



**Testimony of
Mark Buscaino, Executive Director, Casey Trees
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**Committee on Transportation and the Environment
DDOE Confirmation Resolution, Tommy Wells, PR 21-0021**

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 in support of Mr. Wells' confirmation as Director of the District Department of the Environment.

DC has made many strides over the past decade regarding its tree canopy. A few key milestones:

- It set a 40% overall tree canopy goal under the Fenty Administration in 2008 which was strengthened by the Gray Administration through its Sustainable DC Plan which remains in place today through to the Bowser Administration.
- Tree planting activity has steadily increased since the Williams Administration, not only in numbers, but also in where those trees are planted – in particular on private lots where the largest opportunity for tree canopy expansion exists.
- Finally, each year progress toward attaining the City's canopy goal is assessed and widely published through Casey Trees' Tree Report Card – keeping the issue alive so we won't forget the importance of trees, and that we must all hold each other accountable to attain the goals we've set out to achieve.

But there's more to do. With population increasing and development rising to meet those needs, attaining the City's 40% goal will become more challenging not less. To help meet that challenge, Casey Trees has continued to advocate for amending the Urban Forest Preservation Act of 2002 to:

1. Protect more "Special Trees" by reducing the current size limit;
2. Adjust the Act's fee and fine schedule to account for inflation;
3. Mandate long-term survival checks on replacement tree plantings so we can determine if they are indeed replacing trees that were removed;
4. Redirect a majority of Tree Fund dollars to replant trees on those lands where they were originally removed from – private lots, and;
5. Establish an Urban Tree Canopy Working Group to coordinate DC Government, Federal and private efforts to attain and maintain DC's 40% Tree Canopy Goal.

Casey Trees has advocated for these changes to the Urban Forest Preservation Act for the past eight years, so when we heard Acting Director Wells respond to an interview question as follows within his first two weeks in office, we were very pleased:

“I think there's a diffusion of who is responsible for what with trees: who plants on public lands, private lands, who maintains them, and the preservation of trees. How do you weigh the construction good versus the loss of the tree?”

I think we need to have a tree summit. That won't solve everything but it puts the issues on the table. Having a great tree canopy is a major benefit to a city in terms of cooling, stormwater management, air quality. There's so many things that a good tree canopy brings us. It needs to be a priority.

To Casey Trees, Acting Director Well's words rang true. They speak to the importance of coordinating agency efforts who all have a hand in ensuring an abundant and health tree canopy including but not limited to: DGS, DCOP, DDOT, and DDOE. His words acknowledge that reestablishing tree canopy must be done with District, Federal, non-profit and community efforts because there are so many land types that are impacted. They speak to the importance of tree protection and the need to strengthen existing tree protection laws to ensure they are achieving their intended goals. And, most of all, they acknowledge that trees are of critical importance to the District ultimately to the health of its residents.

In short, Casey Trees strongly supports Mr. Wells' confirmation as Director of the District Department of the Environment, and we look forward to working with him and his able and dedicated staff to address the challenges facing DC's trees.