

Executive Summary

The Tacoma Tree Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to community greening efforts. This strategic plan presents a shared vision for the organization's role in growing a greener, healthier, and more connected Tacoma and Puget Sound; and provides guidance to leadership, staff, and volunteers through the year 2025.

Our Mission: *The Tacoma Tree Foundation is focused on educating, empowering, and supporting community greening efforts in the Greater Tacoma area, Pierce County, and the watersheds of the Puget Sound.*

Our Vision: *Our future has trees in every neighborhood, healthy vibrant and cohesive communities that sustain tree planting, tree care and tree education. Neighbors helping neighbors to grow a greener, healthier, and more connected Greater Tacoma, Pierce County and the watersheds of Puget Sound.*

History

Ancestors of today's Puyallup, Steilacoom, Muckleshoot, and Nisqually peoples have inhabited the Puget Sound Region since deep time. They are still here as part of a sovereign state; their voices, governance and worldview are imperative to our planet's future. Their ecocultural interaction with the land helped and continues to shape the forest and waters we know today.

Beginning in the 1830's, European settlement extensively altered the land through logging and agriculture. Then in 1875 Tacoma became regionally significant as the western terminus of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Currently, Tacoma is an urban port city with a population of around 213,000 and serves as the center of business activity for the South Sound Region.

Though Tacoma is one of the most livable cities in the United States and in one of the fastest growing regions, its urban tree canopy is lacking and declining. Environmental racism, stemming from decades of racist housing and development policies¹, resulted in a lack of tree canopy coverage in historically redlined neighborhoods. The associated impacts range from lower home values, increased police presence, under-resourced schools, creation of heat islands, and poor air quality, and a tendency for these neighborhoods to be torn down to build freeways or strip malls in the name of urban renewal. As development pressures soar, tree canopy falls. In 2018, Tacoma regionally ranked bottom of the list with 20% tree canopy coverage.

The Tacoma Tree Foundation was founded in 2018 to address the gap in community support to increase Tacoma's urban forest. Turning this vision into reality requires leadership, new partnerships, and community solidarity. Everyone belongs and has a contribution to make.

¹ Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., "Mapping Inequality," American Panorama, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed September 12, 2020, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=11/47.262/-122.498&city=tacoma-wa>

Our Values in Action

The Tacoma Tree Foundation's values and associated programming represent our dedication to: Community Inclusion, Community Cohesion and Social Capital, Urban Trees and Neighborhood Greenspaces, and Community Health and Human Well-Being.

Values: Community Inclusion

Supporting inclusive and safe communities for all races, ages, genders, abilities, cultures, and lifestyles.

Community Tree Stewards - Providing multilingual training to community tree stewards on best practices in tree planting, selection and care, local policies, and community organizing.

Tree Care/Planting Workshops - A variety of training programs for beginners to professionals that highlight best practices in tree care and landscape management.

Values: Community Cohesion and Social Capital

Leading social cohesion and civic engagement through restored community and mutual caring.

Earth Day South Sound - A yearlong celebration starting on Earth Day 2020, it's a call to action centering around planting and growing a healthy tree for every child in Pierce County.

Advocacy for Trees and Community - Board-approved letters supporting our mission and values as they relate to policy and development.

Values: Urban Trees and Neighborhood Greenspaces

Promoting tree protection, planting, and neighborhood greening where it is most lacking.

Tree Giveaways - Providing multilingual opportunities for tree and plant giveaways in focus neighborhoods throughout the fall and winter.

Exceptional Tree Program – Helping people celebrate trees, participants share their favorite trees by sending photos, stories, and locations for exceptional trees which are mapped in a spatial database.

Tree Walks - Introduce people to the trees of Tacoma and their neighborhood. Attendees learn about the many benefits of trees and develop an appreciation of their value to the community.

Values: Community Health and Human Well-Being

Working to ensure healthy lives and well-being through community greening.

Nature Explorers - Partnership with the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation where Edison Elementary students actively plant and care for a variety of plants and explore the surrounding nature.

Nature Explorers Zine – Supported by Tacoma Creates, the program works with teachers and curriculum coaches to support youth in creating zines that celebrate community, trees, and greening.

Organic Landscape Maintenance Workshop - Video shorts providing safe and environmental practices in organic landscaping.

