COLUMBUS URBAN FORESTRY MASTER PLAN

Advisory Group Workshop #3 (The Management Approach)
Meeting Summary & Emerging Themes

Thursday, April 2, 2020, 8-10 a.m. - VIRTUAL WEBINAR

On April 2, 2020, the Advisory Group convened its third of three workshops with community stakeholders, city staff and the consultants from Urban Canopy Works, Davey Resource Group and Designing Local. The workshop was to discuss the third set of indicators of a sustainable urban forest: The Management Approach.

Because of the COVID-19 situation, this workshop was held virtually using Zoom Webinar. Input was collected through 1) real-time Q&A, 2) live polling, as well as 3) a full online comment form that participants were asked to fill out (38 forms were submitted).

Advisory group members represented many stakeholder groups in Columbus, ranging from the Mayor's Office to utility companies to developers to neighborhood groups and nonprofits. A total of 65 people attended the workshop. All attending organizations are listed at the end of this report.

These workshops are designed as a forum for the community to collectively explore current conditions in Columbus, and start to identify challenges and solutions to the most pressing issues. In other words, the workshops provide a systematic and facilitated method for the community at-large to self-evaluate the sustainability of Columbus' urban forest.

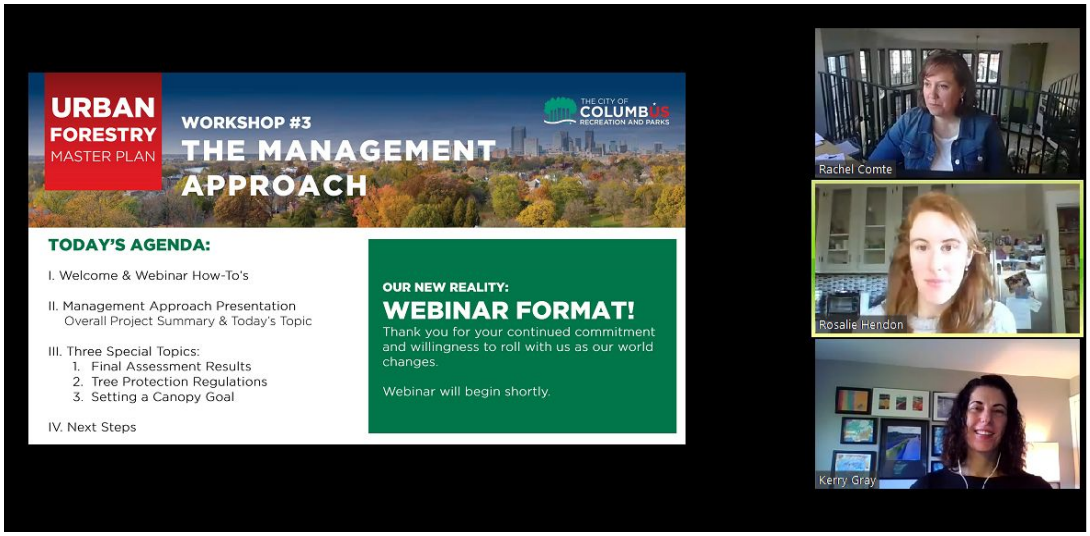

Figure 1: Urban Forestry Master Plan Advisory Group VIRTUAL Workshop, April 2, 2020. Presenters were, from top: Rachel Comte with Urban Canopy Works, Rosalie Hendon with City of Columbus, and Kerry Gray with Davey Resource Group.

This workshop focused on the Management Approach, primarily related to city operations and care of the urban forest. A 15-minute presentation and interactive polling covered the UFMP project as a whole, a recap of the last workshop on The Players, and an explanation of the 11 indicators related to this workshop's topic: The Management Approach. Much like the first workshop, the performance level in each indicator was determined ahead of time based on quantitative data (unlike the second workshop on the Players, in which the findings were more qualitative and subjective). The results showing the score of each indicator are in Figure 2. The remaining 80 minutes were used for three additional discussions.

THREE SPECIAL TOPICS

After the presentation, three topics were presented and discussed:

1. Full Assessment Results
2. Tree Protection Regulations
3. Goal Setting

Input was collected from attendees through online Q&A, polling and the comment form. Emerging themes from all collected input are described below for each topic.

Special Topic #1: Review of Full Assessment Results

The full assessment of the sustainability of Columbus' urban forest was presented to the group.

Highlights:

- Much of the low scores in The Trees section is related to the fact that the data is old.
- Planting space is limited, so there are many small trees and planting areas not suitable for large canopy trees.
- Columbus has some work to do in engaging the community in urban forest care and advancement.
- The city has done a lot in management with limited resources. However, much improvement is needed to ensure long-term health of the urban forest. This will require additional resources and process improvements. Old data makes proactive management challenging as well.
- Overall, if Columbus truly recognizes trees as critical city infrastructure and vital to public health and well-being, there is a lot of work needed in the near future to protect and maintain public health and quality of life.

