

VIENNA TREE ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATIONS TO TOWN COUNCIL

2026-Feb-12

Vienna's Tree Advocacy Committee ("TAC") has been tasked with making recommendations to the Vienna Town Council and Town agencies regarding the preservation and restoration of the Town's tree canopy, which canopy decreased by 163 acres (a 13% reduction) from 2011 to 2021 and almost certainly has continued to decline further since 2021 as residential construction continues at a steady pace. Preserving, planting and maintaining trees both on Town property and on private property furthers the goal of restoring the Town's tree canopy. In pursuit of that goal, we respectfully submit the following suggestions for review by the Town Council, Town Attorney, and Town agencies.

The following recommendations were adopted unanimously by the TAC at the regular meeting held on February 12, 2026:

1. ITEM 1: To revisit the Town's current discretionary practice of giving landowners (whether builder or developer or homeowner) a "veto" over a proposed "street tree" planting within the "tree lawn" on the Town's Right of Way ("**ROW**") adjacent to the landowner's property.
 - a. **PURPOSE**: To further the Town's goal of restoring its lost tree canopy by ceasing the current unofficial Town practice of allowing some landowners to effectively veto the Town's planting of trees within the Town's ROW in locations determined by the Town Arborist (after extensive research and deliberation, and which would be undertaken at the Town's expense) to be suitable for street tree planting.
 - b. **REASONING**:
 - Vienna's tree canopy is decreasing at an alarming rate (a documented decline, according to the Davey Tree 2022 Urban Tree Canopy Assessment, of 13% over the 10-year period from 2011-2021 alone, with substantial continuing tree canopy decline evident over the 5-year period since that time), in large part due to new and in-fill development activity, but also due to natural aging, disease, pests, and decisions by homeowners to remove healthy trees at the urging of unscrupulous contractors who illegally solicit tree-cutting services within the Town.
 - It is appropriate to plant street trees adjacent to new and existing sidewalks in Vienna in locations determined by the Town Arborist to be suitable for such plantings. Sidewalks, their resultant tree lawns, and the planting of new street trees within those tree lawns – in addition to enhancing the attractiveness of the Town's neighborhoods – contribute to the natural shading of impervious surfaces which has

a climatic cooling effect, benefiting all of Vienna's residents and playing a part in restoring the Town's lost canopy.

- Current Town practice is to send the current landowner of the property adjacent to a proposed street tree planting (which has been proposed in a location determined by the Town Arborist) two certified letters giving the landowner the opportunity to object to and effectively veto the proposed planting. If an objection is received, the Town Arborist endeavors to work with the landowner on a mutually agreeable species to be planted. If this is unsuccessful, the proposed planting is cancelled. This policy has resulted (according to the Town Arborist's "Green Streets Project" statistics for the years 2024-2025) in the veto of approximately 18% of the proposed street tree plantings (or approximately 36 new street trees in that time period). Significant time had been invested for each of these proposed trees by the Town Arborist in thoughtfully planning and recommending their location, all to no avail once the veto occurred. Using this same 18% veto rate for the planned planting in Southeast and Southwest Vienna of an additional 450 trees, Vienna residents would be denied the benefits of 81 more proposed street trees, with similar wasting of town staff time and resources.
 - The trees planted under the Green Streets Project are 2 inch caliper; the Town waters the trees for two years and fertilizes them at the end of the 2nd to 3rd year; the survival rate of the trees is greater than 90%. Furthermore, the town replaces trees that fail. To forego planting trees under these ideal conditions is a missed restoration opportunity.
 - We recommend that this practice cease and that the Town use the property within its ROWs to address the compelling public interest of restoring the disappearing tree canopy. Accordingly, the Town should direct the Town Arborist (i) to continue to try to work cooperatively with landowners and listen to any landowner preferences regarding tree species to be planted within ROWs, but (ii) to proceed with plantings in Town ROWs that the Town Arborist determines are in the best interest of the public.
- c. PROPOSAL: To modify the Town's policy(-ies) and/or code section(s) to add wording that would give effect to the following:

"If (1) after the appropriate research and review by the Town Arborist of a proposed street tree planting site adjacent to an existing or newly-constructed sidewalk, the Town Arborist determines that (a) there is a tree lawn on the Town right of way between the sidewalk and the curb with width sufficient to support the planting of one or more street trees, (b) planting a street tree will not unreasonably interfere with underground or overhead utilities, or block traffic signs or the line of sight for drivers at an intersection, and (c) sufficient funding is available (from the Town or other

Town-approved, then (2) the Town shall plant one or more street trees in the tree lawn as the Town Arborist determines to be appropriate. The Town Arborist shall take into account any adjacent landowner requests regarding an alternate species to that proposed (from an approved list of species as published by the Town), but the Town Arborist shall make the ultimate decision as to the species to be planted.”

