

# PHILLY TREE PLAN

## Update and Call to Action for the Philadelphia City Council

### Prepared by

*2023-2024 Climate Leaders at Penn Fellows Richard  
Barad, Stephanie Cheng, Yonghyeon Kim, and Marissa  
O'Neill on behalf of PhillyTREES*



# INTRODUCTION

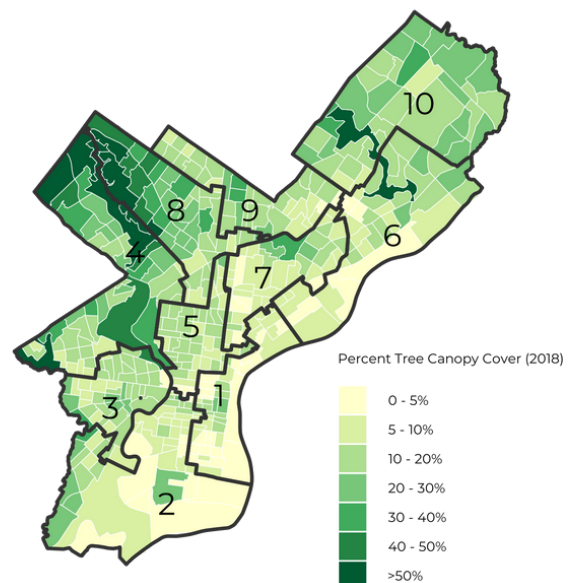
The importance of trees in urban areas needs no overstating—urban trees serve as vital pillars of environmental health, community well-being, and sustainable urban development. With Philadelphia’s urban forest shrinking, the Philly Tree Plan was created to support the livability of the City. This memo aims to serve the Philadelphia City Council as a fact sheet regarding the creation of the Philly Tree Plan, the current implementation, and recommendations to support the success of the plan.

## HOW WE GOT HERE

From 2008 to 2018, Philadelphia lost 6% of its tree canopy, the equivalent of more than 1,000 football fields. While Philadelphia boasts a robust network of city agencies and nongovernmental organizations that are making strides to plant and maintain trees, we are not keeping up with the loss of trees due to a range of factors, including new construction, disease, and age.

The most recent tree canopy assessment found that Philadelphia has an overall tree canopy cover of just 20% , which is not equitably distributed across neighborhoods. The tree canopy cover percentages can range from under 5% in some neighborhoods to over 45% in others, as seen in the map (right) of tree canopy cover percentage in 2018. Neighborhoods with higher percentages of low-income residents and people of color tend to have lower tree canopy cover.

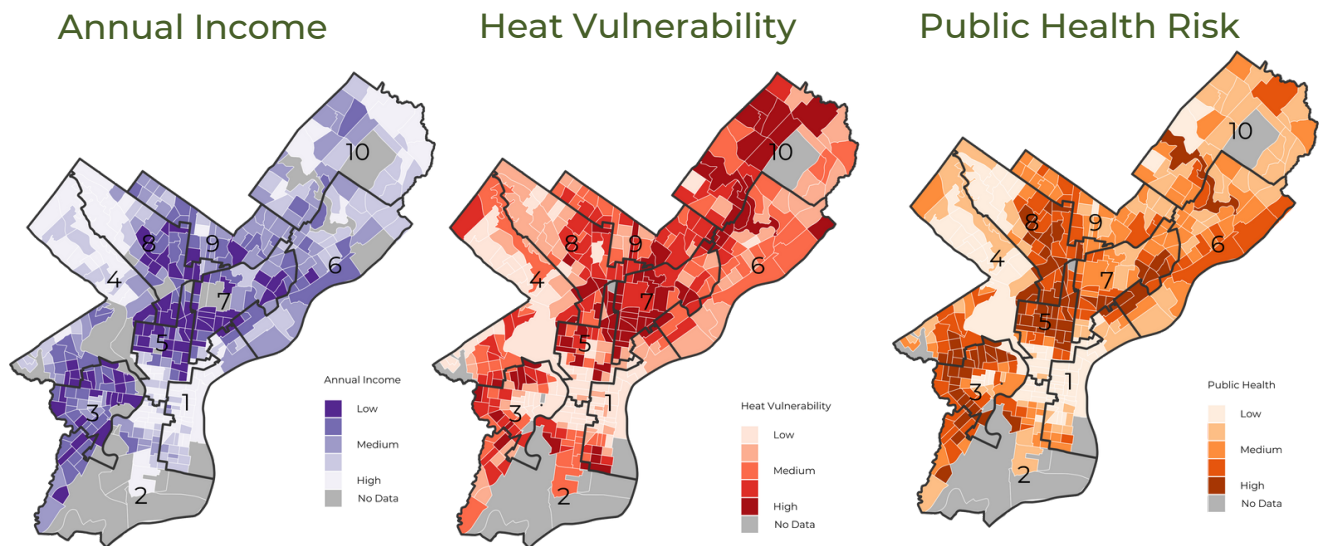
Percent Tree Canopy Cover (2018)