School Landscapes - A program to move school landscapes towards a holistic design-thinking model that includes students in their design, implementation, and care.

Where We Work

The Tacoma Tree Foundation orients to the geography of Tacoma, Pierce County, and the watersheds of Puget Sound, with our efforts based on the community, municipal, and regional levels:

Community

Our focus is where the need for trees, greening, community health and human well-being is the greatest where we can help direct local benefits for communities. Currently, our primary focus is on the Tacoma neighborhoods of Hilltop, South Tacoma, South End, and Eastside.

As regional development continues, so do our partnerships in the Cities of Lakewood, Sumner, Edgewood, Fife, and the Pierce County communities of Parkland, Spanaway, Fredrickson, Midland, South Hill, and perhaps on land of the Puyallup People (swatx^wix^wtx^wəd ʔə tiil spuyaləpabš).

Neighborhood Focus

- Social inclusion and cohesion
- Dismantling racism and other forms of oppression
- Access and share resources

Municipal

Working with municipal partners supports tree preservation and greening at all levels, and lays the foundation for a healthier and greener community planning and development.

City and County Involvement

- Urban heat equity
- Protecting and increasing tree canopy
- Elevating community voices, particularly frontline communities

Regional

We are part of a network of organizations involved in tree and greening-related activities throughout the greater Puget Sound, as what happens in the Snohomish/King/Kitsap/Pierce/Thurston County megalopolis affects the surrounding region.

Regional Influence

- Forest preservation
- Policies on tree preservation
- Climate change resilience and climate justice

Obstacles and Opportunities

Planting and retaining trees and green spaces seems like a simple achievable goal, but there are many obstacles to overcome. With every obstacle, there is an action to create greener communities.

- *Climate change* exacerbates damaging land use practices, seasonal drought, pollution, and exposure to other hazards. Though a global issue, our contributions at the local level create climate resilient landscapes by incorporating climate adapted species and sustainable maintenance practices while also employing community-powered and equity-oriented climate actions.
- *Social inequity* has left a signature on many neighborhoods which lack urban forest canopy and its associated benefits.² We can focus our investments and partnerships to support tree planting, greening and empowering these neighborhoods.
- *COVID-19* creates many challenges to build social cohesion and social capital within communities. The lasting impact of the pandemic affects modes of operation, requiring us to remain flexible and responsive.
- *Urban heat islands* negatively affects densely-developed areas³ as it increases ground-level ozone, smog and our other urban pollution. Identifying and naming these areas suffering from extreme heat helps direct resources for trees and greening.
- *Traditionally-built asphalt and concrete infrastructure* is poorly adapted for the higher temperatures and extreme weather expected this century.⁴ Our targeted tree planting provides shade that reduces pavement fatigue cracking⁵ and reduce stormwater runoff.
- *Roadway development* commonly lacks trees and landscaping, leading to increased commuter stress levels and crash rates. Our support for trees and greening along roadsides create traffic calming, safe streets, and improve walkability in our neighborhoods.
- *Government and Regulations* can be detrimental for trees and green areas as development and lax oversight leaves landscapes bare. Encouraging political will for tree care and greening leads to intention or commitment by the government to enact regenerative laws, policies and actions.

² Martin, Kate. 2018. [How racism kept black Tacomans from buying houses for decades](#). Tacoma News Tribune. 10 August.

³ Sustaining Urban Spaces Research Lab. 2018. [Tacoma, WA - Urban Heat Island Maps](#).

⁴ Cutter, S. L., W. Solecki, N. Bragado, J. Carmin, M. Fragkias, M. Ruth, and T. J. Wilbanks, 2014: [Ch. 11: Urban Systems, Infrastructure, and Vulnerability](#). Climate Change Impacts in the United States: The Third National Climate Assessment, J. M. Melillo, Terese (T.C.) Richmond, and G. W. Yohe, Eds., U.S. Global Change Research Program, 282–296. Accessed May 2016.

⁵ McPherson, E. G., & Muchnick, J. (2005). [Effect of street tree shade on asphalt concrete pavement performance](#). *Journal of Arboriculture*, 31(6), 303.

