



**Testimony of
Mark Buscaino, Executive Director, Casey Trees
April 8, 2016**

**Committee on Transportation and the Environment
DDOT Budget Oversight Hearing; FY 2015 - 2016**

Good afternoon, my name is Mark Buscaino, Executive Director of Casey Trees. Our mission is to restore, enhance, and protect the tree canopy of our nation's capital. I am testifying today to voice significant concern over the Mayor's proposed tree budget as concerns the Urban Forestry Administration - UFA.

For those of us who remember, the early 2000's marked a grim time for DC's trees. The Tree Management Administration – now the Urban Forestry Administration – was in crisis. Understaffed and under-funded, it was doing its best to manage a backlog of 10,000 requests, 4000 standing dead trees, and; hundreds of another type of backlog – permit requests from residents wanting to do their part by planting trees in front of their homes *at their own expense*. The Tree Management Administration was so overwhelmed that it couldn't even process requests from those wanting to pay to help it accomplish *what it was trying but unable to do* – plant trees to replace the thousands that had been lost due to years of neglect.

Ironically, several decades prior the Tree Management Administration, with 137 staff members, was one of the best agencies of its kind nationwide. Among its many strengths – its tree tracking system – “MisTree” – was so advanced that arborists across the country would come to town to see it – with the hopes of having their cities adopt similar technologies.

Fast forward from the early 2000's to today and the Urban Forestry Administration has been transformed once again into a nationally recognized urban tree management unit. But it hasn't been easy or quick – rebuilding UFA spanned four Mayors and 15 years. But our memories are short – and despite this recent painful experience – the struggle to avoid the cycle of boom and bust continues, and is foretold in the Mayor's proposed tree budget that's before you today.

On the tree planting side, UFA's budget for contract tree planting over the past six years has been about **\$3.3M per year**, which has allowed UFA to bring the street tree population back from 100,000 to 135,000 trees. While an incredible milestone, UFA still has not achieved a full population, or “full stocking” of street trees – which is approximately **160,000 trees total**.

To achieve full stocking *and* replace the approximately 4000 trees that are lost each year to natural mortality, car collisions, road repairs and the like, the city needs to plant 8000 trees for the next six years. At \$350 per tree this translates into \$3M dollars annually through FY '22 – or \$18M total over six years. After that – barring unusual circumstances, street tree planting could then be reduced to \$1.5M – \$2.0M/year to maintain full stocking levels.

The Mayor's budget, by contrast, requests a paltry \$4.3M total for planting over the next six years – an 80% reduction over current levels. Under this scenario only 2000 trees will be planted annually. With mortality at about 4000 trees per year, that means that the city will permanently lose 2000 trees every year – or 12,000 total over the life of the budget cycle bringing the total street tree population from 135,000 to approximately 123,000.

Regarding tree maintenance and personnel expenditures, the Mayor's budget reduces these lines from 25.7M to \$19.6M – or 25% total. I have heard residents and council members alike speak about how responsive UFA is to constituent requests, that they are professional, courteous, process permits in a timely fashion, and; respond to tree maintenance and removal needs quickly and appropriately. UFA staff are effective because they are well trained and have the time and resources to respond professionally and on-time. The Mayor's proposed cut-backs will erode the hard-fought gains they've made and the goodwill they've built to constituencies City-wide.

These cuts are particularly concerning given that just last December, DDOT and DOEE hosted a city-wide Tree Summit. From it the City committed to planting an additional 3000 trees over current levels, the Mayor created an Urban Forest Coordinating Council to provide more focus on the city's tree issues, and; more recently – this Committee voted favorably on the Tree Canopy Protection Amendment Act of 2016 – an Act that will expand UFA's tree planting and maintenance authority to all DC lands. These are incredible policy victories the City should be proud of – but they are empty victories if funding support is withdrawn.

