

## The RAFT: Maintaining Progress in Coastal Virginia

Grant # NA23NOS4190255 Task 91.02

Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Coastal Zone  
Management Program



## Fall 2024 Petersburg Open House

### ***Greening Petersburg: Healthy Trees, Healthy Lives:***

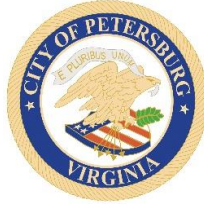
### ***Explore, Vote, Ignite Change***

Monday, September 23, 2024

#### **Executive Summary**

The “Greening Petersburg: Healthy Trees, Healthy Lives: Explore, Vote, Ignite Change” Open House was held on Monday, September 23, 2024 in Petersburg, Virginia at the Petersburg Public Library Event Center. The event was hosted by the [City of Petersburg](#) with support from community partners and facilitation from the Institute for Engagement & Negotiation (IEN) at the University of Virginia as part of [The Resilience Adaptation Feasibility Tool \(RAFT\)](#) process and the [Green Infrastructure Center](#). Over 30 individuals attended the in-person event. The Greening Petersburg Open House was an opportunity for various Petersburg community members to educate themselves on the benefits of urban trees, provide feedback, and vote on proposed initiatives for the future of Petersburg's tree canopy.

Petersburg Council Member Marlow Jones opened the event, emphasizing the significance of community engagement and continuous learning for local leaders. He outlined key goals for the open house, which focused on the benefits of urban trees and improving community health through urban forestry initiatives. Dr. Alton Hart Jr., Director of the Virginia Department of Health Crater Health District, followed with a presentation titled "Nature is Medicine." Dr. Hart stressed the public health benefits of green spaces, from reducing cardiovascular risks to improving air quality, while highlighting the role of trees in creating healthier communities. Amy Wentz of Southside ReLeaf shared her organization's commitment to greening and empowering South Richmond, linking historical injustices like redlining to current urban heat island effect challenges. The Green Infrastructure Center's (GIC) Kendall Topping and Jessica Huang presented on their work with the City of Petersburg to enhance the city's urban canopy with the Petersburg Strategic Tree Canopy Plan. They showcased analyses of the city's tree assets and the economic and environmental benefits of expanding the urban tree canopy. Queen Zakia Shabazz, founder of United Parents Against Lead and CEO of the Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative, delivered a compelling presentation on community-powered resilience. She shared the story of her journey as an environmental justice advocate and introduced the Petersburg Resiliency Hub, a solar-powered community resource center aimed at building local leadership and self-sufficiency.



During the interactive portion of the open house, participants circulated to various tables staffed by local community groups, nonprofit organizations and service providers working on issues of green infrastructure and health. The GIC also hosted a number of tables that provided input on future goals and strategies related to Petersburg urban tree canopy and tree planting plans. The feedback collected at the open house will play a crucial role in shaping Phase 2 of the City of Petersburg and GIC's work on the Petersburg Strategic Tree Canopy Plan, with support from the Virginia Department of Forestry Community Forestry Revitalization Grant. This open house was also made possible by generous support from the Virginia Environmental Endowment, which supported IEN and The RAFT's planning and coordination support; Stantec, which provided refreshments; and an anonymous donor who supported honorarium for presenters. Slides from the event are available in Appendix A of this event summary.

#### **Introduction and Open House Goals- *Council Member Marlow Jones, City of Petersburg***

Council Member Marlow Jones, representing Ward 1, welcomed attendees to the Greening Petersburg Open House and expressed his gratitude for their participation in the event. He emphasized the importance of community engagement and the role of continuous learning for all residents, especially for those in leadership positions. During his remarks, Council Member Jones acknowledged the valuable contributions of the GIC in enhancing understanding of urban forestry in Petersburg. He highlighted the open house goals, which included raising awareness about the benefits of trees in urban environments, reducing the urban heat island effect, and improving community health. By fostering community pride and collaboration, Council Member Jones aims to ensure that Petersburg remains a vibrant and healthy place for all residents.