Partners

Our relationships focus on three principle segments: *Community, Government and Organizations*, and *Professionals*. These partners define the distinct groups of people and entities that lie at the heart of how we fulfill our mission and live up to our vision of a greener Tacoma and Puget Sound.

Community

Supporting communities and community members is at the heart of the Tacoma Tree Foundation. People desire and deserve a greener community, yet limited access to resources, a lack of advocacy and non-existent or minimal tree related education are limiting factors to greening. Our community services include:

- *Community educational programs* - Provide free training to empower “community tree stewards” who become local champions who carry out neighborhood tree plantings and care support.
- *Voice for urban forests* – Advocate for tree conservation, community consideration of developmental tree removal, equitable distribution of resources, and tree care best practices.
- *Implementation of community greening projects* – Initiate and sustain culturally-appropriate community greening projects supported by community members.

Community Partners

Hilltop Urban Gardens | Earth Day Sound | Peaks and Pints | The Nature Conservancy | Puyallup Watershed Initiative | Tacoma Tree Foundation Cohorts of Tree Stewards | Greater Tacoma Community Foundation | Puyallup Watershed Council | Next Step | South Sound Proud | Earth Day Northwest | Tacoma Creates | Orcas Loves Raingardens | Pierce Conservation District | Pierce County Parks | City of Tacoma | City of Puyallup | Chambers Clover Watershed Council | Eastside Family Support Center | Red Elm | Tacoma Public Schools | Greater Tacoma Community Foundation | Technology Access Foundation

Government and Organizations

Healthy urban forests rely on informed and engaged constituencies committed to community greening. Governments and organizations may lack community connections, creating a shortfall when endeavoring to build greener communities. Our services remedy this by using greening as a gateway to civic engagement and an opportunity to cultivate social cohesion:

- *Community outreach* – Outreach in neighborhoods where urban canopy is lacking and/or where there is a foundation of support for urban greening work.
- *Tree distribution and installation support* – Support and provide tree planting for people of all abilities as well as a way to create in-person interactions between neighbors.
- *Community education* - Provide education, spreading the word, and working together on how to best achieve equitable greening in our neighborhoods.

Government Partners

City of Tacoma | Tacoma Public Utilities | Pierce Conservation District | Metro Parks Tacoma | Tacoma Public Schools | Washington Department of Natural Resources | Pierce County

Tree Care Professionals

Many people and organizations rely on landscaping professionals to provide healthy trees and plant care. Unfortunately, it's not uncommon to see improper practices and misinformation that are detrimental to urban forests. As a small organization, we are flexible enough to create programs and opportunities to help professionals provide better service:

- *Training* – Provide training that meets various professional certification requirements and promotes best practices in landscaping and arboriculture to improve local standards of practice.
- *Networking* – Encourage networking and connections with private, government, and nonprofit professionals to provide opportunities and education support within the tree care community.
- *Public Trust* - Create public trust by supporting well-trained professionals who are oriented to local needs to provide quality care and reduce the scale of tree loss.

Tree Care Partners

ISA Certified Arborists | WSDA-Licensed Pesticide Applicators | Members of Washington Association of Landscape Professionals | Independent Tree and Landscape Service Providers | Calendula Farm and Landscaping | Arbor Day Foundation

Key Resources

People are the Tacoma Tree Foundation's primary asset. These are the staff, board members, and most importantly, the volunteers that dedicatedly support a shared vision to have trees in every neighborhood and cohesive communities that sustain tree planting, tree care, and tree education.

Trained staff

Staff are essential to making community contacts and serving a diverse audience. They develop outreach materials, organize meetings, support partnerships, table community events, deliver plants, and develop projects and programs to support equitable neighborhood greening efforts.

Our staff embody the Tacoma Tree Foundation values, they have an inclusive approach, compassion and respect, a willingness to learn and to contribute, a commitment to service and community, the ability to work in a team environment, an interest in trees, greening, and environmental sustainability, and a willingness to share responsibility.

Current staff includes the Executive Director, Communications Specialists with language expertise, Project Specialists, Educators (both adult and youth focus), Community Partnerships Coordinators for focus neighborhoods.

