

To: Hendersonville's Mayor and City Council

From: Tree Board, Environmental Sustainability Board, Conserving Carolina, and Caregivers of Mother Earth

Re: Protecting Hendersonville's natural character while advancing ecological sustainability

Hendersonville is experiencing rapid population growth with increasing development pressures on our communities, urban forests and other types of native plant landscapes. Our tree-centric and integrated natural plant community character is rapidly disappearing.

Urban forests are taking the brunt of expanding housing and commercial cityscapes. Along with their scenic appeal, trees provide shade, soak up rainfall, absorb carbon dioxide, and create a more pleasing environment for residents and visitors alike.

Several planning documents with extensive public input, including GenH Plan, Parks and Greenspace Plan and Sustainability Strategic Plan have shown majority support for protecting, enhancing, and including nature, natural greenspace, and conservation priorities into all aspects of city and suburban life.

Positive changes can be continued with an awareness to favor ecological function, utilizing native plants and trees, over landscapes designed for traditional aesthetics such as turf grass and non-native plants. Cost neutral changes with long-term positive savings requires a paradigm shift, prioritizing integration of more natural landscapes into our city plans for development. With sustainable actions we can minimize the impact of reducing our tree canopy.

With figures taken from a Tree Canopy Assessment (Oct. 2022) and a review of development site plans, Hendersonville has gone from losing an average of 18 acres of trees each year (2014 to 2022) to now losing an average of 61 acres of trees per year (2023 and 2024). Among the lowest of North Carolina cities, Hendersonville's tree canopy was at 35% in 2022 and we have lost, at least, another 122 acres of trees since then. This does not take into account the probable loss of thousands of trees to Helene. This trend is especially troubling as more trees are removed from the landscape.

Hendersonville's Tree Board (TB) and the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB), along with our partners, Conserving Carolina and Caregivers of Mother Earth believe we need to implement additional steps to manage our urban tree and natural resource integrated landscapes. We want to advance ecologically sound planning and management practices,

educational programs, land conservation programs, and allocate more funding for these important initiatives. We propose the following:

- The Development of an Urban Forest Management Plan
- Implementation of City's Park and Greenspace Plan, prioritizing
 - Purchasing additional park lands and reimagining existing park lands for passive recreation uses (before all woodland areas disappear).
 - Convert at least 30% of turf grass in City parks to native grassland and/or pollinator meadows, and other passive recreation uses.
 - Establish a 50% minimum tree canopy coverage resolution signed by City Council
- Consider additional funds for contracted educational professional promoting integrating natural resources into City life
- Expand City Staff Dedicated to Natural Resource Management, including
 - Hiring staff trained in natural resource management (Certified Arborist, Wildlife Biologist, Urban Forester, etc.

The above list is ambitious. Natural landscapes must be integrated into all areas where we live, recreate, work, play, and pray. We hope you will agree to recognize these goals and the value added to our Hendersonville community, and consider delegating the appropriate staff, funding, and resources to accomplish these goals.

Thank you for your consideration,

(Signatures)

