollen, fruit, etc.)	25	2%
Don't want wildlife, bees or other critters attracted to the tree	4	0%
I just don't like trees	2	0%

Sample comments include:

- *"Trees and a healthy tree canopy are essential to the beauty and wellbeing of this city. Planting new trees is wonderful, but Asheville must ensure that mature, healthy trees are protected as well."*
- *"The most livable cities such as in Europe incorporate trees with their city planning for the physical and mental health of the city. Living here in our green canopy is simply what makes Asheville...Asheville. We should not only preserve, but enhance this aspect."*

Theme 8: **Participants identified a need for enhanced education, centralized access to information, and increased community collaboration.**

Participants identified a need for enhanced collaboration, clearer communication, and centralized access to educational resources regarding tree care and management. There was acknowledgement that there are some existing resources, but many people may not know where to find the information that they are looking for.

This included the following subthemes:

- **Focus on Accessible and Relatable Information for all.** Suggestions were made to collaborate with experts to reach people who communicate differently. There are several educational resources available but connecting people with what is already out there seems to be a challenge because people do not necessarily know where to go to find information. Several groups mentioned that it would be beneficial to have one centralized place to show who is doing what and the various resources that are available.
- **Connect to What People Care About.** To share the value of trees with people who do not already care about ecology, groups discussed how it is important to show the value of trees in the bigger picture of one's own family or self. How do trees relate and connect to problems in one's own life? There are many benefits that trees provide that can improve people's lives in ways they may not be aware of. For example, many groups pointed out that trees are good for both health and wealth. Creating a message that relates to overall quality of life will show how trees can be the solution to life's challenges.
- **Data is Decentralized.** Another topic that arose multiple times in the workshops was the decentralized nature of urban forest data currently, as well as a lack of up-to-date data. Management is stronger and more cooperative when everyone has access to information. The groups were tasked with cataloging known data sets and exploring this concept further. What is out there currently? What is needed? How should information be shared?
- **Re-launch the Asheville Tree Map**. Several groups mentioned the need to re-launch the Asheville Tree Map, a crowd-sourced map of the city's trees. It was also discussed that it would be beneficial to utilize the Asheville App as a reporting tool where people are able to report tree maintenance needs, trees that need to be removed, open tree planting spaces, or other tree related observations. The Asheville App, the City of Asheville's service request app, currently routes requests such as potholes, damaged sidewalks, and streetlight repair and more to the correct City department.

From the Stakeholder Group on education. In order to have a successful implementation program, groups at the stakeholder workshops discussed the need to ensure that information is accessible to the entire community, not just those already participating and aware of ecology and the environment.

From the Public Workshop on education. Participants at the public workshop also emphasized that increased education is needed. Ideas such as developing volunteer programs to support tree initiatives or local efforts and increasing overall awareness

by the population via regular campaigns, social media, marketing, engagement, events were suggested.

- *Education regarding tree maintenance (QR codes on trees - scan for more info or to report maintenance needs).*
- *Communication is more hyperlocal in your own neighborhood.*
- *Communication to property owners about the economic benefits of having trees on your commercial site.*
- *Partnerships/Teaming:*
    - *Get non profits involved.*
    - *Connections - connect smaller pieces of urban canopy with greenways, trails, etc. Stronger together.*
    - *More partnerships.*

From the Survey on education. Respondents shared the desire for public outreach and educational programs to inform residents about the benefits of trees, species selection, and proper tree care. Responses suggest that knowledge is key to better urban forestry outcomes and that some of the Asheville community would be more engaged if they had more education about trees and tree care. The question below highlights this, lack of knowledge is named as 2 out of 2 biggest challenges related to trees.

