



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

**County Board Agenda Item
Meeting of October 13, 2007**

DATE: September 25, 2007

SUBJECT: Create a Tree Canopy Fund and mechanism for awarding Tree Planting and Maintenance Grants and authorization to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment (ACE) for administration of Tree Canopy Fund Grant Program.

C. M. RECOMMENDATION:

1. Approve the establishment of a Tree Canopy Fund in a Trust and Agency Account (Fund 799) that provides a mechanism for developer contributions in cases where the required number of trees cannot be planted on site. The minimum recommended contribution rate is equal to \$2,400 per tree that cannot be planted on site as required by the approved plan.
2. Approve the mechanism, as proposed, for using the Tree Canopy Fund to provide grants to community groups for planting trees on private and public property, maintaining specifically designated trees, and educational/outreach efforts.
3. Authorize the County Manager to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with ACE (Attachment) for administration of the Tree Canopy Fund grant program.

ISSUES: Should funds contributed by developers who cannot meet tree planting requirements on their sites be placed in a Tree Canopy Fund? Should money in the fund be periodically transferred to a non-profit group (ACE), which will administer a neighborhood tree grant program with the main purpose of planting trees on private properties?

SUMMARY: Arlington County's Tree Canopy Fund provides a mechanism whereby developers may contribute to a fund in lieu of planting the required number of trees on site. This will be permitted only if developers demonstrate that site constraints make it impossible to accommodate the full number of trees required. Money contributed to the Tree Canopy Fund may be made available by Arlington County to a non-profit charitable organization which will use it to provide grants to neighborhood groups for planting trees on private properties, and for maintenance of specifically designated trees.

Staff recommends establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with ACE to enable it to receive monies from the Tree Canopy Fund and administer the neighborhood tree grant program.

County Manager: _____

County Attorney: _____

Staff: Jamie Bartalon, PRCR

Grant applications will be reviewed and awarded by a committee composed of representatives from the non-profit group (ACE), members of the Urban Forestry Commission, and County staff appointed by the County Manager, or designee.

BACKGROUND: Arlington County's Urban Forestry Master Plan recommends creating a Tree Fund that is dedicated to planting trees on private properties and educating residents about the value and stewardship of trees. Since the 1970's, Arlington County has lost a significant amount of tree canopy, with formerly densely forested areas experiencing the most loss. It is estimated that over 3,000 acres in Arlington have been converted from "heavy" tree cover (over 50% canopy) to "low" tree cover (less than 20% canopy) during the past three decades. This loss of tree canopy has occurred primarily on private properties. Although Arlington has an aggressive program to plant trees on public property, far more planting opportunities and the greatest potential to increase tree canopy coverage exist on private properties. The Tree Canopy Fund provides a mechanism for the optimal placement of trees in areas where they can be expected to reach mature ages and sizes.

The proposed Tree Canopy Fund and mechanism for awarding neighborhood grants was developed by staff working with the Urban Forestry Commission, and is supported by the Commission.

DISCUSSION: It is proposed that a Tree Canopy Fund be established by Arlington County as a separate Trust and Agency Fund for the purpose of planting trees on private or public properties, maintaining specifically designated trees, and educating residents on the value and stewardship of trees. Arlington County will transfer money from this fund to a non-profit organization (ACE), which will use the money to award tree planting grants to community organizations. The amount of funding for the program depends on the amount of money that has accumulated in the fund from developer contributions and/or donations from other sources. Applications for tree grants will be reviewed each spring, or at other appropriate intervals, by a committee composed of members of the non-profit (ACE), Urban Forestry Commission, and County staff.

Sources of Funding – Sources of contributions to the Tree Canopy Fund may include (but are not limited to):

- Contributions by developers of special exception projects where it has been demonstrated that the required number of trees to be planted do not fit within the site. In such cases, the County Board may determine that the developer may make a monetary contribution to the Tree Canopy Fund based upon the number of trees that could not be planted on site.
- Contributions by developers that have not been successful in meeting tree preservation requirements, for example, retention of bond money if trees designated for preservation should die during the period set by the bond. The fund is not intended to be used as a substitute for required tree preservation during development.
- Contributions from other sources, such as charitable gifts and grants.

Contribution Rate - When used to help meet tree planting requirements associated with special exception projects, the County Manager, or designee, will establish a contribution rate that will approximate the market cost of providing on-site trees, including the cost of planting,

replacement/warranty, and maintenance pruning every 5 years to the age of 30 years, plus a 20% administrative contribution. The contribution rate includes the administrative fee for the non-profit (ACE) to help cover their costs for managing the fund and grants.

In FY 2007, the recommended minimum contribution rate for the Tree Canopy Fund when used to help meet special exception project requirements is equal to **\$2,400 per tree** that is not planted on site as required. The County Board can set a contribution rate greater than the minimum for specific development projects when they approve any project with conditions. The minimum rate will be adjusted annually by the County Manager after considering appropriate factors such as inflation, market costs, etc.

The amount of contributions will vary each year as the actual number of trees that cannot be planted on sites as required by plan will vary depending on the number of plans reviewed, the number of trees removed and site constraints associated with each project. Staff projects that during an average year this could be 20 to 30 trees, though in one recent year it was more than 75.