From 2020-2022, the City engaged with over 9,000 residents to understand their concerns, hopes, and ideas for the future of trees in Philadelphia through surveys, community meetings, workshops, neighborhood ambassador programs, and other activities. These ideas led to the creation of the Philly Tree Plan, which establishes eight critical goals for Philadelphia’s urban forest.

# PRIORITY NEIGHBORHOODS

Philadelphia's disparity in tree canopy cover is a major environmental justice issue. The city sees inequitable distribution of tree canopy cover across neighborhoods and city council districts. Areas with low tree canopy cover tend to also have a higher public health risk, greater climate vulnerability, and lower average income.

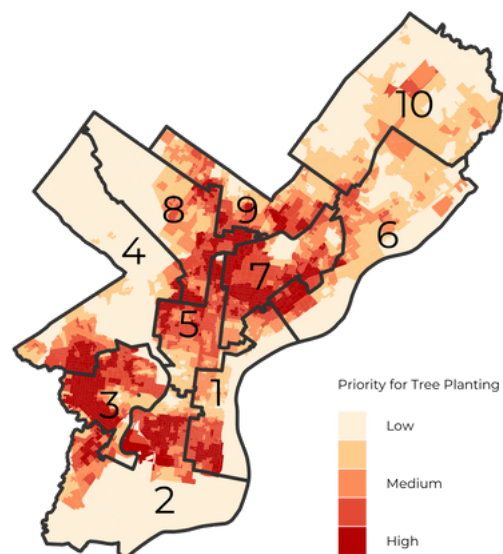


As part of the tree plan implementation, the city analyzed maps of tree canopy cover with demographic and environmental data highlighting how marginalized communities disproportionately have less tree canopy cover. This analysis reveals stark contrasts between affluent neighborhoods and those grappling with systemic inequalities, highlighting the urgent need for intervention. The Philly Tree Plan identified priority areas based on existing tree canopy cover, heat exposure and vulnerability, air quality, health risk (asthma, mental health, cancer), income, and impervious surface coverage. The resulting priority area map is shown on the right. The highest priority areas are located in North Philadelphia, South Philadelphia, and West Philadelphia.

Recognizing the disparities in tree canopy cover across neighborhoods,

community members helped identify and develop planting and funding goals for priority neighborhoods. For each priority area, city and nonprofit partners are working with residents to adapt the neighborhood's approach to ensure it meets the community's unique needs.

## Priority Areas for Tree Planting



# THE BENEFITS OF TREES

The programs and goals of the Philly Tree Plan have the power to work in tandem with existing social, environmental, economic, and health priorities across the city. Here are just a few of the many benefits that will come from the Philly Tree Plan's implementation.

## SOCIAL

- Improve public safety, with studies stating the ability to reduce crime by 12% and save \$50M/year in captured value from reduced robbery and theft.
- Expand environmental education programming through partnerships with schools and after school programs.
- Enhance school yards through green stormwater infrastructure projects and other programs that provide environmental benefits and active green space for recreation and play.
- Introduce proactive inspection cycles to reduce potential for trees to cause damage to people and infrastructure.

## ENVIRONMENTAL

- Combat flooding through green stormwater infrastructure collaborations.
- Reduce air pollution, including ozone, particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide.
- Lower temperatures and reduce the heat island effect.
- Limit impacts of climate change by expanding the urban forest's capability to store carbon dioxide.
- Create habitat for thousands of species of pollinators and migratory birds.

## ECONOMIC

- Expand career opportunities through the creation of 1,000 full-time jobs.
- Provide opportunities for small and local businesses to bid on tree contracts.
- Reduce residential energy costs (Current trees are already saving residents \$6.9 million).
- Increase access to career pathways in urban forestry.
- Promote vibrant commercial districts through an expansion of Taking Care of Business Clean Corridors Program.
- Build on successful city and partnership flexible work programs like Same Day Work & Pay.

