Richmond Urban Forestry Commission 2025 End of Year Report

Published December 2025

Prepared by the Richmond Urban Forestry Commission as per Richmond City Code § 8-544

Photo credit: Reforest Richmond, https://www.reforestrichmond.org/rtw-2024

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements and Membership

Executive Summary

Commission Mission and Guiding Values

Summary of Commission Activities and Description of Work in 2025

- Processes and Establishment
- Subcommittees
  - Technical Subcommittee Update
  - Budget Subcommittee Update
  - Outreach Subcommittee Establishment
- Policy and Outreach

Areas of Focus for the Commission in 2026

Appendices

Appendix 1: Commission Meetings

Appendix 2: Commissioners and their Terms

Acknowledgements

The development of this report is a collaborative effort that would not be possible without the input of all commission members and supporting staff. Thank you.

Commission Members

Whit Clements	4th District
Betsy Coffield	2nd District
Mary Elfner	3rd District
Janine Lester	5th District
Jim Licklider	3rd District
Sophie McGinley	2nd District
Kendra Norrell	7th District
Mary Petres	3rd District
Carlin Tacey	1st District

Commission Staff

Kathleen Brown	OOS Sustainability Coordinator
David Landsell	Special Assistant to Council Chief of Staff
Qui Nguyen	DPR Community Forestry Coordinator
Sven Philipsen	2nd District liaison
Amy Robins	5th District Liaison
Danielle Smith	City Attorney's Office
Michael Webb	DPW Urban Forester
Elena Zweerink	DPW Urban Forestry Technician

Executive Summary

The Urban Forestry Commission ("Commission") was established pursuant to City Code § 8-544 to improve the City's urban forestry resources through policy development, advice, education, and fundraising. Since its recent reinvigoration, the Commission has worked to establish operational procedures, form subcommittees, and identify focus areas to fulfill its mission of enhancing Richmond's urban tree canopy as documented in the 6-month Report (March 2025).

This report outlines the Commission's activities in 2025. Since the 6-month report, the Commission has continued its work in the established subcommittees. The Process committee successfully re-drafted the language of the Commission's ordinance, which is in coordination with City staff and developed the Commission's letterhead/logo in coordination with the Office of Strategic Communications. Since the Commission is now operational, the Process committee has completed its role, and a new Outreach subcommittee was organized (November 2025) to focus on outreach and advocacy in the coming year. Through the subcommittee and Full Commission meetings the Commission has focused on engaging in the Richmond People's Budget Process, contributing to the Zoning Refresh effort, cohosting an event for Richmond Tree Week and engaging in the launch of the Richmond Tree Plan.

The Commission continues to be committed to transparent governance and inclusive decision-making as we work to protect and expand Richmond's urban forest for the benefit of all residents.

Commission Mission and Guiding Values

The Commission's mission is to improve the City's urban forestry resources through policy development, advice, education, and fundraising as established in City Code § 8-544.

Our work is guided by several core values identified in our initial subcommittee meetings and summarized below:

- *Preservation and Enhancement*: Preserve existing tree canopy to the greatest extent possible while working to expand urban forest resources, particularly in underserved neighborhoods
- *Science-Based Approaches:* Ground recommendations in current arboricultural and ecological best practices
- *Community Driven:* Working closely with community partners to educate and share resources for the betterment of the urban canopy
- *Equity and Environmental Justice:* Invest the most in the neighborhoods that have the least tree coverage, recognizing historical patterns of inequity
- *Climate Resilience:* Consider climate change and urban heat island effects in all recommendations
- *Cross Departmental:* Find connections with other city initiatives, such as the City's Urban Forest Master Plan, also called Richmond's Tree Plan, the current Zoning Code Refresh and associated Thriving Environment subcommittee, the Richmond 300 Plan, RVAgreen 2050 Plan, Richmond INSPIRE Plan and others to maximize positive impacts.
- *Lasting Contributions:* Ensure the bylaws and procedures established as well as the refined responsibilities and duties of the commission align with City goals and result in better performing landscapes and a healthy, thriving urban canopy

Summary of Commission Activities and Description of Work to Date

Since its reinvigoration, the Commission has focused on establishing its operational framework, creating subcommittees, and beginning to identify priority areas for attention. The following sections detail this work.

Process and Establishment

2025 Officers:

The Commission elected a Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary as officers. All officers were elected to serve one-year terms.