Preserving healthy trees on site is a priority during development. When a developer fails to meet tree preservation requirements, contributions that result from this failure will vary depending on the assessed value of the tree to be preserved or bond posted for preservation. For assessment purposes, the value of the tree to be preserved will be determined in accordance with appraisal methods developed by the Council of Tree and Landscape Appraisers and published by the International Society of Arboriculture in *Guide for Plant Appraisal*.

Process - The County Board may determine that when the number of trees required to be planted for a special exception project cannot be accommodated on site, or trees to be preserved do not survive construction, the developers may make a monetary contribution to the Tree Canopy Fund. The option for developer contributions will be included in staff recommendations for the project when deemed appropriate, and the County Board will make a final determination during the plan approval process.

Eligibility - Community groups such as civic and homeowner associations, community non-profit organizations, civic service clubs, school-related groups, and ad hoc neighborhood groups are eligible to apply for, sponsor, and receive grants for tree planting and educational initiatives through the Tree Canopy Fund. Individuals may also apply for grants for maintenance to be performed on specific trees designated by Arlington County through their Champion Tree Program and Tree and Shrub Ordinance.

Application Process - Applicants must provide detailed information on use of the requested funding in one of three categories: tree planting; maintenance of Champion/designated tree(s); or, public education/outreach on the value and stewardship of trees. A designated contact person for the group submitting the proposal must be included with the application.

Tree planting applications must list the number and species of trees proposed to be planted, and include a detailed map showing the proposed location and species of each tree. Waivers granting permission to plant on private properties, releasing the program from all liabilities, and agreeing to all future maintenance of the tree(s) must be submitted

for each property and signed by each property owner receiving trees. The estimated cost of the project, based upon contracted tree planting costs provided with application materials, must be submitted as part of the application.

Tree maintenance applications will only be considered for trees that are on Arlington County's current list of Champion Trees. In addition to having Champion Tree status, eligible trees must also be designated or under application for protection through the County's Tree and Shrub Ordinance as specimen, heritage, memorial or street trees. Staff will work with applicants and a tree contractor to estimate maintenance costs for designated trees.

Public education/outreach applications must clearly state how the goals and objectives of the effort will contribute to the stewardship of trees, define the target audience, and outline how proposed outcomes will be achieved and measured. An estimate for the total cost of the project, and a detailed breakdown of anticipated expenditures must be submitted as part of the application.

Award of Funds - ACE will appoint a representative to participate in a grant review committee that also includes at least (2) members of the Urban Forestry Commission and (1) County staff as appointed by the County Manager, or designee. This group will accept and review applications, and award grants on an annual basis, or more frequently if appropriate. The amount of money accrued within the Tree Canopy Fund and the number of approved applications will determine the amount of funding available for any given project; with a maximum of \$5,000 to be awarded per project.

During the review process, the Urban Forestry Commission, County staff, and representatives from ACE will review applications for tree planting according to factors listed below. In general, projects that maximize environmental benefits through tree canopy enhancements, satisfy unmet needs in a neighborhood, and show that proper maintenance will be provided will receive the highest priority for funding. Arlington County will not provide follow-up maintenance for trees planted on private properties.

Some factors that could positively influence award of grants:

- Canopy tree that will shade a public sidewalk or other right-of-way.
- Canopy tree that will shade a public sidewalk in a location where the public right-of-way between the curb and sidewalk is less than four feet wide.
- Project consists of planting large canopy trees native to this area or appropriate variants (see list of recommended species).
- Trees will be planted in or near a Resource Protection Area (generally within 100 feet of a stream), in an area subject to erosion, or in other environmentally sensitive areas.
- Applicant commits to providing ongoing maintenance and watering.
- Canopy trees are planted in an area that is maintained as woodland.
- Proposed trees are located in areas conducive to future growth and health (i.e. areas that will provide sufficient space for root growth and crown development, not located under wires, etc.).

- Tree Stewards, Master Gardeners or other individuals who have training/experience in tree care have committed to maintain trees or provide maintenance advice/oversight.
- The applicant commits to providing additional “cost share” towards tree planting.

Upon award of tree planting grants, the designated contact person for the applicant group will be contacted and informed of the projected planting time for their project. The applicant group will be responsible for communicating final plans and planting schedules to property owners where trees are to be planted. The group will also be responsible for field-marking exact locations on properties where trees are to be planted, as indicated on the approved plan. Trees will be planted by a contractor selected by ACE during the appropriate planting season. County staff will not be directly involved in planting trees on private properties, but will provide educational information and connections with volunteer organizations.

Approved tree maintenance grants for County Champion/designated trees will be awarded through work performed by a contractor selected by ACE.

Approved grants for public education/outreach will be awarded as reimbursements to the applicant group for approved expenditures. Receipts for all expenditures must be provided prior to reimbursement.

FISCAL IMPACT: There will be no direct fiscal impact to Arlington County. All contributions to the Tree Canopy Fund will originate from developers and/or charitable gifts as described under “*Sources of Funding.*” The Trust and Agency Fund is used to account for assets received, held, and disbursed by the County acting in a trustee capacity or as an agent for individuals, organizations, or other governmental units. Although carried in the County’s financial records since the County is responsible for the funds, these assets are considered **not** to be assets belonging to the County.