

Memorandum



**To: Mayor and City Council; City Planning Board;
City Planning Staff**
From: Hendersonville Tree Board
Date: December 20, 2022
Subject: Tree Canopy Loss

Our city landscape is changing. As in many parts of North Carolina, we are experiencing rapid population growth with increasing development pressures on our communities and their urban forests. This is especially true for Hendersonville. Developed landscapes, the roads, streets, houses, subdivisions, apartments, condos and commercial buildings, are rapidly becoming the face of our community. **Our tree centric community character is now disappearing rapidly.** The Tree Board believes we need to implement additional steps to properly manage our tree and natural resource integrated landscape. We request a meeting(s) be set up to discuss our tree management issues with council members, the planning board, and the planning staff.

The primary reason canopy tree loss is high and getting worse is the lack of tree preservation or planting standards in our zoning code. Only a few small zoning districts have any tree preservation or planting standards. The most glaring examples and the largest developments affecting the most trees are found in the PRD zoning districts, in open space requirements for many developments and in districts where subdivisions can be constructed, all without saving or planting a single tree.

The Tree Board is not opposed to needed development. But we are opposed to developers that do not integrate trees and other natural vegetation into the planning of the development, ignore the ecological need to protect and properly manage our natural environment, and help residents to keep our tree centric community character intact.

Back in 2009, thirteen years ago, the City of Hendersonville had a tree survey conducted to measure the percentage of canopy coverage in the city. Only 36.6 % of Hendersonville was covered by tree canopy. While probably considered adequate at the time, this tree canopy coverage was already smaller than almost every other city we could find in the state that have conducted surveys. Since then, the march of development continues to negatively affect the city's tree canopy. In the last decade, we have lost another 150 **acres** of trees (from city data) and that figure does not include a

number of large developments (9) that have been approved for forested areas and have not yet started construction. When completed, the Tree Board believes that we will approach losses of canopy trees of 225 acres or more. As it stands now, 2515 housing units are planned for construction in Hendersonville. And we have no doubt more developments are on the way. If constructed in the manner of recently approved developments, Henderson's tree canopy could easily shrink to below 30%.

We are not only losing significant tree canopy resources to development, particularly housing unit development, they are being completed with almost no regard for tree preservation or planting. Today's method of constructing commercial or housing developments is to mass grade the site and removing the majority of all trees, even in areas where there will not be buildings or streets constructed. It is not unusual that 80% of all trees on a site are eliminated. And then, if the developer wants to actually plant a few trees, he will install a few short-lived ornamental trees in an attempt to make the development look a little better. Large canopy trees are almost never planted.

Trees have long been a significant part of the character and landscape of Western North Carolina and Hendersonville is no exception. We know that abundant natural resources, trees and green spaces attract people, commerce and tourism. Canopy trees also provide a great number of quantifiable benefits as can be found in the City's Code of Ordinances and other city documents excerpted and attached to this memo..

With all of the benefits that trees provide, the Tree Board believes that a healthy urban forest is as crucial a component of life, health, and well-being in Hendersonville as any other part of our infrastructure, items that cost millions of dollars more. Conservation of our urban forest and green space is truly a low-cost multiple benefit community investment.

We certainly appreciate the support of the City Council for the Tree Board and its current activities. Those efforts have been successful in planting more than 500 trees through the NeighborWoods program and planting projects on our public properties over the last decade. But our joint efforts to conserve and renew our urban forest pales in the face of the loss of canopy trees to development.

Members of the City Council have recently proclaimed that the city will prioritize the protection of existing tree canopy and the development of greenspaces and parks. The Tree Board stands ready to help make that happen.

We await your response to our request and this issue. Thank you for your consideration and attention to this matter.

City Council Core Values and Beliefs

The City of Hendersonville believes environmental sustainability is critical to preserving the community for future generations

The City will prioritize the protection of existing tree canopy and the development of greenspaces and parks

City Code of Ordinances

Article IV - Trees and Shrubs - Division 1

Sec. 46-116 - Purpose of article

The purpose and intent of this article is to preserve and protect trees existing within the city and its extraterritorial jurisdiction by:

1. Saving trees from indiscriminate destruction or unnecessary removal;
2. Diversifying the tree species in the area;
3. Establishing standards limiting and regulating the removal of trees
4. Building an awareness of the need for and value of preserving trees;
5. Establishing an education program providing information and guidelines for tree preservation and maintenance;
6. Establishing standards for tree maintenance and protection;
7. Enhance, maintain and replenish trees in the Hendersonville area to improve the community's beauty and appearance.

Sec. 46-117 - Benefits of Trees

The city finds it important to amend this article to better preserve and protect trees since numerous benefits are derived from this practice, including the following:

1. Assists in the stabilization and fertilization of soil and in the prevention of soil erosion
2. Contributes to the process of groundwater recharge and storm water run off retardation and protecting against flood hazards and the risk of landslides;
3. Contribute to the process of air purification and oxygen some air pollutants;
4. Intercepts airborne particulate matter, and reduces some air pollutants;
5. Provides a haven for birds, reptiles and mammals which in turn help control the insect population;
6. Aids in glare, heat, noise abatement, along with maintaining the climate balance and decreasing wind velocity;
7. Provides nuts and fruits for wildlife;

8. Provides important psychological, sociological, and aesthetic counterpoints to the urban setting;
9. Provides aesthetic qualities which enhance livability;
10. Promotes energy conservation by maximizing the shading and cooling effects of trees;
11. Buffers uncomplimentary and often incompatible land uses by providing a transitional area.

Subdivision Ordinance

Section 1.04 Purpose and Intent - Goals and Objectives

H.) Protect open space, wildlife habitat, natural resources, cultural resources, and historic and rural character, where appropriate

Comprehensive Plan

Chapter 3 - Natural and Environmental Resources

Vision Statement - Hendersonville will be known for its success in protecting valuable open spaces and reducing its ecological footprint, maintaining the resources that first attracted residents to this community and supported its prosperity. Preservation of environmentally sensitive areas will protect citizens from natural hazards, improve water and habitat quality and contribute to an interconnected network of recreational open space.

Goal NR-1, Strategy NR-1.2: Protect Land Adjacent to Streams in order to protect water quality, reduce erosion, and protect wildlife habitat

Goal NR-2, Strategy NR-2.3: Promote Preservation of Woodlands. Mature trees and wooded areas are significant community-defining natural features and contribute to Hendersonville's identity