Figure 1: Greening Petersburg Open House Event Poster placed at the entrance to Petersburg Public Library Event Center. Photo by Claire Downey with the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service.

**Nature as Medicine: Healthy Environment, Healthy Community-** *Dr. Alton Hart Jr., Director, Crater Health District*

Following the Introduction, Dr. Alton Hart Jr., Director of the Crater Health District, delivered an insightful presentation titled "Nature is Medicine." He outlined the district's mission to foster healthy communities through disease prevention, health promotion, environmental protection, and emergency preparedness, covering the areas of Petersburg, Hopewell, Emporia, and several surrounding counties. Dr. Hart emphasized the benefits of exposure to green spaces, highlighting how they can lower stress and promote relaxation. He pointed out that cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. and discussed how increased access to green spaces can mitigate the risks associated with this condition. Dr. Hart noted that one of the most effective ways to improve air quality in neighborhoods is simply by planting more trees. He shared 14 compelling reasons to plant trees, including reducing the urban heat island effect, enhancing children's education and test scores, aiding in recovery from illness, boosting the local economy, and increasing property values. His presentation underscored the vital role that nature plays in promoting public health and community well-being.



**The Block is Hot: Environmental Justice Initiatives in Richmond-** *Amy Wentz, Co-Founder, Southside ReLeaf*

Amy Wentz from Southside ReLeaf, a community-based environmental justice organization in Richmond, demonstrated the significant effects of Urban Heat Islands (UHIs) on the local climate in South Richmond, VA, and emphasized the stark disparities in life expectancy across various neighborhoods. She highlighted how health metrics in Richmond mirror those of the Petersburg area, connecting historical injustices—such as annexation, redlining, and urban renewal—to the current UHI challenges. Amy Wentz articulated the organization's commitment to creating practical solutions that enhance the resilience of communities for future generations, while addressing racial segregation and disinvestment that have led to inequities in the built environment. The challenge for Southside ReLeaf, she explained, is to reduce negative health outcomes through initiatives that plant, educate, and advocate for healthier communities. She noted the importance of engaging with the community in this work, stating that it's essential for individuals to learn how they can contribute. Since its formation, Southside ReLeaf has planted and given away over 1,000 trees, showcasing their efforts to increase green spaces and improve local infrastructure. Amy Wentz also introduced the "Greening Southside Master Plan," aimed at building community power and collective action in Richmond. She concluded by inviting attendees to reach out for support in building environmental justice collaboratives in their areas, reinforcing the importance of uplifting unheard voices and promoting people-powered advocacy for climate resilience.

**Community Forest Revitalization Program: Improving Tree Equity in Petersburg-** *Kendall Topping and Jessica Huang, Green Infrastructure Center*

Kendall Topping and Jessica Huang from the Green Infrastructure Center delivered a presentation focused on their partnership with the City of Petersburg to enhance the community's green infrastructure. The Green Infrastructure Center is a nonprofit organization based in Charlottesville, Virginia dedicated to helping communities evaluate and improve their green infrastructure assets. Their collaboration with the City of Petersburg aims to promote and create a healthier and greener urban landscape. They showcased maps and analyses of the city's tree assets, emphasizing the importance of expanding both the quantity and quality of trees throughout Petersburg. The presenters highlighted the numerous economic benefits of increasing tree cover, including lower utility costs, higher property values, improved air quality, and increased business revenue, as people are more likely to spend time in areas shaded by trees. They discussed the vision for a greener Petersburg, which is not only more resilient but also capable of creating local jobs. Kendall Topping and Jessica Huang introduced the Community Forest Revitalization Program, showcasing maps that were part of Phase 1 of the initiative. They encouraged attendees to participate in open floor exercises following the presentations, where community members could provide feedback and vote on proposed initiatives for the future of



Petersburg's tree canopy. They noted that this feedback will play a crucial role in shaping Phase 2: the implementation of the Petersburg Strategic Tree Canopy Plan.