## HEALTH

- Improve air quality and reduce rates of respiratory and cardiovascular health conditions.
- Improve mental health and reduce stress.
- Increase focus and concentration in children.
- Provide nutritious, locally grown food for residents through orchards and urban gardens.
- Avoid more than 400 premature deaths per year.

# IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

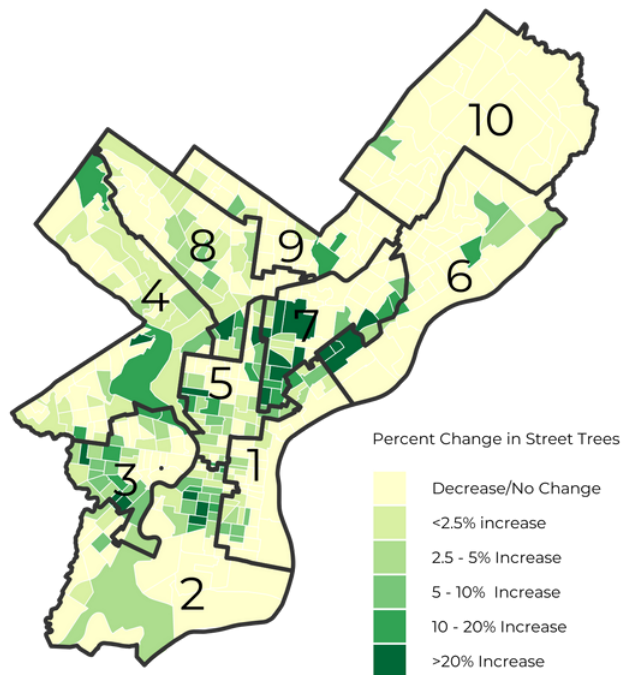
In just over a year since the launch in February 2023, substantial progress is already underway on the Philly Tree Plan. Here are some highlights under each of the eight goals.

<b>#1</b> <b>Coordinate support for Trees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parks and Recreation has hired a City Forester, the City Forester started on April 1st 2024.</li><li>• Philadelphia was awarded a \$12 million grant from the USDA Forest Service. The plans for this funding include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Creation of the Philly Tree Coalition, paid staff within the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, to coordinate activities for urban tree planting and care and fundraising</li><li>◦ Expansion and creation of programs across partner organizations including PHS, city departments, PowerCorpsPHL, Fairmount Park Conservancy, School District of Philadelphia, and the Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia.</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>#2</b> <b>Protect the existing and future urban forest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The city of Philadelphia passed legislation that introduced fees for failing to replace trees during new development.</li><li>• The Natural Lands Department at Parks and Recreation has started a comprehensive assessment of the city's natural lands. The assessment focuses on ecosystem quality and health, and extends beyond trees.</li></ul>
<b>#3</b> <b>Grow the urban forest equitably across the city</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parks and Recreation received \$1.8 million for Fiscal Year 2023 from the City Operations budget, a \$1 million mid-year transfer of Capital funds for street trees, and \$900,000 from the William Penn Foundation.</li><li>• Philadelphia was awarded a \$12 million grant from the USDA Forest Service, which will be used by multiple Philly Tree Plan partners to grow the urban forest. (See Goal #1 for more details.)</li><li>• New zoning code updates increased tree planting requirements for new construction projects.</li></ul>

**#3**  
**Grow the urban forest equitably across the city (continued)**

- Based on data from the City of Philadelphia Tree Inventory, the number of street trees decreased by 5% between 2021 and 2023. Areas with the largest decline in street trees include Northeast Philadelphia, the Navy Yard, and the Sports Complex neighborhoods (see Annex 1 maps).

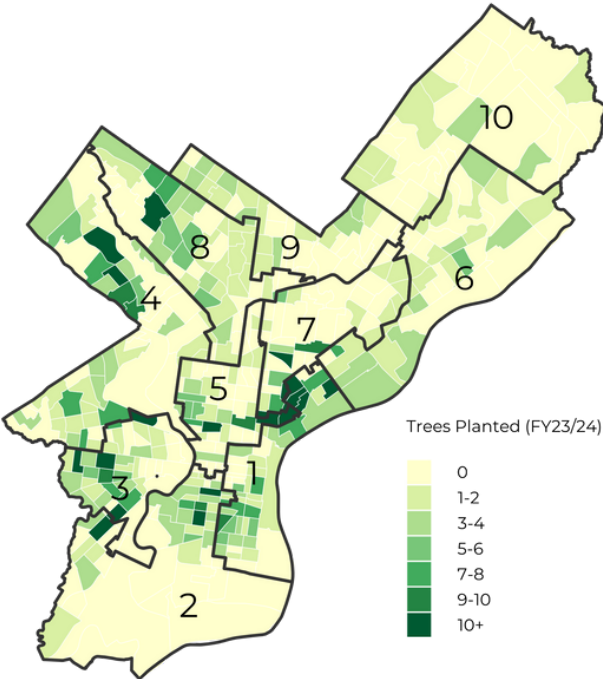
**Percent Change in Street Trees (2021-2023)**