COLUMBUS, OHIO 32 Indicators of a Sustainable Urban Forest		*Assessed Performance Level*		
		Low	**Mod.**	**Good**
The Trees	Urban Tree Canopy Cover			
	Equitable Distribution			
	Age Distribution			
	Condition of Publicly Owned Trees			
	Condition of Publicly-Owned Natural Areas			
	Trees on Private Property			
	Diversity / Pest Vulnerability			
	Suitability - Overhead			
	Suitability - Ground Level			
	Suitability - Soil Conditions			
	Suitability - Invasives			
	Suitability - Cllimate Change Adaptability			
The Players *(vote counts included)*	Neighborhood Action	*24*	*36*	*2*
	Large Private & Institutional Landholder Involvement	*52*	*9*	*1*
	Green Industry Involvement	*23*	*28*	*12*
	City Department/Agency Cooperation	*45*	*16*	*0*
	Funder Engagement	*44*	*18*	*0*
	Utility Engagement	*33*	*26*	*1*
	Developer Engagement	*51*	*12*	*0*
	Public Awareness	*31*	*30*	*1*
	Regional Collaboration	*23*	*33*	*5*
The Mgmt Approach	Tree Inventory			
	Canopy Assessment			
	Management Plan			
	Risk Management Program			
	Maintenance of Publicly-Owned Trees (ROWs)			
	Planting Program			
	Tree Protection Policy			
	City Staffing and Equipment			
	Funding			
	Disaster Preparedness & Response			
	Communications			
	Totals	**19** **59%**	**13** **41%**	**0** **0%**

Figure 2: Cumulative Results of the Indicators of a Sustainable Urban Forest performance levels on all categories. The numbers in the Players indicators correspond to the votes awarded by the advisory group members.

NOTE ON RATING ADJUSTMENT: Upon request of an advisory group member and further subsequent analysis, the indicator "Suitability - Climate Change Adaptability" was changed from Good to Moderate. The original Good rating was based on using the US Forest Services' TreeAtlas model and applying the expected impacts of climate change to the Columbus public tree inventory data. However, as the inventory is out of date and the USFS tool only applies to native species in the US, it can be said that data is insufficient to warrant a Good rating. While Tree Atlas shows that the natives within the public tree inventory are expected to weather climate changes fairly well in coming decades, a full assessment is not possible currently so a Moderate rating is more accurate at this time.

Advisory Group Reactions to Full Assessment. On the workshop comment form (38 forms submitted), 12 noted no surprises in these results. Those that did cite some surprises made the following comments:

- Surprised (pleasantly) to see trees doing well in terms of climate change adaptability. I'm not as surprised to see room for growth in the other areas. I think the biggest challenges or areas of opportunities are going to be in engaging 'the players' or stakeholders, and around funding in terms of management.
- I am surprised that we are not in the good for a few more areas. I think having appropriate, realistic goals will be helpful in taking steps forward, as we are going to need to be focused to make progress.
- I am surprised by Columbus' lack of tree cover and lack of a restoration plan.
- I was surprised to hear what adding 1% canopy cover looks like - the area of OSU campus!
- There are no surprises when looking at the assessment of equitable distribution of trees, but I did expect more categories in the good column.
- I was very happy to see that the city nursery sources local seed for much of their plant material - great to have that local and diverse seed source.

Other Comments Related to The Trees

- But I must have missed that our trees are "good" with respect to "suitability - climate change adaptability". I'm not sure I agree with that. Does this mean that a certain percentage of the urban forest is made up of trees from the lower half of the chart that we saw in the first meeting? If yes, it should be noted that some of those trees are not the best street trees (cottonwood, sweet gum) and are not the best trees for carbon sequestration.
- The Trees: no big surprises. Columbus has when compared to similar sized cities long had a lower profile, less effective forestry program. Columbus is a younger large city with little history of heavy industry or old money. The City nursery has been used wisely, and although EAB took a toll on canopy, the City adopted a prudent management plan without much time to plan. All cities struggle with managing canopy on private property that may make it more important to take excellent care of trees on public property where the City has direct control.
- I missed the discussion focused on The Trees, so I was wondering how the climate change adaptability was determined in the assessment? My assumption is that it means diversity in tree species in addition to native trees.
- Regarding invasives- since Columbus has eliminated the Ecological Restoration Program, I think that this score should be reconsidered as low not moderate
- What measures determined a Moderate rating on <Invasive> category? CERP(Honeysuckle removal program) has been eliminated, Parks have a lot of invasives, as of Nov 2019, the city's recommended street tree list still had potentially invasive trees listed (Amur Maples).
- In reference to soil suitability - until development regulations are changed so that developers stop churning up every square inch of soil on constructions sites (including residential sites), everyone will be left planting living trees in DEAD SOIL where the topsoil was either removed

or covered over with hardpan clay with no organic matter, low soil oxygen and no soil microbes. Trees cannot thrive in these conditions and this will be a long-term impediment to your canopy goals.