Board of Directors

As a 501[c][3] non-profit organization, the Board of Directors functions as the supervisory authority regarding matters affecting the Tacoma Tree Foundation and is responsible for: determining the mission and purpose; selecting and evaluating the performance of the chief executive; strategic and organizational planning; ensuring strong fiduciary oversight and financial management; fundraising and resource development; approving and monitoring programs and services; enhancing public image; and, assessing its own performance as the governing body.

Board members are personally and professionally focused on a healthy environment, community health, diversity, equity, the power of nearby nature, and the arts. As the Tacoma Tree Foundation grows, the Board encourages full participation and shared power with diverse racial, cultural and economic groups to create a diverse organization that is responsive to the communities we serve.

Volunteers

These are neighbors helping neighbors to grow a greener, healthier, and more connected Greater Tacoma, Pierce County and the watersheds of Puget Sound.

Volunteer Tree Stewards undergo an eight hour training course to support and connect their communities on best practices in tree planting, plant selection, tree care, local policies and rule, and community organizing.

Advisory Network Supporters "outside" the organization bridge the gap between staff and Board and community representation of neighborhoods. These supporters are fluid throughout the Tacoma Tree Foundation meetings and programs, and provide support whenever and wherever they can.

Action Plan

The action plan presents goals that represent the desired status of tree planting, preservation, and community greening efforts over the long run. These formal statements represent the ultimate impacts the Tacoma Tree Foundation hopes to achieve by the end of 2025.

Goal: Improve community health and well-being through social inclusion, cohesion and capital-building to restore urban trees and greenspace.

Community Strategy: Educate and empower communities to preserve and increase urban greening

Action: Focus efforts in urban communities identified as significant heat islands

Action: Provide tree planting and care workshops for community members and professionals serving focus communities

Action: Align tree planting with other greening efforts

Action: Encourage youth leadership and job training in tree planting and stewardship

Action: Train community tree stewards in multiple languages

Action: Support post-planting tree care through capacity building and training

Action: Support fruit tree planting and culturally relevant food systems to help enable tending and gleaning initiatives

Partner Strategy: Support partners to increase urban greening and community engagement

Action: Form partnerships with organizations and civic groups in focus neighborhoods by listening before acting

Action: Support obtaining a 30 percent tree cover goal within urban areas

Action: Advocate for funding, ordinances, policy and plans to strengthen tree preservation and care of the urban forest

Action: Encourage climate resiliency and socially-just adaptation practices in urban forests

Action: Support outdoor learning in nearby nature and school landscapes

Action: Highlight significant trees in our neighborhoods through tree inventories, tree walks, and exceptional tree designation

Foundation Strategy: Growing Foundation capacity to support urban communities where we work

Action: Raise and retain a \$20,000 “rainy day” fund

Action: Establish a donor membership network

Action: Fundraise to cover 10% of operating costs

Action: Develop and approve an Operations Plan

Action: Fund and provide opportunities for staff professional development

Action: Recruit and retain a robust and diverse volunteer network, Foundation Staff, and Board of Directors

Action: Broaden community and agency partnerships within underserved urban areas of Pierce County

Assumptions

For this Action Plan, we assume:

- Our overarching goal will help guide the Tacoma Tree Foundation mission
- The objectives address the significant obstacles and opportunities faced by our communities and these concerns are shared mutually with our partners
- Preliminary strategies and actions will alleviate challenges faced by our partners and highlight next steps for our organization to focus resources, relationships and effort
- This is a living document that we reference regularly to navigate our progress towards achieving our vision

Appendix 1. The (Forested) Path to a Strategic Plan

Our first strategic plan is a Board of Directors priority for 2020. The intent of the Strategic Plan is to ensure Tacoma Tree Foundation is following its mission. The Strategic Plan outlines a vision for a greener Tacoma, describes the context in which we operate, and characterizes different partners, projects and programs. Then, the organization collaboratively sets goals, strategies and actions to fulfill its mission. This will help make clear internal priorities to share with stakeholders, partners and potential collaborators.

The Tacoma Tree Foundation started with a moderated strategic planning meeting in December 2019 with staff, Executive Board members, and available potential new board members participating. The Board Executive Committee, with assistance from the Executive Director, assembled the information from that meeting and crafted a draft strategic plan for the Board’s review in the fall of 2020. Below were initial intentions crafted into a canvas that helped jumpstart the process.