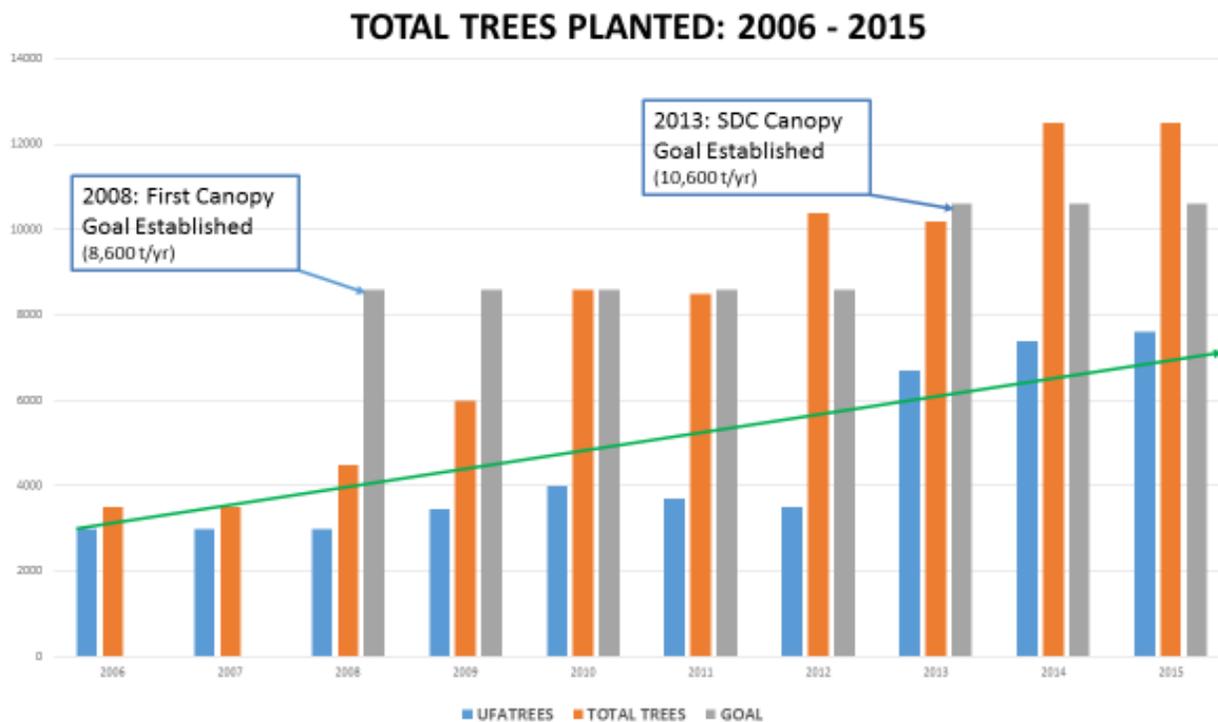
The story I began with today of boom and bust is not new but it is recent, and as you likely remember – painful. But over the past 15 years the City has completely rebuilt its tree management function and some of the fruits of that labor can be seen in the Exhibits A – D attached. These Exhibits, based on data from our Tree Report Cards and the DC Open Data website, speak for themselves. The gains made in tree planting, constituent response times, tree removal and other key performance indicators are clear.

The dark days of inadequate tree planting, standing dead trees and thousands of constituent complaints are finally behind us – let's keep them there. Please fully fund UFA's budget so they can continue planting 8,000 trees each year for the next six years to achieve a full population of street trees, and; fully fund existing staffing and tree maintenance levels so UFA may maintain DC's iconic tree resource in a manner befitting this – our City of Trees.

Thank you

Mark Buscaino

EXHIBIT A



Notes:

- Data taken from Casey Trees Tree Report Card Statistics
- Establishment of Tree Canopy Goals first in 2008 and again in 2013 with the Sustainable DC Plan has been a strong motivator to increase tree planting city-wide.
- Of all the tree planting groups, UFA is the largest.
- Without UFA's efforts, the city will not achieve its canopy goals over the long term.
- DC's street tree population at approximately 135,000, is notable but still only about 85% full at 160,000. Budget cutbacks will trigger a slow but marked decline in the city's street trees to approximately 123,000 over the next six years.
- The green arrow represents a general trend line in UFA's ability to manage large city-wide tree planting contracts. It has taken years to build up to this point; proposed cutbacks will erode UFA's ability to continue functioning successfully along this trend line.

EXHIBIT B



Notes:

- Data taken from DC Open Data