Comments Related to The Players

- The Players: again, Columbus lacks the history of old industry and old money that some other large cities have enjoyed. However, there is a strong network of neighborhood involvement in some areas. Weak development codes have permitted developers to ignore canopy protection and restoration to a significant degree, so not a surprise that the development community is not better engaged. There is a strong local green industry, and surrounding communities seem to be happy to work with Columbus in the interest of greater regional success. Public awareness is always a moving target, but the low profile forestry program in Columbus compounds that challenge.
- I think the biggest challenges are engagement of private homeowners and the disconnect between city departments in implementing a comprehensive plan.
- I think community buy-in will be the key to additional funding which is necessary

Comments Related to Management Approach

- It all starts with the management approach, without proper staffing and funding we will struggle to keep what we have, let alone add to it. This needs to be addressed as a main priority.
- The Management Approach: this was a really valuable piece of the planning process. It documents that Columbus has not devoted the resources over time to sufficiently support urban forestry. An accurate inventory, better development regulations, more proactive management/tree care, better education and communication with residents, more reliable equipment, better use of contractors and/or more professional staff to achieve desired service levels, and more effective partnerships both among City departments and with outside organizations are needed. City leadership needs to understand the need and support a higher profile program that focuses on leadership, communication, and professionalism. The Columbus forestry staff includes some dedicated, talented professionals, but there are not enough of them given the City's current size and operational approach. Perhaps dividing the City into management zones managed by designated city foresters would make challenges more manageable in a large city?
- Also, the tree inventory should be reduced to low since the 2013 aerial inventory is way out of date in light of the extensive development ongoing. My fear is that we do not know the current level. We may need to escalate our message if our canopy is less than 20%. Do you know how many trees we have lost since 2013 from our parks or ROW? I have a question about the listing of 3500 trees planted per year. This is not what it says on the Departments web site. When did the city increase the amount of trees planted per year? The web page says 2000 trees planted and 1500 trees cut per year for a net of 500.

All Other Comments on the Full Assessment

- Our canopy must be improved. Doing so must be underpinned with adequate funding and enforced regulations or it is not likely to produce the desired results.
- Bringing tree-poor neighborhoods up to the standards of the better canopied areas is a logical approach to increase the benefit at city / regional levels.
- It's disappointing to see that Columbus spends less funding on tree care, etc. than other Midwestern cities.
- Also it was disappointing to learn that Columbus doesn't require tree protection during development projects - this seems like an easy way to protect our resource and engage developers in a broader conversation about the importance of canopy.

- Although this graphic below <full matrix of results> shows a lot of red and yellow, I think Columbus is on the right track to improving their urban forest. Public engagement is always difficult to achieve especially in a diverse, large city, but a city-wide management plan is the first step. With improved tree code and continued education, I think the results will be substantial.
- What is the current cover, have we lost, gained or stayed the same since the survey was done?
- Columbus is lagging far behind and needs to kick it up! Hence, the Master Plan.
- We have a long way to go.
- I look forward to seeing if we can draft an urban forestry and tree protection plan that can be put in front of city planning authority.
- Two points of note from a transit perspective are the low performance on equitable distribution of trees, and the low performance on maintaining street trees in the public ROW. Both of these issues are of concern to transit riders. 94% of COTA's customers reach our service by walking, and shade along public ROWs will be an increasingly important consideration as our climate changes, and our population ages. Transit customers in Columbus are disproportionately low income compared to the population at-large, and may also be disproportionately impacted by an inequitable distribution of tree canopy. People who walk and use transit are disproportionately impacted by a lack of shade on public streets.
- I think that the Low/Moderate assessment is probably accurate, but it will also be important to highlight some of the many good qualities of the urban forest as well. We have some very nice existing resources and the river corridors, farm lands, large mowed areas etc hold a lot of potential.
- It’s great that sustainability is high!
- As a tree hugger, I was disappointed by how much need there is for efforts to promote, fund, and regulate trees.
- The big opportunity seems to be acquiring and/or easing undeveloped properties in the Darby watershed and outside the city -- to afforest and establish an "emerald necklace" type park system. If this effort is serious about addressing climate change, then large-scale afforestation is an important option. This sort of move would yield significant property value increase, public good, and environmental benefits for many generations to come.

Highest Priority Indicators. An interactive poll was presented during the online workshop, asking which indicator in each category should be prioritized first.

- In the Trees category, most felt **canopy cover (**both overall and equalizing between neighborhoods) should be addressed first.
- In the Players category, **cooperation between city departments** emerged as a priority, followed by **neighborhood-level** activities.
- In the Management Approach category, the top 2 priority areas centered on updating the **tree inventory** and creating a **better tree protection policy**.

Full results from the poll follows.