- The number of street trees in priority areas increased by 4%. Areas with a notable increase in the number of street trees include areas of North Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, Southwest Philadelphia, and the Point Breeze neighborhood of South Philadelphia.
- During FY2024 the Parks and Recreation planted 570 new street trees, an increase of 187 (48%) compared to FY2023. 35% of new street trees planted by Parks and Recreation in FY2024 were planted in priority areas.
- Additional trees have been planted by other city agencies and partner organizations like the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. In total, 2,421 trees were planted during FY2023 according to FY2023 budget data.

### Number of Street Trees Planted by Parks and Recreation (Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024)

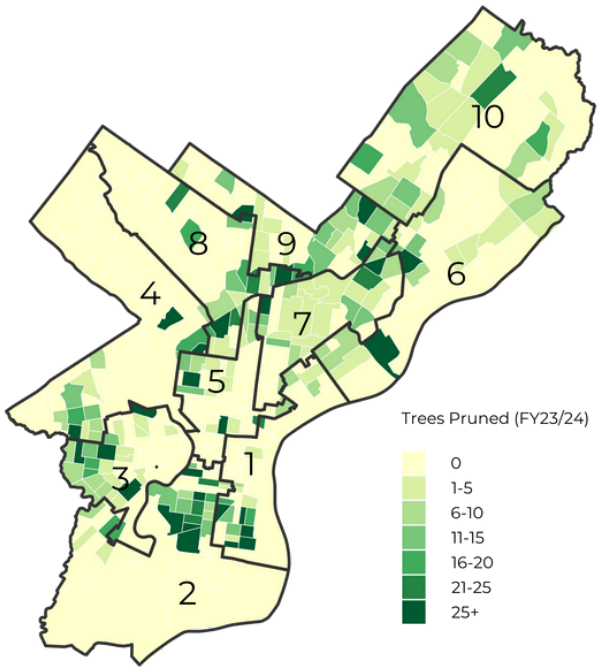
#3  
Grow the urban forest equitably across the city (continued)



#4  
Reduce the burden of trees on residents

- Parks and Recreation and the Department of Commerce launched a new commercial corridor tree planting and care program as part of the Taking Care of Business Clean Corridors Program.
- During FY2024 Parks and Recreation pruned 1,547 trees, an increase of 690 (80%) compared to FY2023. 80% of trees pruned in 2024 are located in priority areas.
- To date, during FY2024 Parks and Recreation has removed 715 trees, this is a slight decrease compared to FY2023 when Parks and Recreation removed 777 trees.



<p><b>#4</b> <b>Reduce the burden of trees on residents (continued)</b></p>	<p><b>Number of Street Trees Pruned by Parks and Recreation (Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024)</b></p> 
<p><b>#5</b> <b>Invest in people and communities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The city is providing training and compensation for ambassadors to care for new trees planted through the Taking Care of Business Clean Corridors Program.</li> <li>• The Forest Service grant includes \$1.2 million of dedicated fundings for community-based projects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>#6 Communicate with residents and improve customer service</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parks and Recreation has hired two new customer service staff, and one more is currently being hired.</li> <li>• The additional staff should help improve the Parks and Recreation department's ability to respond to tree related community concerns.</li> </ul>



<p><b>#7 Advocate for communities to benefit from the urban forest</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tree planting and pruning activities have focused on priority areas, allowing communities with the highest needs to get the most benefits from city tree related activities.</li> <li>• The IRA funding includes money dedicated towards school yard greening activities, this money will be targeted at schools located in priority areas.</li> <li>• Parks and Recreation has hired three community forestry organizers, allowing for greater community engagement and advocacy and improved partnerships with community groups and coalition partners.</li> </ul>
<p><b>#8 Celebrate and support the ways communities are engaging with trees</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many community partners have increased efforts to celebrate trees, and promote community support for trees. Awbury Arboretum celebrated a year of trees during 2023, and held many events throughout the calendar year focused on celebrating trees.</li> <li>• Awbury Arboretum also opened a new structure that is used for building musical instruments from fallen trees.</li> <li>• Parks and Recreation expanded the Farm Philly program to include public orchards, which supports agricultural activities on public lands in the city.</li> </ul>

