



# Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District

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April 8, 2020

Dear Metro Council Representatives,

Two recent studies informed the public of the state of our canopy in Louisville; the [Urban Tree Canopy Assessment](#) (2015), and the [Louisville Urban Heat Management Study](#) (2016). These studies concluded that:

- The city's tree canopy continues to **decline at the rate of 54,000 trees annually**,
- Our trees are the lungs and sponges of our city, **providing millions of dollars in ecological services** each year,
- There is a **vast disparity** of tree coverage and its impact between the east end of town and the west end,
- **Our city is the fastest growing and most intense urban heat island in the country**, and we'll be left with only an estimated tree cover of 21-25% by 2052 if we don't reverse the loss.

In response, the Division of Community Forestry set a goal of 45% tree coverage in the metro area by 2052. Why should you care? Your constituents care. In an online survey we conducted of Jefferson County residents' top resource concerns, the declining tree canopy was the number one concern of 65% of respondents. Their concerns also included our poor air quality, poor stream health and flooding; all of which can and should be mitigated by increasing our tree canopy.

After months and months of public meetings, draft amendments to the code are before you for approval. These amendments would set the first preservation requirement for new developments ever, among other things. The drafted amendments are not perfect and they don't address every issue we face regarding our declining tree canopy, but they are a great and necessary start. For example, the west end is largely untouched by this plan, and we have a responsibility to folks living in West Louisville to alleviate the problems created by the 'heat island' effect set in motion by this city's leaders generations ago. Critical planting efforts must be funded to change the 12-year life expectancy gap of those living in the red-lined neighborhoods of West Louisville to the tree-lined neighborhoods of East Louisville.

These amendments specifically address the requirements for new developments in suburban form districts on preserving current trees and replanting trees once construction is completed, and most of those developments are occurring east of I-65. Additionally, most of our remaining tree canopy in Jefferson County is located in areas where new construction and development is most frequent making the majority of the tree canopy vulnerable to being cut down. The best thing developers can do for our metropolitan community is to keep as many of the existing, mature trees on these newly developed properties as possible. This is not the only piece that will get us to our goal of a 45% tree canopy but it is a significant step in the right direction. In fact, it only slows our current trajectory. It does not reverse our problems. You, the Metro Council, can stand up for the trees that must remain standing now, so that we can begin planting the trees that must return to our communities tomorrow.

In the past two months, we have seen the devastating life loss a pandemic causes in our community. Our most vulnerable citizens with poor respiratory health, poor heart health and weakened immune systems are currently fighting for their lives. If we don't act as a community to improve the air quality, water quality and cap our rising temperatures, this vulnerable population will only increase in numbers.

Communities across the country are putting these, and even stricter, requirements into place to preserve and plant trees. It is time Metro Louisville act to preserve as many trees as possible and work aggressively to improve the environment in which Louisvillians live each day. There is a Chinese proverb that says, "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now."

Sincerely,  
Lilias Pettit-Scott  
Urban Agriculture Conservationist