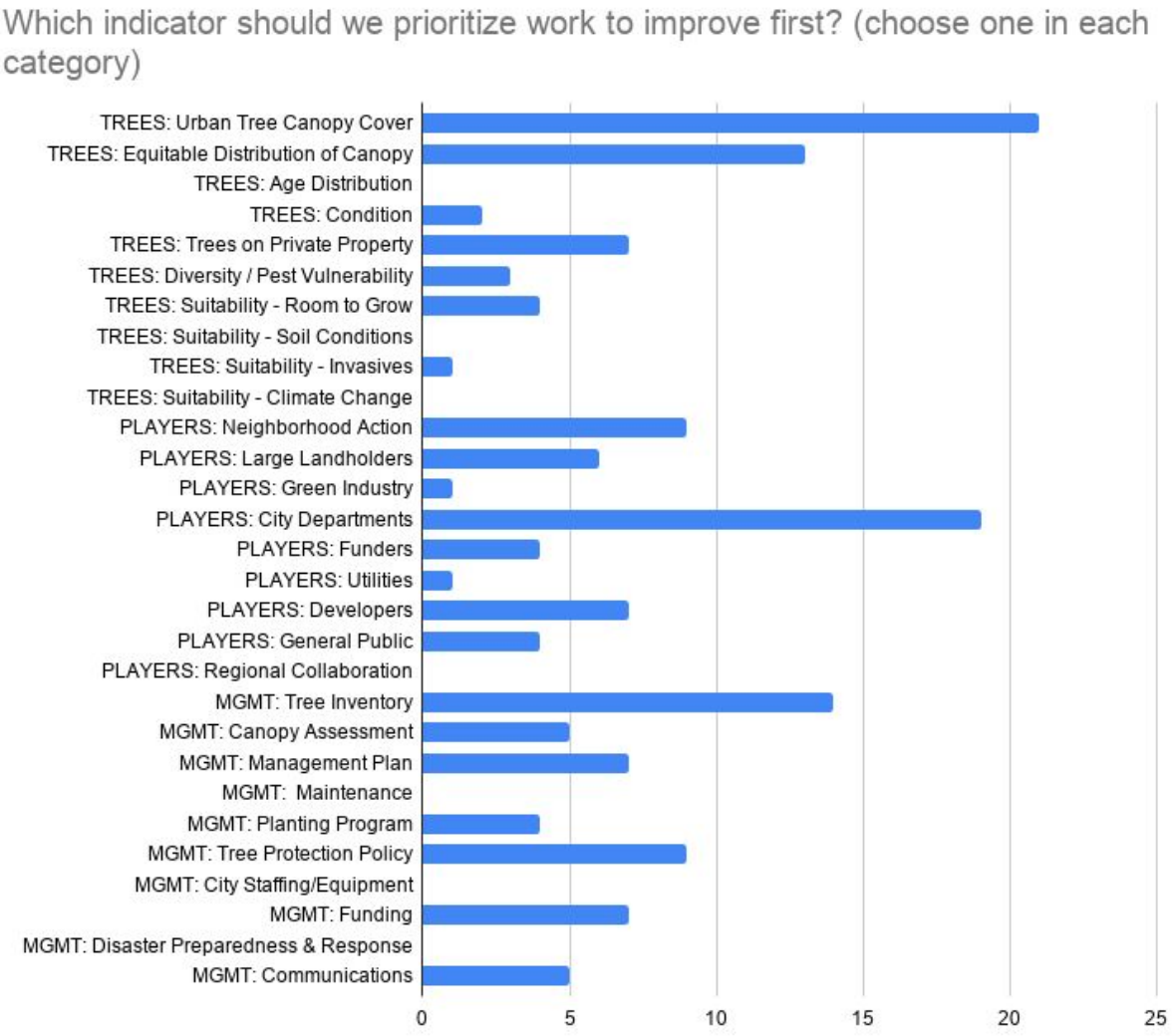

Figure 3: Webinar poll results on prioritization of which indicator to work on, from each of the three categories. 51 respondents total.

Special Topic #2: Tree Canopy Protection Regulations

Kerry Gray presented data on the existing code in Columbus, which was compared to 2 nearby communities (Gahanna and Dublin) as well as the City of Charlotte, which is considered a peer city due to its size and similar development pressures. The chart in Figure 4 provides a summary of the tree protection code elements in each community. Boxes with an "X" indicate an element is in place in the community, while a blank box indicates an element that is not addressed in the community's current code.