# GENERAL BUDGET ANALYSIS

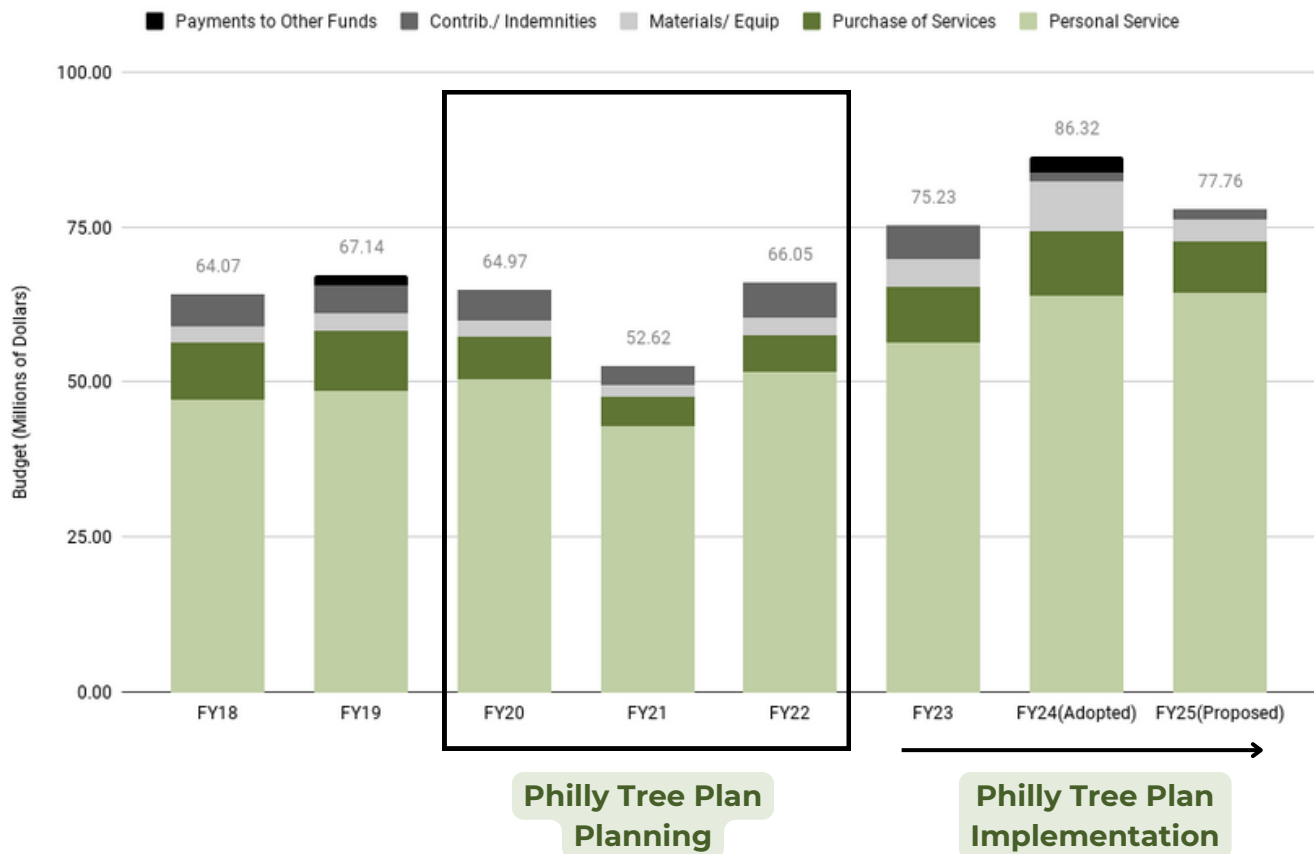
## Planning Phase: Philly Tree Plan (FY2018 - FY2022)

Philadelphia started the planning of the Philly Tree Plan from FY2020. The Parks and Recreation operating budget showed a slight decrease from \$67M to \$52M between FY2019 and FY2021, it recovered to the same level in FY2022.

