

**Testimony of Robert Shaut**  
**Chief Operating Officer, Casey Trees**  
**April 27, 2026**

**Budget Oversight Testimony for the Department of Transportation**  
**Committee on Transportation & Environment**

Good morning, Council Chair Allen, members of the committee, and staff. My name is Rob Shaut, I'm the Chief Operating Officer at Casey Trees - an urban forestry non-profit with the mission to restore, enhance, and protect the tree canopy of our nation's capital.

I'd like to start by thanking you, Chair Allen, and this committee for supporting the passage of the Tree Preservation Enhancement Amendment Act of 2025, expected to become law next month, which protects more of our city's Special Trees, allowing them to become the mature tree canopy for the next generation. The law will increase the special tree inventory by tens of thousands of trees, which will increase the scope of work on the Urban Forestry Division and should be considered during budget cycles. Lastly and importantly, the amendment re-establishes the Tree Fund as a NON-lapsing fund.

We hope this legislative fix sticks. In the current budget the Tree Fund is listed as a "lapsing fund," which will be swept into the General Fund at the end of the fiscal year. This undermines the intent of the Tree Fund and the permit fees collected for tree removals – which is to plant and care for the newly planted trees in replacement of removed trees. Instead, necessary tree planting dollars may be used for other purposes, exacerbating the net loss of canopy within the District.

The Tree Fund is also critical because it supports tree plantings on private lands, where our city's Urban Forestry Division cannot work. Private lands are the greatest opportunity and represent the greatest need for tree planting in the District.

The Tree Fund supports the Riversmart Homes program, the DC State Tree Nursery, and the Income Contingent Hazardous Tree Removal Program. Casey Trees works in partnership with the city on both the Riversmart Homes program and hosts the DC State Tree Nursery. Collectively \$1.5 million of those funds helped us plant 7,100 trees across the city.

**We urge the Mayor and Council to ensure the integrity of the Tree Fund as non-lapsing,** giving residents confidence that every dollar collected supports a more resilient canopy for DC's future.

We'd also like to recognize our partners at the Urban Forestry Division, that work tirelessly to ensure our city is green and growing. The District is facing many challenges in this FY27

budget and it speaks to the significance and competence with which our Urban Forestry Division operates that their overall level of funding remains slightly above last year. This level of funding and staffing is critical to supporting our city's urban foresters and ensuring our city meets its 40% tree canopy goal by 2032.

I would like to note that the district collects and analyzes data every five years to assess the growth or loss of our city's overall tree canopy. This is vital in understanding where the tree canopy stands in the face of significant development pressure. We applaud the city for investing in this analysis. We look forward to the 2025 canopy analysis release in the coming months.

Washington, DC has been named "The best City in the United States for our city's Parks" – this didn't happen overnight. In DC, parks are an integral part of our history – dating back to the L'Enfant plan. These greenspaces were strategically located in the original layout of the City. Street trees were incorporated as mini parks throughout the City to offer the myriad of benefits that we know and appreciate. We have a history of prioritizing trees in our communities across DC – and that requires continued investment and attention – even in challenging years.

The investments we make today in our city's tree canopy will compound in public health, community and climate resilience benefits, FAR into the future. It is imperative that we prioritize protecting and funding our tree canopy as an integral infrastructure for the benefit of our residents and future generations.

Thank you for your time, attention, and the opportunity to testify today.