	Columbus, OH	Gahanna, OH	Dublin, OH	Charlotte, NC
Tree Protection and Preservation				
Land Use Regulated				
Single/Two-family Residential		X	X	X
Multi-Family Residential	X	X	X	X
Commercial/Industrial		X	X	X
Public Land	X	X	X	X
Public Tree Damage and Removal				
Restricts tree removal on public property	X	X	X	X
City permit or approval required for tree removal, pruning or excavating near public trees	X	X	X	X
Prohibits damage to public trees (e.g. attaching ropes, signes, wires, excavation)	X	X	X	X
Private Tree Damage and Removal				
Restricts tree removal on private property	X	X	X	X
City permit or approval required for tree removal on private property		X	X	X
Requires preservation of trees during development on private property	X	X	X	X
Prohibits damage to preserved/protected trees		X	X	X
Regulated Features on Private Property				
Forests/woodlands		X	X	X
Specific species and/or size tree (e.g. heritage/significant trees)	X	X	X	X
Tree Critical root zone/dripline			X	X
Amount of canopy cover (minimum amount set)				X
Riparain buffers, natural areas, preservation zones		X		X
Tree Protection Measures				
Tree protection/preservation plan required		X	X	X
Identification of prohibited activities in dripline/critical root zone		X	X	X
Tree protection fencing or other protection measures required		X	X	X
Credits/incentives for tree preservation		X		X
Site Plan/ Development Requirements				
Inventory and location of trees/forests/woodlands on site		X	X	X
Tree Protection/Preservation Plan		X	X	X
Location of tree protection measures (e.g. fencing, soil protection, trunk protection)		X	X	X
Landscape plan with mitigation plantings		X	X	X
Grading and Utility plans with trees		X	X	X
Mitigation/Penalities				
Tree planting requirements for removal of regulated trees	X	X	X	X
Fee in lieu of planting mitigation trees	X		X	X
Tree mitigation planting establishment, maintenance and survival requirements		X	X	
Penalities established for damage and removal of preserved/saved trees		X	X	X
Tree Fund	X	X		X

Figure 4: Tree Protection comparison chart used in the webinar presentation.

After each part of the tree code was described to the group, all were asked in an online poll their opinion on the existing tree protection regulations. Figure 5 shows that the majority of respondents felt Columbus' tree protection regulations need to be strengthened.

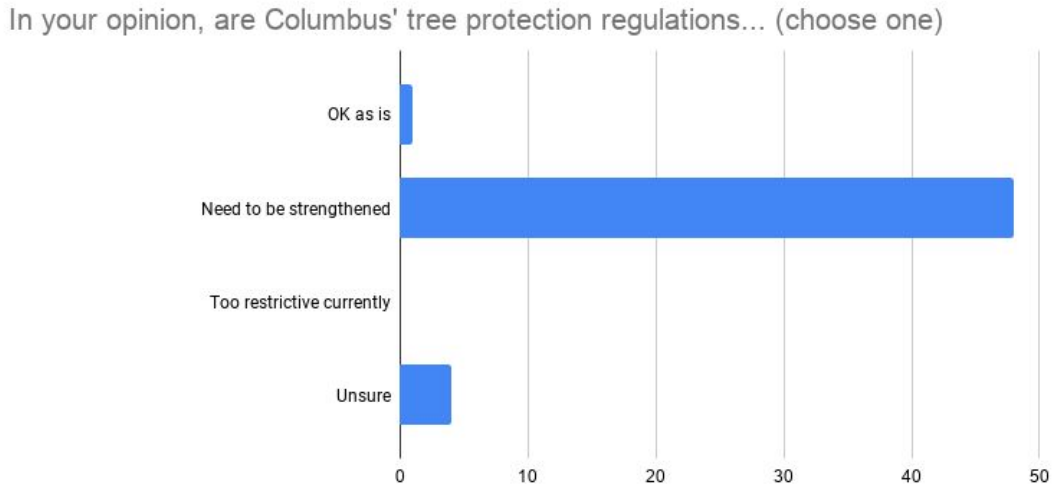

Figure 5: Webinar live interactive poll results on current tree protection code. 53 respondents total.

Three questions were also posed to the group in the online comment form (38 responses received):

1. What type(s) of NEW tree protection and preservation regulations do you feel need to be in place in Columbus?
2. Which of these regulations would be SUPPORTED by the broader Columbus community?
3. Which of these regulations would be OPPOSED by the broader Columbus community?

The tree protection plan for construction on all types of properties is needed most, according to the responses received, though many "Other" comments cited a need for a combination of these regulations. The heritage trees option would be most supported, while the tree removal regulation on all properties would be most likely opposed.

A summary of results follow:

NEW tree protection and preservation regulations for Columbus	Which are needed?	Which would likely be supported?	Which would likely be opposed?
List of heritage or significant trees (species and size) that require protection	2	**12**	0
Regulate tree removal on all properties (includes residential)	6	1	**25**
Regulate tree removal on multi-family, commercial, and industrial properties only	2	5	1
Require a tree protection plan for construction on all properties (includes residential)	**17**	3	2
Require a tree protection plan for construction on multi-family, commercial, and industrial properties only	1	11	1
Other (see below)	10*	5**	6***

* "Other" comments received (10) related to which regulations are needed called largely on the need for a *combination* of these options.

** "Other" comments received (5) related to which regulations would be supported center largely on the need to work with stakeholders and the public to both get them on board and educate them on any new regulations. Also consider incentives versus regulations/fees.

*** "Other" comments received (6) related to which regulations would be opposed were focused on the idea that pushback is expected and all will need to be at the table during the creation of any regulations.