## Implementation Phase: Philly Tree Plan (FY2023 - FY2025)

The Parks and Recreation estimated actual budget for FY2023 was \$75.23M, an increase of \$9.18M ( $\Delta 13.90\%$ ) from FY2022's \$66.05M. Comparing this to the change in the City's Total Budget for the same period, FY2023 saw a 10.9% increase from FY2022. The FY2024 budget for the City showed an increase of 8.6%, with the Parks and Recreation budget experiencing a larger increase of 14.7%. For FY2025, there is an estimated decrease in both the city's total budget and the Parks and Recreation budget based on the preliminary budget data. The Parks and Recreation budget is expected to experience a larger decrease of 9.9% compared to a 2.1% decrease in the city's total budget.

## Parks and Recreation Total Budget



# GENERAL BUDGET ANALYSIS

## Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Operating Budget FY2018 ~ FY2025

(General Fund Obligation)

(USD, Millions)

Name	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24 (Adopted)	FY25 (Proposed)
City Budget Total	4.40B N/A	4.77B (Δ8.4%)	5.04B (Δ5.7%)	4.72B (▼6.3%)	5.34B (Δ13.1%)	5.92B (Δ10.9%)	6.43B (Δ8.6%)	6.29B (▼2.1%)
Parks and Recreation Budget Total	64.07 N/A	67.14 (Δ4.8%)	64.97 (▼3.2%)	52.62 (▼19.0%)	66.05 (Δ25.5%)	75.23 (Δ13.9%)	86.32 (Δ14.7%)	77.76 (▼9.9%)
Personal Service	47.03	48.58	50.47	42.88	51.59	56.44	63.86	64.27
Purchase of Services	9.40	9.63	6.89	4.72	6.04	8.85	10.40	8.49
Materials/ Equip	2.62	2.75	2.62	2.02	2.70	4.54	8.05	3.50
Contrib./ Indemnities	5.01	4.64	5.00	3.01	5.72	5.40	1.50	1.50
Payments to Other Funds	0.00	1.55	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.50	0.00

Source: City of Philadelphia Office of the Director of Finance

# GENERAL BUDGET ANALYSIS

Looking at the budget for the Infrastructure and Property Management program, which is largely responsible for the Philly Tree Plan, while it showed a slight decrease at the beginning of the planning period, it directly recovered to the level of FY2019's budget. After the Philly Tree Plan implementation, we observe a consistent increase in its budget from \$27 million to \$34 million. Notably, the allocation for tree management saw a significant rise between FY2022 and FY2023, coinciding with the implementation of the Philly Tree Plan in early 2023. Since then, the budget allocation has remained relatively stable.

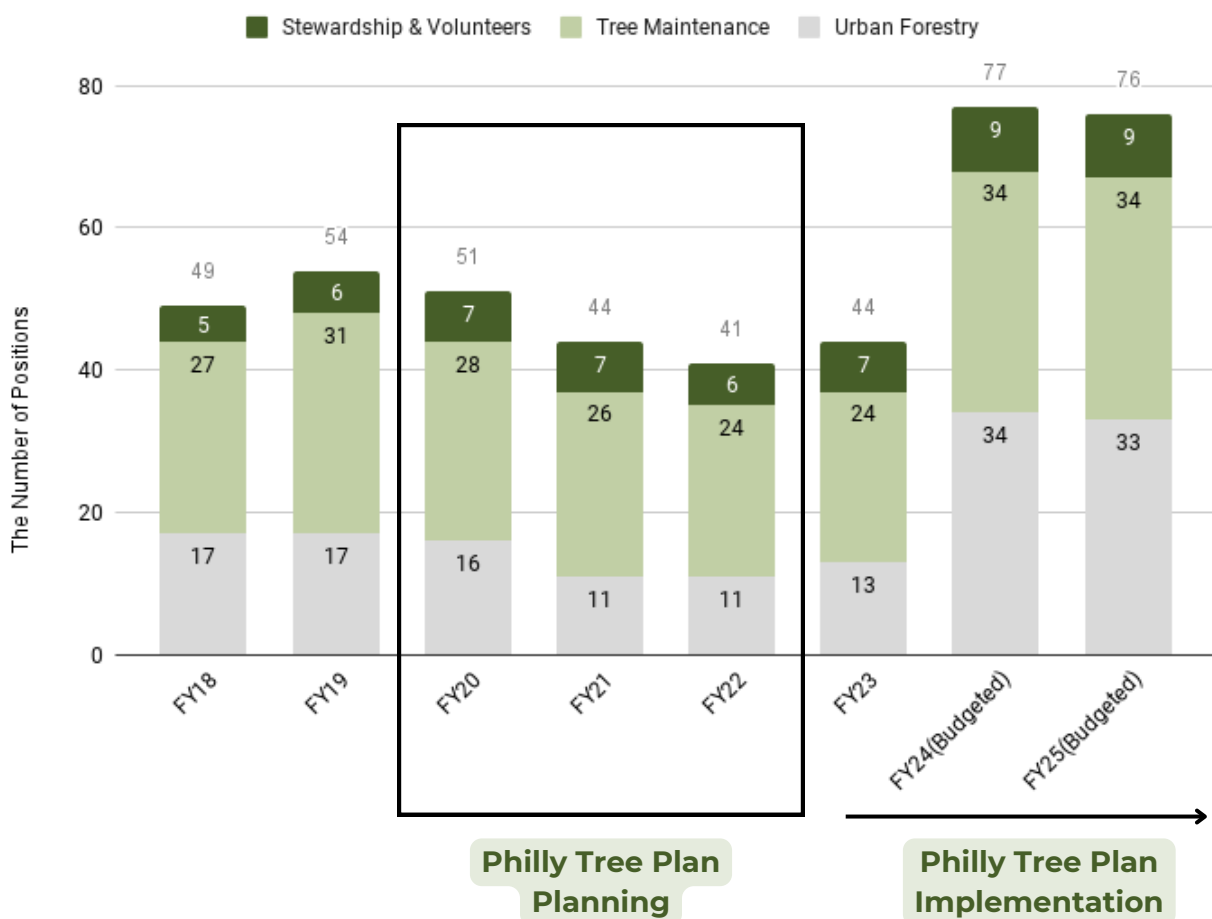
## Infra & Property MGMT Budget, Tree MGMT Budget