2. **ITEM 2:** To create an annual recognition and award (“**Tree Conservation Award**”) for those builders and/or developers who have distinguished themselves by going “above-and-beyond” the Town’s minimum requirements as to the preservation and protection of existing trees and/or to increase, rather than decrease, the Town’s tree canopy as a result of their building and development activities. This could perhaps be extended to recognition of private landowners within the Town as well.
 - a. **PURPOSE:** To encourage builders and developers working within the Town (and private landowners) to protect and restore the Town’s tree canopy.
 - b. **REASONING:** As public-facing business-persons (and/or as good neighbors), these builders and developers (and landowners) would see the benefit of official and public recognition of their tree-preservation/conservation practices, and would likely be encouraged to try to earn such recognition by improving their construction practices (or planting trees on their land).
 - c. **PROPOSAL:** Based on input from the Town Arborist, TAC and other Town staff, the Mayor and Town Council would recognize and present an annual “Tree Conservation Award” at an appropriate venue, and assure appropriate and prominent recognition in the Town’s various media forums of any such builder(s) and/or developer(s) (and private landowners) who prove(s) deserving of it. The Town could develop a commemorative logo of some sort attached to this award which the recipient(s) could display and use as they see fit (in their marketing, etc.)
3. **ITEM 3:** To create a “Heritage Tree Program” in the Town, along the lines of programs that other Virginia municipalities have put in place and pursuant to Code of Virginia Section 10.1-1127.1.
 - a. **PURPOSE:** To identify, recognize, and attempt to protect special trees within the Town that meet certain criteria (as defined by the Town Arborist) such as species, age, girth, height, etc.
 - b. **REASONING:** Recognition of such specimens would serve to encourage and promote their protection and perhaps even provide some degree of legal protection...especially in the case of street trees or trees on Town property.
 - c. **PROPOSAL:** To explore the various similar programs in other jurisdictions and develop one of our own with input from all of the various actors who would be involved (Mayor, Council, Town Attorney, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Arborist, etc.)
4. **ITEM 4:** To commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States by sponsoring, promoting, and supporting an initiative to plant 250 trees in Vienna’s residential front

yards in 2026, which initiative shall be funded from sources other than the Town budget.

a. PURPOSE: To (i) help activate the Town's celebration of the 250th anniversary of the United States, (ii) further the Town's goal of restoring its lost tree canopy, (iii) enhance the attractiveness of the Town's neighborhoods, and (iv) provide shade for pedestrians who use sidewalks.

b. REASONING:

- Members of the "Vienna 250" committee thoughtfully suggested this idea as a way to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States. This 2026 initiative is aligned with the TAC's determination that the planting of shade trees on private residential property is essential to any realistic plan to restore the Town's lost tree canopy in the coming years.
- The Arbor Day Foundation operates a "Community Tree Distribution" program in which it partners with localities for large-scale distribution of trees for planting on private property. It makes available its sophisticated software application to enable the locality to effectively and efficiently execute the program. As of February 2026, TAC is in preliminary discussions with the Arbor Day Foundation to determine whether it could support this "250 trees" planting initiative in 2026.
- In 2026 or 2027, the TAC expects to recommend to the Town Council a long-term aspirational goal of planting "**A Shade Tree in Every Front Yard**" in Vienna. This initiative would be a public/private partnership that would be promoted and supported by the Town but substantially funded from non-Town sources. Undertaking an initiative in 2026 to plant 250 trees in residential front yards will help the Town, the TAC, and other proponents to learn how best to implement a larger scale residential planting initiative.

c. PROPOSAL: Sponsor, promote, and support the Vienna 250 commission's suggestion of an initiative to plant 250 trees in Vienna's residential front yards in 2026, with members of the TAC taking a leadership role in securing outside funding and executing the program.

5. ITEM 5: To distribute to new homeowners in Vienna a welcome packet that contains informational material regarding the care and nurturing of both new and established trees on their property.

a. PURPOSE: To educate new Vienna homeowners as to best practices and what to expect and what to do to assure the best chances for survival and thriving of their property's tree canopy.

b. REASONING: Construction-impacted trees are likely to shed branches in an effort to obtain a new equilibrium in the aftermath of construction-related stresses. Homeowners often misconstrue this to mean that the tree is dying. And this misinterpretation is often reinforced by unscrupulous (or uninformed)

tree contractors offering to cut them down. As a result, otherwise perfectly viable, established trees are unnecessarily removed, contributing to the Town's loss of tree canopy, when what was actually needed was some simple support, nurturing, and monitoring as the new state of resource balance develops. In addition, newly-planted trees need some, again simple and easy, tender-loving care in their first years to ensure their success.

- c. PROPOSAL: To take advantage of existing resources (using suggestions from the Town Arborist and the Town Urban Forester), to obtain copies of those relevant publications, and to put them together (in a "Welcome to Tree City, USA" welcome packet) and distribute them to new homeowners in town.

Respectfully submitted – Town of Vienna Tree Advocacy Committee