Special Topic #3: Setting Goals

The final special topic centered on goal setting in Columbus. The presentation covered the importance of tree canopy related goals, their use, canopy goals from other cities and changes they have experienced over time.

How to Measure Progress. There are multiple ways to set tree-related goals related in cities. A canopy percentage goal is the most common, though goals can also be based on raising the level of certain tree benefits (ie. more trees to increase stormwater retention by 10%), tree planting goals, numbers of neighborhoods engaged and more.

The group was asked in an online poll (Figure 6) their opinion on the preferred method to measuring progress in Columbus in coming years. The majority of respondents cited an overall canopy goal should be the primary progress metric, followed by canopy by land use and equalizing canopy across neighborhoods. This group sentiment will be used by the Project Team to make a final decision on the overall vision and goals of the UFMP.

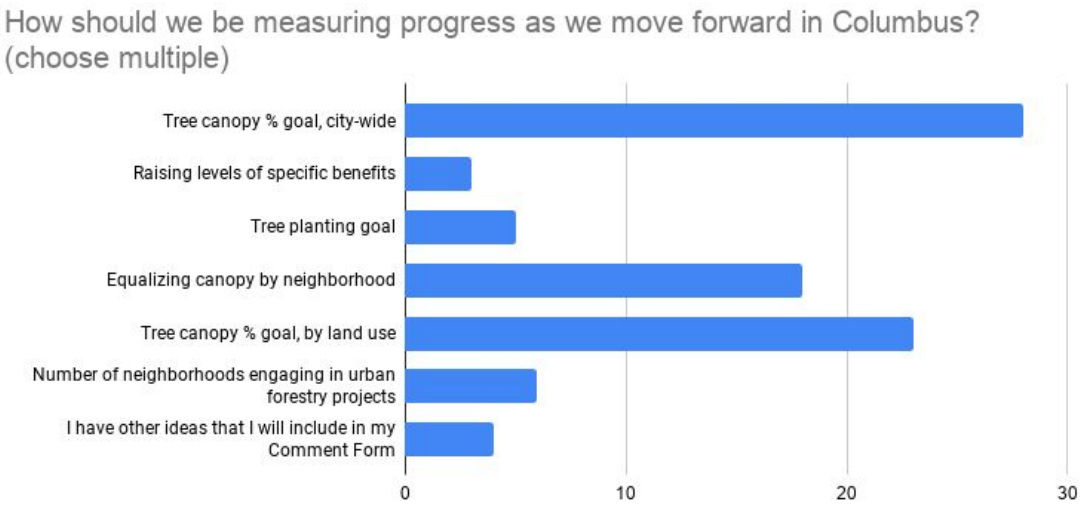

Figure 6: Webinar poll results on preferred method to measure progress in Columbus. 53 respondents total.

Additionally, some numbers specific to Columbus were presented (Figure 7), covering current canopy and what it would take to increase canopy levels.

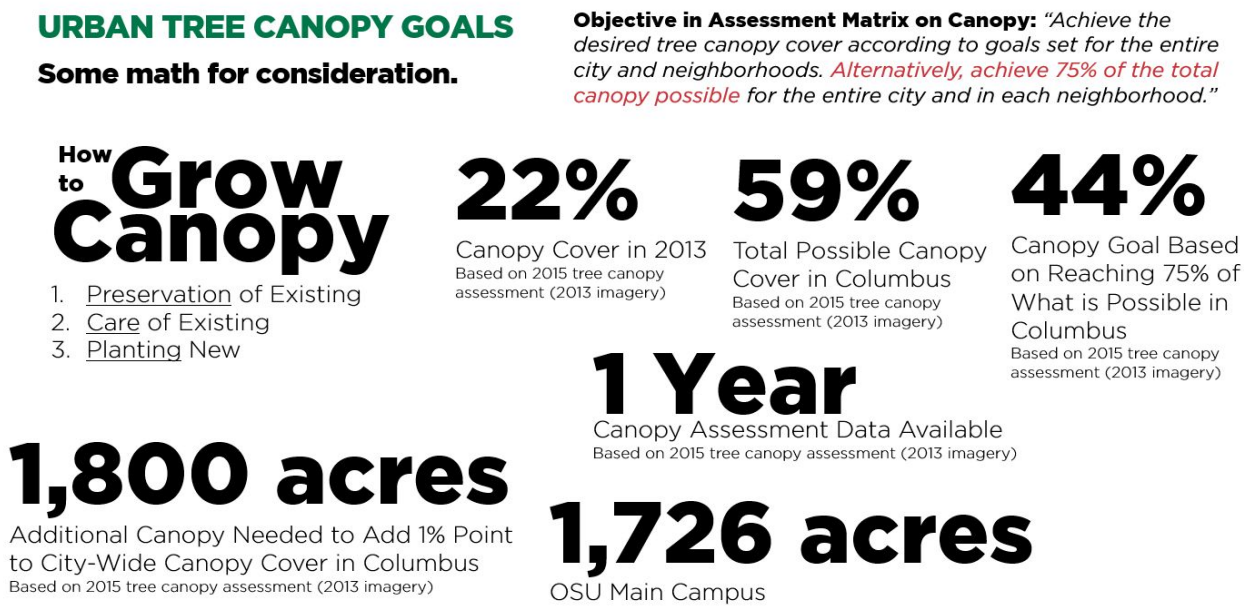

Figure 7: Canopy goal numbers presented to Advisory Group in goal setting discussion.