In your opinion, what are the three biggest challenges related to trees in our community? (Rank your top three)	**Responses**	**Percent of Responders**
Lack of knowledge about which types of trees are best to plant	550	48%
Fear of trees falling or dropping branches and causing property damage or injury	460	40%
Lack of knowledge about how to properly care for trees	432	38%
None of these- I don't see any significant challenges with trees	353	31%
Trees interfere with utilities (e.g., overhead power lines, underground pipes	235	21%
The cost of maintaining trees (e.g., pruning, watering) is too high.	181	16%

In your opinion, what are the three biggest challenges related to trees in our community? (Rank your top three)	Responses	Percent of Responders
The initial cost of purchasing or planting trees is too high.	166	15%
The cost of removing trees is too high	115	10%
Trees cause damage to my property (e.g., roof, gutters, sidewalks, driveways	70	6%
Personal safety concerns (e.g., too many trees create hiding spots or obscure visibility	57	5%
Trees can cause or worsen allergy problems	42	4%
Trees create too much mess (e.g., dropping leaves, seeds or fruit	29	3%
Trees are too difficult or time consuming to care for.	28	2%
Trees look unattractive if they are not well maintained	28	2%

Comments from the survey:

- *"Help the community understand the long term value of trees through education and public activities."*
- *"Education is important to both plant the right tree in the right place and to keep people from removing trees that don't need to be removed."*
- *"Education about why we need trees, how to take care of them, and how to choose which trees should be a priority in all schools at all ages. Our future depends on these students knowing about trees."*
- *"Collaborate with local environmental nonprofits on education regarding invasive species, benefits of native species, sources of native species, planting and maintenance of trees and native species."*

From the Student Survey on education. *Respondents to the student survey shared that there is a need to educate the public about tree care and benefits of trees.*

Theme 9: Respondents emphasized the importance of balancing urban growth with the preservation of Asheville's natural character.

Respondents frequently highlighted the challenge of balancing urban growth with the preservation of Asheville's natural identity, emphasizing the community's desire

to protect its existing landscape character. It was often mentioned that Asheville is a desirable place to live because of the trees, woodlands, streams, and wildlife, and losing this identity to growth was in conflict with the reasons people wanted to be here.

From the Stakeholder Group on Asheville's identity. Stakeholders discussed the challenge of balancing the need for housing, affordability, and economic growth, stating that these were often perceived as competing priorities. However, stakeholders emphasized the need for a strong strategy that prioritizes the preservation of Asheville's identity.

From the Public Workshop on Asheville's identity. Attendees at the public workshop stated that profit from development could not be prioritized over tree canopy. Some notes from the workshop:

- *Want the city to have "more teeth" and be more confrontational with issues we care about.*
- *Want the city to respond to citizen concerns with vigor - care more about issues outside of economics.*
- *Stronger policies against big corporations. Big corporations don't care. How do we make policies that aren't about money? Make sure policies aren't around big corporations. Awareness about what corporations preach versus their actions (ex: Subaru leveling land).*
- *Balancing development with urban canopy. Hold developers accountable! Encourage not only canopy but diversity.*

From the Survey on Asheville's identity. Respondents shared that trees are a defining characteristic of Asheville and an asset to its economy, related to tourism and quality of life for residents. Comments mentioned that tree conservation can be incorporated into the city's brand and identity.

- *"Increasing the number and quality of tree plantings will go far toward preserving the character of our city which will inspire more tourism and revenue. We need to push hard for tree care."*
- *"I moved here and many tourists come to Asheville for our forests and mountains. Trees are an essential element to our beautiful natural environment. I am especially concerned about UNCA's plans to destroy a valuable section of URBAN FOREST for a soccer field that could be put on*

other UNCA land. This would be a devastating loss to our community on so many levels."

- *"We live in Asheville - it's supposed to be in the mountains with green space and trees all around. We are becoming the opposite of that. Development HAS to include preserving the canopy - there is a way to grow sustainably while incorporating nature into it. Trees keep roads/sidewalks much cooler in the hot summer, give homes for wildlife and quiet everything down."*

From the Student Survey on Asheville's identity. A student respondent shared that they really enjoy walking around downtown Asheville because the trees and flowers are especially pretty. They said "That's one part of Asheville I like."

Conclusion and Next Steps

The perspectives and input shared by Asheville residents, community organizations, businesses, educational institutions, and more throughout the discovery phase of the project is integral to build a UFMP that addresses the real priorities of the community. This collaborative effort can set the groundwork for successful implementation of Asheville's UFMP. Thanks to all who have participated and to those who will continue to engage in this process for the future of Asheville's urban forest.

Upon conclusion of the engagement process, the project team will set goals, develop the narrative and recommendations and draft the UFMP. Then, the plan will go through a review process before a final plan is released.