# GENERAL BUDGET ANALYSIS

The number of Tree Management Positions showed a continuous decrease during the planning period from 51 positions to 41 positions, which is smaller than the number of positions of FY2019, by showing a big decrease in the positions of Urban Forestry. However, there has been a notable increase in the number of budgeted positions responsible for the Philly Tree Plan. Specifically, in Urban Forestry, the count increased from 11 to 34, more than tripling. Positions in Tree Maintenance grew from 24 to 34, and those in Stewardship and Volunteerism rose from 6 to 9.

## The Number of Tree Management Positions



Beyond funding from the city budget, the city has also received two major grants to support implementation of the Philly Tree plan. This includes a William Penn Foundation grant for \$900,000 and a USDA Forest Service Inflation Reduction Act grant for \$12 million grant to be used by the city and partners over a five-year period.

# CALL TO ACTION

One year down, the Philly Tree Plan is making strides, but the continued support for these efforts is vital. Here are a few things the City Council can do to ensure Philadelphia meets its urban forestry goals:

## **1. Continue to engage residents in the implementation of the Philly Tree Plan.**

There are ample opportunities for Philadelphians to volunteer and work in programs to support tree planting and maintenance and get involved in ongoing priority neighborhood plans. City council members can identify organizations in their district that are engaging in the tree plan and amplify their efforts.

## **2. Continue to support the implementation of the Philly Tree Plan through the city budget.**

Increasing the city's tree canopy has immense potential to improve public health, economic, social, and environmental outcomes, but there are city positions that need to be funded and filled to meet these goals. Examples include a sidewalk coordinator within the Office of Transportation, Infrastructure, and Sustainability; staff for the Department of Commerce's Taking Care of Business Clean Corridors Program; an utility tree coordinator, and more arborists and street tree inspectors; among other roles. Funding for work done through contractors is also a critical component of the budget needs. The proposed FY25 budget for Parks and Recreation and the tree plan marks a decline compared to recent years. If this

trend continues, it could risk future progress of the plan. Ensure financial support for the plan continues to grow by and demonstrate how the tree plan can be a critical component of achieving the goals in Mayor Parker's "Clean and Green" initiative.

## **3. Support efforts to "protect the existing and future urban forest"**

as very few types of trees have legal protection in Philadelphia. Examples of actions in the tree plan include enacting legislation and policies that expand heritage tree protections during development, protect food-bearing trees, provide incentives for preserving large trees, require and enforce tree protection plans, and develop robust establishment care requirements.

## **4. Support efforts to "grow the urban forest equitably across the city"**

through the passage of new zoning requirements and regulations. Examples outlined in the tree plan include introducing requirements that lower the lot size minimum for tree planting and replacement and reduce the minimum linear frontage and allowable distance between street trees. Other opportunities include increasing on-site planting, expanding the City's existing Tree Fund,

and requiring the planting of replacement trees before permit applications can be obtained. Additionally, the current tree related legislation passed in 2022 does not apply to Council District 5. It is recommended this be revised to ensure consistent tree planting regulations for new developments throughout the city.