These numbers show how difficult it will be to grow canopy cover levels overall, over time. For this reason, it was suggested that a long-term canopy goal be set to the community's ideal number and a shorter-term goal also set that offers up a number that is more achievable. The Project Team will be setting these numbers but wanted to get the opinion of the Advisory Group exactly what those long-range numbers should be.

Preferred Canopy Goal Number for Columbus. The group was asked in an online poll (Figure 8) their opinion on the preferred canopy goal that should be put in place in Columbus. The majority (almost 80%) of respondents reported that the long-term goal in Columbus should fall somewhere between 30-44%, with 44% receiving the highest number of votes.

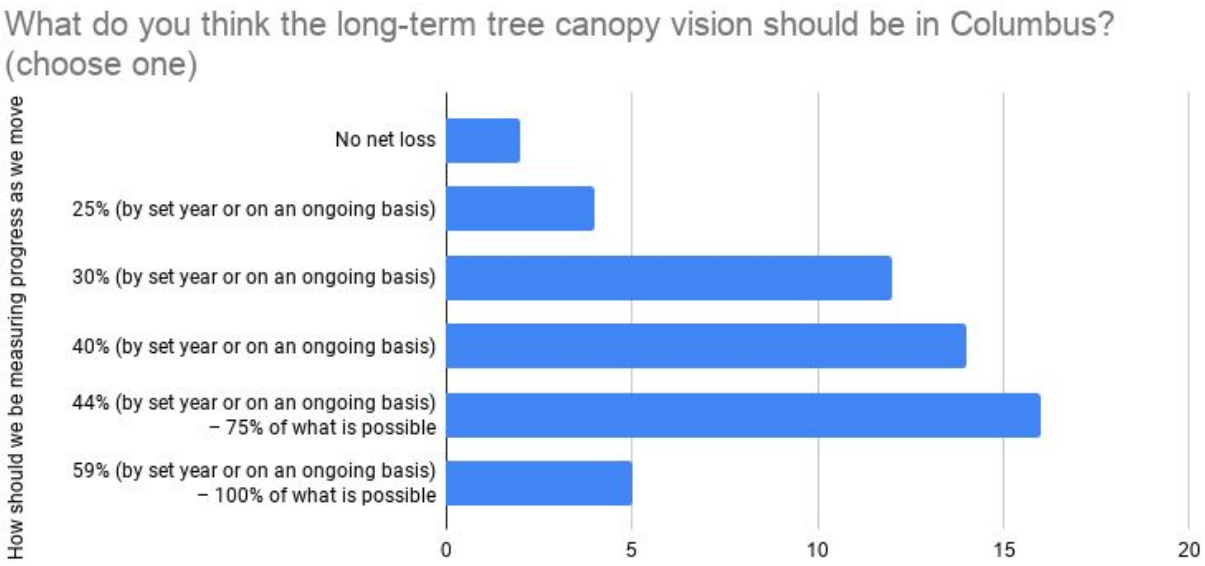

Figure 8: Webinar poll results on preferred long-term canopy goal in Columbus. 53 respondents total.

More detailed comments related to canopy goal numbers that were received in the online comment form:

- Set a high number to reach over the next century.
- This should be ambitious.
- 32% (a ten percent increase from today) and no net loss to start.
- 44% evenly distributed (no area less than 30%).
- Long term - 44% / Short term 30% (to ease into good habits with funding, management, messaging).
- Set a percentage of coverage; then set the specific methods to obtain the percentage can be created.
- 10-20% increase in 10 years.
- Look to Cincinnati as a model and goal.
- I like the idea of 75% of what is achievable, but that's awfully ambitious. A simpler, more abstract goal may be better, or skip the numerical goal completely for now. Perhaps just a net increase every decade? But the 35-40% range seems about right if you decide you want a number.
- Increase benefits provided with emphasis on protecting existing high quality trees and species.
- The long term goal should be plantings that will provide 50% coverage in 20 years.

