



September 23, 2004

MEMORANDUM

**MCPB**  
**Item # 4**  
**9/30/04**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Charles Loehr, Director  
Park and Planning Department

**FROM:** Jack Seely, Pope Farm Facility Manager  
Natural Resources Division

Cathy Conlon  
Countywide Planning Division, Environmental Planning

**SUBJECT:** Office of Legislative Oversight – Inter-Agency Study of Tree Management Practices

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**INTRODUCTION**

The attached draft of the Inter-agency Study of Tree Management Practices has been prepared by the Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight in response to a request by the County Council. The Council wanted to understand county agencies' activities and practices regarding tree care and tree management, and identify opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these practices. The five county and bi-county agencies included are: The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), Montgomery College (MC), Montgomery County Government (MCG), Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC).

**SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS**

The study presents research findings about tree care activities, the benefits of trees, and approaches to tree management practices. It also describes how the five county and bi-county agencies acquire, install, maintain, and remove trees located on public land or along public rights of way maintained by the County. The report makes findings in five different categories:

General Findings

General findings include the fact that landscape, forest and street trees in Montgomery County, including those maintained by the County, provide numerous benefits. The study also finds that maintaining these trees requires different levels of tree care activities including, tree

conservation, tree establishment, tree maintenance, and tree removal and replacement; with higher levels needed in urban areas. Approximately \$4 million was spent by the five agencies in FY04 for tree planting, pruning and removals (\$1,725,000 of that total was spent by M-NCPPC).

#### Findings for Landscape Trees

All five agencies are responsible for acquisition, planting, maintenance and removal of landscape trees. Only M-NCPPC grows plants at the in-house nursery, the Pope Farm.

#### Findings for Forest Trees

The report finds that M-NCPPC, MCG, MCPS and WSSC manage forest tree activities either to comply with the County's Forest Conservation Law, or as part of efforts to restore stream valleys and protect water quality. Both M-NCPPC and MCG have stream restoration programs. MCG uses private contractors to supply and plant trees (usually seedling size or cuttings), while M-NCPPC relies on volunteers and park staff to plant trees grown by Pope Farm. WSSC plants forest trees as part of their land management practices around the reservoirs, and they have agreed to planting by MCG (Department of Public Works and Transportation) of two forest conservation bank areas.

#### Findings for Street Trees

MCG and WSSC administer programs to care for an estimated 290,000 street trees in the unincorporated areas of the county. Most activities are handled by MCG, but WSSC removes and replaces trees that interfere with water and sewer repair projects. In FY04, approximately 5,100 new street trees were planted, the majority of which (approximately 3,600 trees) were provided by private land developers as part of their development approvals. Street trees acquired and planted in urban districts and as part of commercial streetscape projects by county agencies using private contractors, are typically larger, and receive more care after planting. More money is spent to acquire and maintain these trees. The report finds that it may be cost effective for Pope Farm to supply street trees for these programs. The report also finds that tree care maintenance activities in the county such as, pruning, removal and replacement are under-funded and do not occur as often as they should, especially outside the urban districts.

#### Findings about Management and Coordination

With regard to management and coordination, the major findings of the report are that there are many tree care activities common to the five agencies which are distributed among several groups across the agencies and often embedded in programs that serve many different purposes. To address the general decline in fund support for tree care activities, agencies have deferred maintenance, identified other funding sources, and supplemented programs with capital budget funding.

## SUMMARY OF THE REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS ON M-NCPPC

The report includes four recommendations for Council consideration to address some of the issues identified in the study.

### Recommendation for Management Briefing

The first recommendation is that the Council ask the Chief Administrative Officer to provide a management briefing on the County's street tree program, and address several questions regarding the status of current implementation and costs for improvements. This recommendation does not have immediate implications on M-NCPPC operations or programs, but it is possible that a future request could be made to investigate the feasibility of Pope Farm's involvement in supplying trees to support the street tree program.

### Recommendation for Trees for Urban Districts

The second recommendation states that the Council request Pope Farm and the Urban Districts investigate the feasibility of Pope Farm supplying street trees for the Urban Districts. Staff in the Horticultural Services Section of the Division of Natural Resources manage the Pope Farm Nursery, and provide planting with after-care for landscape trees in County parks, CIP projects, and Enterprise facilities.

The Horticultural Services Section staff prepared a budgetary analysis to address the possibility of providing trees only, and/or trees with after-care to Montgomery County government agencies. This report was a comprehensive analysis of the necessary personnel and materials, and is referenced in the study report. It was formulated to meet the specific requirements of the County tree program and the urban districts. Specifically, it addressed the annual need for 1700 trees for street planting and maintenance of canopy cover. Additionally, it detailed the needs of approximately 150 trees for the three urban districts.

### Recommendation for IFC Team Coordination

The study's third recommendation is that the Council ask the Interagency Forest Conservation Team to manage an ongoing effort for staff from the five agencies to coordinate landscape, forest, and street tree program activities and report the results of this effort to the Council. M-NCPPC staff from the Environmental Planning section of the Countywide Planning Division, and from the Natural Resources Division are members of the Interagency Forest Conservation Team. This team was formed in response to recommendations contained in the County Executive's 2001 Forest Preservation Strategy document which outlined several goals for forest and tree conservation in the county, and identified the need for coordination among the agencies charged with these efforts.

Most of the issues raised in the attached OLO study have been discussed in varying levels of detail by the IFC Team. The county street tree program was identified in a June 2004 update by the team as a priority focus item for the coming year. Other priorities identified in this update were controlling negative impacts of excessive deer population and invasive species on county forests, and tree preservation during redevelopment in older urban and suburban areas.

Certain M-NCPPC staff will continue to participate as core members of the IFC Team. As the priority topics are explored in more detail, other staff directly involved with M-NCPPC's related programs will be included.

### Recommendation for Urban Forests

The fourth recommendation of the study is that the County's Department of Environmental Protection be directed to develop a proposal for a management plan that recommends a long range strategy to maximize the environmental benefits of the County's urban forest.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that a letter to the County Council be sent from the Planning Board stating our willingness to participate in working on all the recommendations contained in the OLO study. With regard to the second recommendation, the Horticultural Services Section would like to accommodate the needs of the 1700 trees for Montgomery County Government. The current range of tree sizes in production meet the specification needs for the county trees. Staff recommends that further investigation be done to determine the feasibility of Pope Farm's involvement in growing trees for the county's street tree programs. The increase in production will necessitate the need for additional personnel and machinery in the Horticultural Services Section to increase infrastructure at the farm and in the after-care program. The increase in production for County trees will require additional acres not currently present at the Pope Farm. There is additional acreage currently at Agricultural History Farm Park, adjacent to Pope Farm, which would have to be dedicated to these trees. Staff suggests that the Urban Districts consider the original cost analysis and option proposal presented by Pope Farm in more detail. Pope Farm supports the growing of trees for the urban districts.

With regard to the study's last recommendation, Staff recommends a partnership between the Department of Environmental Protection and M-NCPPC in the development of an urban forest plan for the county. Given M-NCPPC's regulatory responsibilities for private sector trees, the many trees located and managed by M-NCPPC in urban area parks, our ongoing efforts to develop urban environmental protection guidance and streetscape plans as part of master plans, and upcoming proposals for development of a county Green Infrastructure Functional Master Plan, Staff believes a partnership between Park and Planning and the Department of Environmental Protection would avoid duplication of efforts.