

**Norfolk to require trees on all developments, part of effort to expand canopy — and absorb water**

27 October 2021

The city of Norfolk wants more trees shading bus stops, lining streets, covering your backyard. Trees are useful not only in the fight against climate change but also to weather its consequences, such as extreme heat and increased rainfall, city officials say. They clean particulate matter, support pollinators and other wildlife, reduce energy bills and add beauty.

With new rules approved by City Council Tuesday, Norfolk planners hope they can eventually cover nearly a third of the city with trees.

The changes incentivize builders to keep or plant trees, as well as require a certain amount depending on a development's size.

"There's nothing about a tree that, frankly, isn't positive," said George Homewood, city planning director.

They take in a lot of water, helping absorb extra flow that could otherwise overwhelm city infrastructure, for instance.

Homewood said the goals are to keep as many trees as possible, replace ones that can't be saved and look for areas where planting them can have the most impact, including formerly redlined areas. Communities of color are often still located in those areas, which were informally segregated through discouraging investment in Black communities. These neighborhoods also tend to have fewer shade-giving trees, creating what's known as an "urban heat island effect" linked to increased heat illness.

This week's changes are the latest step in an overhaul years in the making.

In 2018, the city developed a Green Infrastructure Plan it said would help design "the coastal community of the future."

Tree cover in the city has been declining due to disease, harmful insects, aging trees and unnecessary removal, the plan states. To offset that, the city wants to replace aging trees and diversify species.

Norfolk's current tree canopy — the amount of aboveground coverage provided by a tree's branches — is about 26%. Officials aim to get to 30%. (The total possible would be about 36%. But that wouldn't be feasible, because the city is almost entirely developed and some spaces, such as sports fields or paved areas, couldn't host trees.)

That means planting about 5,000 trees each year for the next two decades, said city planner Chris Whitney — assuming all existing ones stay, too.

The new zoning rules will play a big role in achieving that goal. They require a minimum tree canopy on all new or redone developments, ranging from 10-20% depending on zoning district and lot size. Builders can either preserve existing trees or plant new ones.

Before getting approval for their projects, builders have to accumulate a certain number of "points" by including flood-protection measures such as higher elevations, on-site stormwater treatment and alternative energy generation. The city calls it a "resilience quotient."

Trees will now count toward the stormwater component, incentivizing builders to keep or plant them for the points. Rain barrels have been the primary method before, Whitney said. Planting larger or native trees is worth more.

The council also OK'd changes to Norfolk's general plan, which guides decision-making, to add in more tree-related goals.

Those include ensuring every bus stop has shade and potentially creating a tree planting credit program or "treebate" through a private-public partnership.

Source:<https://www.pilotonline.com/news/environment/vp-nw-norfolk-tree-rules-20211027-te42o5jwybf5hndonhwhsk7g5a-story.html>