*Figure 2: Representatives from Southside ReLeaf, including speaker Amy Wentz, pose for a picture with speaker Queen Zakia Shabazz. Photo by Claire Downey with the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service.*

**Partnering for Resilient Communities: Vision for Petersburg- Queen Zakia Shabazz, United Parents Against Lead, CEO- Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative**

Following the Green Infrastructure Center, Queen Zakia Shabazz delivered a presentation on "Partnering for Resilient Communities," emphasizing a broader definition of environmental justice that transcends the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s framework. Her journey into environmental advocacy began in 1996 when she discovered her son had been impacted by lead exposure, leading her to establish United Parents Against Lead (UPAL), a national organization aimed at ending lead poisoning and other environmental hazards through education and advocacy. Queen Shabazz highlighted the critical need for urban forestry, stating that for every tree cut down, eight must be planted to combat deforestation. She underscored the importance of community-led resiliency, advocating for a shift in power to local communities through community-powered funds. As the CEO of the Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative (VEJC), she formed the Petersburg Resiliency Hub, Virginia's first solar-powered facility, which offers training in self-sufficiency, leadership, and renewable energy. The presentation included a video documenting the hub's transformation, culminating in footage from the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Queen Shabazz also announced Petersburg Community Resilience Day on April



30, inviting community engagement in sustainability efforts. Her extensive background as an author, educator, and environmental justice advocate continues to inspire action against lead poisoning and empower communities to advocate for their health and well-being.

**Closing Announcements-** *Naomi Siodmok, Director of Planning and Community Development, City of Petersburg*

Naomi Siodmok concluded the evening's presentation by expressing her appreciation to the Open House funders, including the Virginia Environmental Endowment, the Department of Environmental Quality Coastal Zone Management Program, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Virginia Department of Forestry, the USDA Forest Service through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the City of Petersburg, the UVA Institute for Engagement & Negotiation RAFT program, an anonymous donor, and Stantec. She then introduced the attending community partners, which included Southside ReLeaf, Petersburg is Growing Inc., The Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR), United Parents Against Lead & Other Environmental Hazards, Petersburg Community Resiliency Hub, Virginia State University (VSU), River Street Education/Petersburg Healthy Options Partnerships, Crater Health District, and the Virginia Department of Forestry.

Naomi encouraged attendees to explore the room's perimeter, highlighting the left side of the Event Center where participants could visit community partner tables to learn more about their initiatives in Petersburg and the surrounding community. Additionally, she instructed attendees to explore the right side of the Event Center where various tables were set up to provide information about Phase 1 of the Green Infrastructure Center's Community Forest Revitalization Program. Participants were invited to engage in open floor exercises, where they could share feedback and vote on proposed initiatives aimed at enhancing Petersburg's tree canopy to inform the next stage of the Green Infrastructure Center's work with the City. In closing, Naomi announced the free tree raffle sponsored by the Virginia Department of Forestry. She instructed attendees to collect stamps at each station and return their completed raffle cards at the entrance for a chance to win one of eight juvenile native trees.

**Open Floor Exercises and Tree Raffle**

Attendees participated in open floor exercises following the presentations, where various members of the public provided feedback and voted on proposed initiatives for the future of Petersburg's tree canopy. Additionally, attendees had the chance to visit community partner tables, learning more about local initiatives related to environmental justice and urban forestry while enjoying light refreshments provided by Cindy's Creations. Children enjoyed the craft table hosted by the Virginia Department of Forestry, staffed by Urban and Community Forest Specialist Alanna Ostrowski.