Sophie McGinley	Chair
Whit Clements	Vice-Chair
Carlin Tacey	Secretary

The Commission will be electing the next year of officers at the December 16th meeting.

6-Month Report:

Per City Code § 8-544, the Commission delivered their 6-month report to the Government Operations Subcommittee City Council in March 2025.

Ordinance Edits and Rules of Procedure:

The Commission drafted recommended edits to the language of the Commission's ordinance and draft rules of procedure to clarify roles and responsibilities of the Commission.

Website:

The Commission worked with DPW to launch an Urban Forestry Commission website:

Urban Forestry Commission | Richmond

Logo and Letterhead:

The Commission worked with the Richmond Office of Strategic Communications to develop a branding packet so that there is consistent imaging to use with communications with the public.

Public Attendance:

Commission meetings have been well attended by the public. While we have received minimal formal public comment, meetings have hosted a reliable turn out of engaged citizens.

Staffing and Subcommittees

The Commission established four subcommittees in 2025 to efficiently organize its work:

1. **Technical Subcommittee**: Focuses on inventory, arboricultural, ecological, and technical aspects of urban forestry as well as education and outreach
    1. Members: Jim Licklider, Janine Lester and Carlin Tacey
    2. The Technical Subcommittee focus of 2025 has been to review the previously proposed Richmond Tree ordinance and providing recommendations on how this could be improved or better integrated into current urban forestry practices in the City.
2. **Budget Subcommittee**: Examines funding needs and opportunities related to urban forestry initiatives as well as community partnerships
    1. Members: Whit Clements, Sophie McGinley, Mary Elfner

2. The Budget Subcommittee has been considering the impact of Virginia House Bill 2630, regarding tree canopy funds and how that might inform the management of the urban tree canopy in Richmond.

3. **Process Subcommittee**: Worked on administrative and procedural matters (specifically focused on the first year of this reinvented Commission, this subcommittee is no longer active, and any process related activities will be stewarded by the elected officers)
    1. Members: Sophie McGinley, Carlin Tacey, Whit Clements
    2. The Process Subcommittee lead the re-writing of the Commission ordinance, developed the Commission logo, coordinated Commission presentations, and developed the 6-month report to Council.
4. **Outreach Subcommittee**: Leads the Commission's efforts to collaborate with local organizations, contribute to Richmond Tree Week and meaningfully engage in the Richmond Tree Plan outreach and engagement process in 2026.
    1. Members: Kendra Norrell, Betsy Coffield, Carlin Tacey
    2. The Outreach subcommittee was a product of Richmond Tree Week. The Commission intends to be an active participant and leader in the events in 2026 as well as other structured engagement efforts for Zoning Refresh and the Richmond Tree Plan.

Areas of Focus for the Commission in 2026

Based on discussions at full Commission meetings and within subcommittees, the Commission has identified three focus areas for 2026:

The Richmond Tree Plan and Tree Ordinance Modernization

In October 2025 the Department of Public Works (DPW) launched the Urban Forest Master Plan process, which is intended to serve as a roadmap to protect, expand, and enhance the city's tree canopy. The Richmond Tree Plan, as it is called, is set to include strategies to help maximize benefits from the ecological, economic, and health advantages of a thriving urban forest. The Commission intends to advise urban forestry on the plan throughout the process and assist in engaging the public. The Commission also recognizes that Richmond's existing tree ordinance (1992), which was not codified, requires significant updates to reflect current urban forestry best practices, climate challenges, and community needs. Priority areas include:

- Involvement in the development and review of the Richmond Tree Plan
- Innovative and valuable data capture for urban tree canopy assessment
- Comprehensive review of the existing Municipal Tree Policy and other Urban Forestry policies and procedures to identify gaps and outdated provisions
- Research on model forestry and natural resource ordinances from comparable cities
- Address inequities in tree canopy distribution and identifying areas of particular vulnerability
- Development of stronger tree protection standards for both public and private property
- Establishment of tree replacement requirements that ensure no net loss of canopy
- Public Outreach for the Richmond Tree Plan

Zoning Refresh

The Commission aims to ensure urban forestry considerations are fully integrated into the city's master plan (Richmond 300) and ongoing zoning refresh activates. Focus areas include:

