## ****Urban Greenspace and Urban Forestry: A Blueprint for Healthy, Resilient, and Equitable Cities****

* Urban greenspace and forestry are not luxuries—they are essential infrastructure for sustainable, healthy, and just cities. Across the United States, urban areas face the converging challenges of extreme heat, air pollution, inequitable access to nature, and biodiversity loss. These challenges are not distributed evenly. Historically marginalized communities, shaped by policies such as redlining and disinvestment, are far more likely to live in neighborhoods with sparse tree canopy, fewer parks, and greater exposure to environmental hazards.
* Expanding urban greenspace and restoring tree canopy offer multiple, measurable benefits: reducing heat, improving air quality, sequestering carbon, managing stormwater, supporting biodiversity, and improving public health. Yet to realize these benefits equitably, investments must be targeted to the communities that have been systematically excluded.
* This plan envisions a bold, justice-centered investment in urban forestry and greenspace as a strategy for climate adaptation, public health, environmental restoration, and community well-being.

### Core Strategies and Actions

* Plant one billion urban trees, focusing on underserved and heat-vulnerable areas.  
  A nationwide urban tree planting initiative will prioritize neighborhoods facing extreme heat, air pollution, and low canopy coverage—particularly communities with high social vulnerability. Tree species will be selected with community input to ensure ecological suitability and long-term survivability. Planting will be paired with maintenance programs to ensure trees reach maturity.
* Guarantee every urban resident lives within a quarter mile of a park or greenspace.  
  Access to nature is a fundamental environmental and public health right. Investments will focus on creating new parks, greenways, and pocket parks to close greenspace access gaps, prioritizing high-density, low-income, and park-deficient neighborhoods.
* Convert vacant lots, parking lots, and dead malls into greenspaces.  
  Underutilized urban land will be transformed into parks, community gardens, native meadows, rain gardens, and ecological restoration sites. These reclaimed spaces will serve as vital nodes in an urban ecological network, providing habitat, managing stormwater, reducing impervious surfaces, and beautifying communities.
* Establish ecological corridors to connect fragmented habitats.  
  Urban wildlife corridors, greenways, riparian buffers, and linear parks will link isolated patches of habitat, supporting pollinators, migratory birds, and urban biodiversity. Ecological connectivity increases ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change and urbanization.
* Mandate green schoolyards for every public school.  
  Schoolyards will be redesigned as learning landscapes with native trees, rain gardens, edible gardens, outdoor classrooms, and nature play spaces. Green schoolyards not only improve stormwater management and reduce heat, but also enhance student health, academic outcomes, and community engagement.
* Prioritize planting native and diverse species over monocultures.  
  Tree planting initiatives will emphasize site-appropriate, biodiverse native species to ensure ecological resilience, habitat value, and resistance to pests and diseases. Monoculture plantings of fast-growing species will be avoided to prevent vulnerability to collapse.
* Enact tree preservation ordinances to protect existing canopy.  
  Preserving mature trees often provides greater short-term climate and ecological benefits than new plantings. Strong tree protection policies will regulate removal, require mitigation plantings, and incentivize conservation easements for privately held urban forests.
* Monitor canopy cover and greenspace access with geospatial tools.  
  High-resolution satellite imagery, LiDAR, and tools like Tree Equity Score will track urban canopy, greenspace access, and heat vulnerability. Transparent reporting and public dashboards will hold governments accountable and guide adaptive management.

### Why This Matters: Climate, Health, and Equity

* Urban trees provide quantifiable ecosystem services. U.S. urban forests collectively sequester around 700 million metric tons of carbon, mitigate urban heat islands by lowering local temperatures by up to 9°F, intercept thousands of gallons of stormwater per tree annually, and remove millions of tons of air pollutants each year, with direct health and economic benefits.
* Yet the distribution of these benefits is profoundly unequal. A 2021 study found that formerly redlined neighborhoods have 23 percent less tree canopy than non-redlined areas, exposing residents to higher heat and pollution burdens. Investing in urban forestry is therefore not only a climate solution, but an environmental justice imperative.
* Beyond measurable environmental impacts, access to greenspace is linked to lower stress, improved mental health, increased physical activity, and stronger social connections. Greener neighborhoods are also more resilient during heat waves, floods, and extreme weather events.

### Integrated with Broader Policy Goals

* Urban greenspace and forestry are foundational to broader climate, health, and social equity strategies. They complement:
* Land use reforms that enable denser, walkable, green neighborhoods
* Transportation strategies that reduce car dependency and reclaim streets for people
* Environmental remediation efforts to clean up polluted urban lands
* Green jobs programs that employ local residents in planting, maintenance, and ecological restoration
* By integrating urban forestry and greenspace into every aspect of urban design, we can create cities that are healthier, cooler, more biodiverse, more beautiful, and more equitable.

### Key References

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