The Green Infrastructure Center (GIC) presented their maps which detailed each of the following goals for the City of Petersburg's Strategic Tree Canopy Plan:

- **Goal 1:** Ensure the proper stewardship of Petersburg’s public trees to maintain tree health, safety and beauty.
- **Goal 2:** Conserve large trees to maximize tree benefits, such as reducing stormwater runoff, urban cooling and air pollution reduction.
- **Goal 3:** Expand community knowledge on the importance of trees and their proper care to increase tree health, safety, and beauty in Petersburg,
- **Goal 4:** Increase the tree canopy benefits of beatification, lower temperatures, cleaner air, walkability, public transport, and increased shopping by planting trees along transportation corridors and business districts throughout the city.,
- **Goal 5:** Expand tree benefits equitably across Petersburg by focusing on increasing tree canopy in communities where canopy is lower than the city’s canopy coverage of 42%.

The public walked around the 5 stations, engaged in dialogue with other community members and the GIC staff, learned about the preliminary work that the GIC has completed, and voted on the strategies that they would like to see implemented for each of the goals mentioned prior. The following feedback was collected from the attendees and summarized by GIC staff:

- Petersburg residents would like more trees around businesses, in neighborhoods, next to streets and sidewalks, and at schools and parks. Low Street Park, Sport Complex, Poplar Lawn, and Blanford Academy playground are parks where the community would like to see more trees.
- Delectable Heights, Pocahontas Island, and Poplar Lawn are neighborhoods where residents at the open house are most interested in a neighborhood greening project.
- Shading street segments should be a priority in Petersburg. Community members flagged important sections to replant trees along Sycamore Street and Alley, E. Washington Street, Halifax Street, Adams Street, and Guarantee Street.
- Localized flooding is an issue in some areas of the City.
- Open lots, including Halifax Triangle, could be great locations for future public space.
- The city should only plant tree species that grow well in the specific conditions of the chosen locations.

Overall, the participants were supportive of the City of Petersburg’s proposed tree canopy goals and strategies. Looking forward, the Green Infrastructure Center will continue to work with the Tree Canopy Advisory Committee and the City of Petersburg to develop the Strategic Tree Canopy Plan and will incorporate the community feedback into future versions of the plan. Final decisions on neighborhood greening projects will be made at the next Advisory Committee workshop, pending city approval. The event concluded with a tree raffle, sponsored by the Virginia Department of Forestry. Naomi Siodmok drew the names of the winners, who were awarded one of eight juvenile trees to take home and plant in their community.





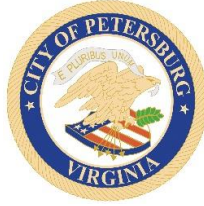
*Figure 3: Open House participants engage in discussion with Community Forester, Kendall Topping during the Open Floor Exercises. Photo by Claire Downey with the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service.*

### Open House Host

- **City of Petersburg, Virginia**, Naomi Siodmok, Director of Planning and Community Development, Event Master of Ceremony

### Community Partners

- **Southside ReLeaf**
- **Petersburg is Growing Inc.**
- **The Friends of the Lower Appomattox River**
- **United Parents Against Lead & Other Environmental Hazards**
- **Petersburg Community Resiliency Hub**
- **Virginia State University**



- **River Street Education/Petersburg Healthy Options Partnerships/ Petersburg Healthy Living & Learning Center**
- **Crater Health District**
- **Virginia Department of Forestry**

#### **Institute for Engagement & Negotiation and RAFT Team**

- **Sierra Gladfelter**, Senior Associate, Institute for Engagement and Negotiation at UVA
- **Meredith Keppel**, Senior Associate, Institute for Engagement and Negotiation at UVA
- **Rose Freeman**, Graduate Student Research Assistant, Institute for Engagement and Negotiation at UVA

#### **Green Infrastructure Center Team**

- **Karen Firehock**, Executive Director, Green Infrastructure Center
- **Kendall Topping**, Community Forester, Green Infrastructure Center
- **Jessica Huang**, Community Forestry Planner, Green Infrastructure Center
- **Mathew Lee**, Director of Forest Conservation, Green Infrastructure Center
- **Lauren Doran**, Conservation Programs Manager, Green Infrastructure Center