20 additional comments were received via the online comment form, related to setting goals for Columbus. They follow:

- *Goals by Community*
    - It may be helpful to have an overall goal, and goals per Columbus Community, so that we can track at both levels - this will also help speak to the equity of the plantings/preservation
    - All neighborhoods are not equal. Low income areas may benefit from smaller trees that don't require such expensive maintenance (red buckeye, Carolina silverbell, American yellowwood, eastern redbud, flowering dogwood or even dwarf fruit trees in food insecure areas). This could also be a solution to the question about competition space for solar panels - where people want solar they can plant smaller trees. Since smaller trees tend to have shorter life spans, their replacement has to be factored into the long term plan. But small trees are better than no trees.
    - I really appreciated Cincinnati's place-based goal ""increase all neighborhoods 30% canopy cover or greater"". Given disparities in canopy cover, that is a very smart way to set our goal."
    - Even though Columbus should aim to increase the canopy, their main goal should be the equitable distribution of trees throughout the city.
    - Prioritize underserved neighborhoods and measure success by health indicators.
- *Need Buy In*
    - Ultimately with a goal like this, it will need to be recommendations to the Mayor's Office of what that goal should be considering our overall landscape in this space, climate goals, etc. Strike a balance between what's reasonable/achievable and bold/aspire to. The goal needs to be set by the Mayor in order to get adequate participation & buy-in from internal and external partners and stakeholders. I say that since as discussed in the webinar, a goal like this can really drive all other aspects of creating, maintaining and growing our urban forest.

- It can always be adjusted; not as important as other topics.
- I think a recommendation to put one in place makes total sense and should be done. Needs to be clear if this is a Canopy Goal for public trees only or city-wide (including on private property). Regardless of which it is, doing an updated inventory and analysis will be a critical first step which is why I wouldn't put any specific recommendations on what the goal is or should be at this point in the process (certainly ok to put group feedback & thoughts on what we want to aspire to).
- We will not hit 100% (59%), because that percentage is going to change. And 22% is unacceptable. We are growing so fast; as a city and Metropolitan area. We need to act relatively quickly to earmark areas where trees can be planted and to require replanting of trees that are destroyed - which they are; a lot - during development.
- Need a number goal for political leaders and citizens to rally behind, but a timeline as well.
- It's necessary to put us in line with other desirable market cities that already have an urban canopy plan.
- A very long-term goal broken into smaller, achievable short-term goals would be a nice balance between "shooting for the stars" and not setting up to fail.
- It is important to set benchmarks for success up front: 25% by x, 35% by y, 44% by z.
- It should be based on data about available land area for planting new trees, and the resources available to support this goal. I think it needs to be realistic but ambitious at the same time. Consider the projected population growth and development in the future.
- I would like more information on how the 311 tree request 2-3 year backlog was eliminated this year. My concern is about the new 4 foot tree lawn width for replanting and how this will impact neighborhoods in older communities.
- Aim high, but 100% isn't realistic. Allow plenty of time to reach your goal, and set smaller goals along the way.
- I think we should break it down into smaller percentage canopy increase goals rather than trying to go for the whole goal farther out, like making checkpoints.
- You shared some helpful examples and case histories, and these suggest it's NOT easy to move the needle in the face of 21st century challenges. Better to select an option that increases chances of success as defined?
- Protect existing trees and planting goals
- Caution against tree planting goals that don't include nursery quality, planting, and establishment standards and specifications. Additional maintenance funding must be accounted for with any goals associated with public land. Tie goals to human health and economic benefits to get the most buy-in from landowners and politicians.
- Seems like comparing Cols to Dublin and Gahanna is apples to oranges. And Columbus can't use the University District metrics as a measure of how Columbus is doing (those metrics may be for another topic but I'll say it here anyway).
- I think this goal should actually be something that adjusts over time. Possibly the first goal of this plan should be to prevent further loss and once that is accomplished the goal could be to increase to 30%, etc.

Parting Reminders

The entire group was thanked for taking the time to attend these three workshops. This input has been extremely valuable to the Urban Forestry Master Plan process. All were reminded to take a few minutes to fill out the comment form as this is our primary method of input as we are in virtual mode for this workshop.

The plan going forward is to synthesize what we have learned and develop recommendations with the Project Team. Ideally, we would like to have another in-person event with the Advisory Group in several months to discuss our draft master plan and next steps. However, this event will depend on public health recommendations.

Attending Organizations

American Society of Landscape Architects
Builders' Exchange
Building Industry Association
City of Columbus Land Bank
City of Columbus - City Council
City of Columbus - Neighborhoods
City of Columbus - Mayor's Office
City of Columbus - Planning
City of Columbus - Recreation and Parks
City of Columbus - Recreation and Parks Commission
City of Dublin
City of Gahanna
City of New Albany
City of Upper Arlington
City of Westerville
Clintonville Area Commission
Columbia Gas
Columbus Regional Airport Authority
Defense Supply Center of Columbus
Designing Local (consultant)
Davey Resource Group (consultant)
Franklin County
Franklin Park Conservatory
Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District
Greenlawn Cemetery
Green Columbus
Mideast Area Commission
Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
Nature Preserves Advisory Council
Ohio Department of Natural Resources - Urban Forestry
Ohio State University
Ohio EPA
Ohio State University Extension
Ohio Railroad Association
South Linden Area Commission
Southwest Area Commission
The Columbus Foundation Green Funds
Urban Canopy Works, LLC (consultant)
USDA
US Forest Service
US Green Building Council - Ohio Chapter
Westland Area Commission