



LOUISVILLE URBAN FOREST MASTER PLAN (2025)

Findings and Strategies

Urban forests have never been more critical to cities than today, serving as one of the only city infrastructure types that lowers temperatures and home energy costs, reduces air and water pollution, and improves human health in many different ways. The Louisville Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP) is a long-term strategic plan for addressing the many challenges facing the community by best utilizing and stewarding the urban forest.

FINDINGS ON EXISTING CONDITIONS

- Finding 1: Tree canopy is inequitable across Louisville.
- Finding 2: Tree canopy has grown slightly between 2012-2019 citywide
- Finding 3: Despite citywide gain, losses and gains are occurring at the neighborhood level.
- Finding 4: The majority of tree canopy is on private land.
- Finding 5: Trees are not currently considered critical city infrastructure in Louisville.
- Finding 6: There is a significant lack of resources for tree management within Metro.
- Finding 7: Street trees are not maintained effectively in good condition under the current system.
- Finding 8: This poor street tree management results in increasing inequities.
- Finding 9: Many street trees in poor condition have translated to many residents not wanting more trees.
- Finding 10: The public doesn't fully connect trees to public health and livability.
- Finding 11: There is an array of players doing good work in urban forestry.
- Finding 12: Work above is overlapping and inefficient.
- Finding 13: Long term care by Louisville Metro Government and tree organizations isn't in place, while planting continues.
- Finding 14: In lower-income areas, assistance for tree care on private property is needed to grow and maintain canopy.
- Finding 15: Neighborhoods are not walkable without shade.
- Finding 16: Trees are not included as a necessary component in design plans for transportation projects.
- Finding 17: There are significant gaps in urban forestry data that prevent full knowledge of the make up and condition of the urban forest.
- Finding 18: There are gaps to address in current tree protection regulations during development.
- Finding 19: There is no common goal or vision around this work currently.
- Finding 20: There is an opportunity to empower Louisville residents and solve a labor challenge.

UFMP GOALS

ACCESS FOR ALL

Prioritize access to tree canopy for all residents, working toward a minimum of 30% canopy in each neighborhood.

MENTALITY CHANGE

Work toward a mentality change that recognizes trees as vital city infrastructure.

WALKABILITY

Ensure people can walk, bike, and take transit without heat stress.

QUALITY & LONGEVITY

Ensure tree canopy is resilient, protected and sustainable in the long term.

THE PATH FORWARD

Reaching the four urban forest goals in Louisville will require a solid and consistent investment in trees across the community over the coming decades. There are 33 actions needed to meet these goals, grouped into 10 strategies.

Strategy 1: Improve coordination of all actors and refine roles for highest impact.

- **Action 1.1** - Form a coalition for plan implementation over the first 10 years.
- **Action 1.2** - Address significant overlap between tree organizations, underutilization of others.
- **Action 1.3** - Metro government takes over full care and management of street trees.
- **Action 1.4** - Home Rule cities take over full care and management of street trees.

Strategy 2: Ensure green infrastructure is built into all infrastructure projects.

- **Action 2.1** - Create a higher level Urban Forester position.
- **Action 2.2** - Incorporate trees and progress tracking metrics into policies, code, and planning documents.
- **Action 2.3** - Improve outcomes in green infrastructure through better standards.
- **Action 2.4** - Explore revisions to state policy of KYTC related to state roads in urban areas.

Strategy 3: Improve tree preservation & planting in development.

- **Action 3.1** - Provide a dedicated staff member for enforcement of existing code regulations.
- **Action 3.2** - Assess the effectiveness of existing regulations.
- **Action 3.3** - Prepare for future, evidence-based code revisions.

Strategy 4: Prioritize preservation to protect intact natural systems in more rural areas.

- **Action 4.1** - Identify existing highest quality forest and natural systems for priority preservation efforts.
- **Action 4.2** - Codify protection for high quality areas in a Conservation Form District.
- **Action 4.3** - Create a community-wide plan for addressing invasive species management.

Strategy 5: Build a skilled local workforce while meeting local needs in implementation.

- **Action 5.1** - Create an urban forestry workforce development program.

Strategy 6: Address data gaps to improve understanding of Louisville's urban forest.

- **Action 6.1** - Use tree canopy data layers to further analyze trends in tree canopy
- **Action 6.2** - Update the urban tree canopy assessment (UTC) every 5-10 years
- **Action 6.3** - Complete public tree inventory (streets, parks, any other public land)
- **Action 6.4** - Obtain a better understanding on make up of the urban forest located on private land.
- **Action 6.5** - Make all urban forestry data sets accessible to organization partners and the public.

Strategy 7: Improve public awareness on the role of the urban forest.

- **Action 7.1** - Create a central information hub.
- **Action 7.2** - Centralized messaging for partners to utilize to create a unified voice.
- **Action 7.3** - Distribute the campaign throughout the community.

Strategy 8: Ensure proactive care and preservation for overall urban forest health.

- **Action 8.1** - Develop a financial assistance program for tree care on private property.
- **Action 8.2** - Provide expertise to help property owners make decisions that support healthy trees.
- **Action 8.3** - Celebrate and value mature trees with a heritage tree program.

Strategy 9: Plant with a purpose.

- **Action 9.1** - In the short term, prioritize areas with highest need and lowest canopy.
- **Action 9.2** - For the longer term, create a more detailed, evidence-based planting plan.
- **Action 9.3** - Use the latest science to select the best tree species.

Strategy 10: Institute a plan to regularly measure progress and reassess.

- **Action 10.1** - Set measurable benchmarks or success metrics for each goal.
- **Action 10.2** - Produce annual UFMP progress reports.
- **Action 10.3** - Reassess action steps every five years.
- **Action 10.4** - Update the UFMP every 15 years