- Provide expert input on tree-related provisions in the zoning refresh process
- Advocate for stronger tree conservation requirements in new developments
- Recommend tree canopy coverage goals by neighborhood or planning district
- Support green infrastructure integration throughout the city

- Identify opportunities for tree preservation and planting in redevelopment areas
- Other plans the Commission will follow and intend to inform include:
    - RVA H2O: RVA Clean Water Plan
    - RVAgreen 2050 Climate Equity Action Plan
    - Richmond Connects
    - Vision Zero Action Plan
    - Better Streets Plan
    - Richmond INSPIRE

Richmond Tree Week

To further ongoing efforts across City departments and local organizations in support of trees, the Commission intends to be an active participant and leader in the 2026 Richmond Tree Week Events:

- Partner with local organizations to help make sponsored events successful
- Facilitate the planting of more trees during Richmond Tree Week

Richmond People's Budget

Engage in the ongoing process of the Richmond People's budget:

- Provide advocacy and expertise for identified projects
- Act as a resource regarding the urban forest and stormwater management in the next budget cycle, contribute to the effort to identify opportunities with community organizations

Based on current Commissioners' experience and interests the following goals are outlined for the Urban Forestry Commission subcommittees in 2026:

Technical Subcommittee

- Serve as advisory role for Urban Forest Master Plan and inventory collection and maintenance
- Public education, advocacy and partnerships for the urban canopy
- Technical recommendations for tree location, species selection, planting practices, soil management, and maintenance
- Review of current urban forestry practices and recommendations for improvements
- Align recommendations with City procedures and resources through existing policy updates, new policy development and procedural recommendations
- Advocate for equitable tree canopy distribution
- Provide recommendations and strategies on best management and stewardship for urban canopy on private land
- Input on city development projects that impact the urban forest
- Recommending climate-adapted, diverse species for future plantings
- Develop strategies to maximize trees' role in carbon sequestration, stormwater management, and heat mitigation

Budget Subcommittee

- Explore innovative funding mechanisms for tree planting and maintenance
- Analyze current funding for urban forestry initiatives
- Align budget recommendations with community initiatives and partnerships
- Identify potential grant opportunities and other funding sources
- Develop recommendations for budget priorities
- Create strategies for public-private partnerships to support urban forestry
- Review City's Urban Forest Master Plan from a fiscal perspective
- Investigate grant opportunities from state, federal, and private sources

Outreach Subcommittee

- Provide public advocacy and education support to the City Departments on the Commission and to local organizations supporting the urban forest

- Build partnerships with community organizations to expand reach and impact
- Create a framework for volunteer engagement in urban forestry initiatives

- Work with Community Partners to create educational materials about the benefits of urban trees for residents and businesses

- Establish a communication framework to keep the public informed about urban forestry initiatives
- Consider how community initiatives can be further funded and resourced

- Initial existing initiatives the Commission will support include:
    - Richmond Tree Week
    - Invasive Species Awareness Week
    - Adopt-A-Tree Program

Appendices

Appendix 1:

Commission Meetings

Previous

September 5, 2024

October 29, 2024

December 16, 2024

February 4, 2025 *(no quorum)*

February 24, 2025

March 18, 2025

April 15, 2025

May 20, 2025

June 17, 2025

July 15, 2025 (no quorum)

August 19, 2025

September 16, 2025

October 21, 2025

November 18, 2025

December 16, 2025

Upcoming

January 20, 2026

February 17, 2026

March 17, 2026

April 21, 2026

May 19, 2026

June 16, 2026

NO RUFC MEETING IN JULY, 2026

August 18, 2026

September 15, 2026

October 20, 2026

November 17, 2026

December 15, 2026

Appendix 2: Commissioners and their Terms

Whit Clements	Council Appointee	3/11/2024	3/10/2026
Betsy Coffield	Council Appointee	3/11/2024	3/10/2027
Mary Elfner	Council Appointee	3/11/2024	3/10/2026
Janine Lester	Council Appointee	3/11/2024	3/10/2026
Jim Licklider	Mayoral Appointee	5/10/2025	5/22/2028
Sophie McGinley	Mayoral Appointee	5/23/2024	5/22/2028
Kendra Norrell	Council Appointee	3/11/2024	3/10/2027
Mary Petres	Mayoral Appointee	11/19 /2025	5/19/2028
Carlin Tacey	Council Appointee	3/11/2024	3/10/2027