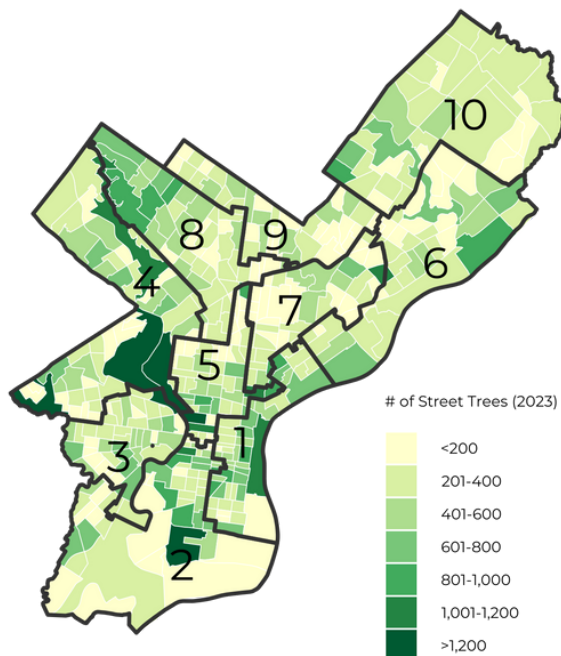
#### **5. Explore opportunities to create a resolution for the tree plan.**

With multiple new members joining city council in June a resolution could help inform city council of the efforts and impacts of this plan and demonstrate a renewed commitment from city leadership. This will help open more doors for awareness and engagement to bring additional residents, community organizations, businesses, and other entities into the plan.

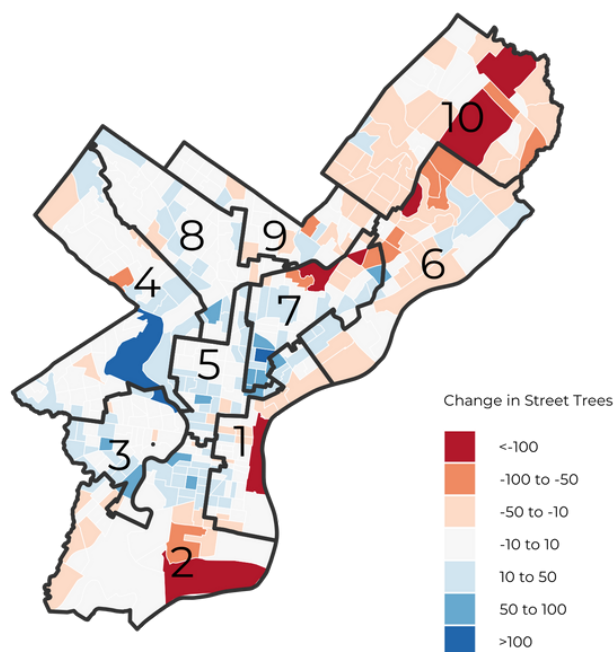


# ANNEX 1: ADDITIONAL MAPS

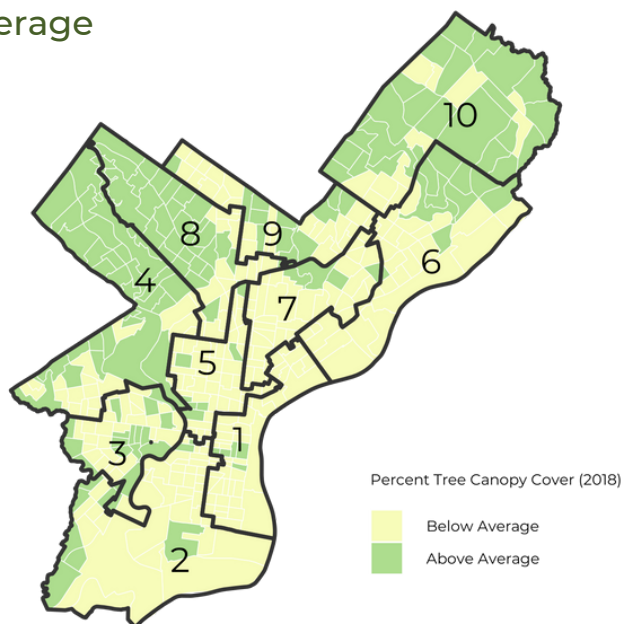
Number of Street Trees (2023)



Change in Street Trees (2021-2023)



Tree Canopy Cover Compared to Average



Percent Change in Street Trees (2021-2023)