INSTITUTE for  
ENGAGEMENT & NEGOTIATION  
Shaping Our World Together



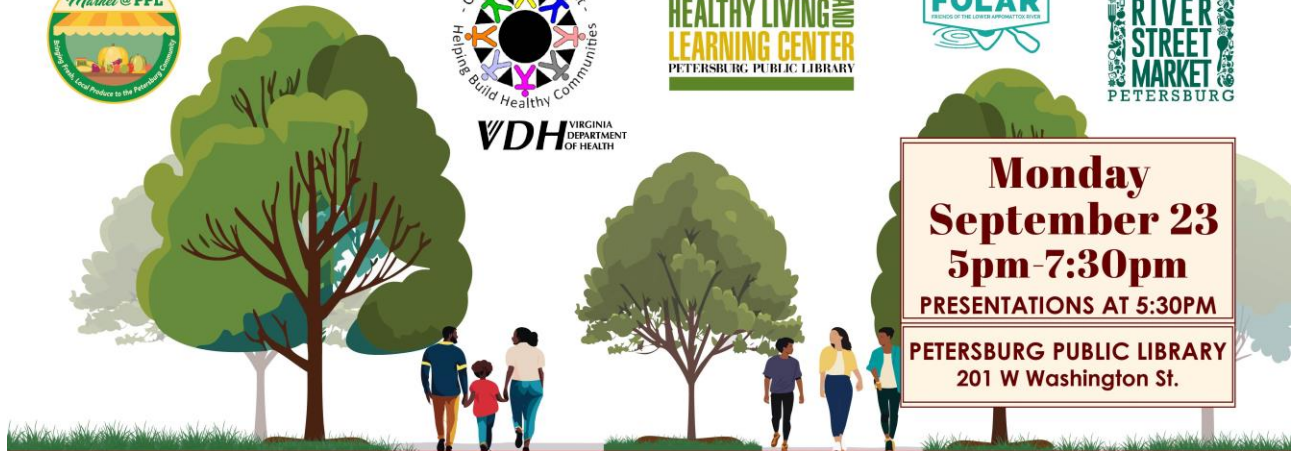
*Thank you to all of our partners and supporters for this event!*



INSTITUTE for ENGAGEMENT & NEGOTIATION  
Shaping Our World Together



United Parents Against Lead  
& Other Environmental Hazards



**Monday  
September 23  
5pm-7:30pm**  
PRESENTATIONS AT 5:30PM  
**PETERSBURG PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
201 W Washington St.

Hosted By the City of Petersburg  
With Support From Community Partners

# GREENING PETERSBURG: HEALTHY TREES, HEALTHY LIVES OPEN HOUSE



## Appendix A: Open House PowerPoint Slides



**Councilman Marlow Jones**

**City of Petersburg  
Ward 1**



# Healthy Environment, Healthy Community

Dr. Alan Hart



SOUTHSIDE  
ReLEAF

**The Block is Hot**  
**Amy Wentz**



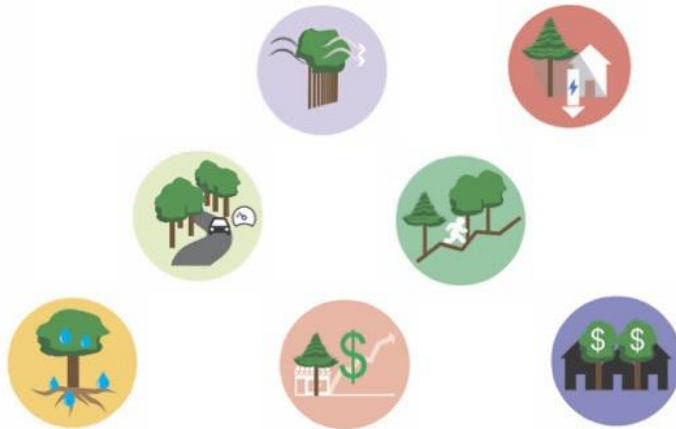


# Why Trees for Petersburg?

The Benefits of Increasing Tree Canopy  
in Petersburg

Kendall Topping, Jessica Huang

## Why Trees?



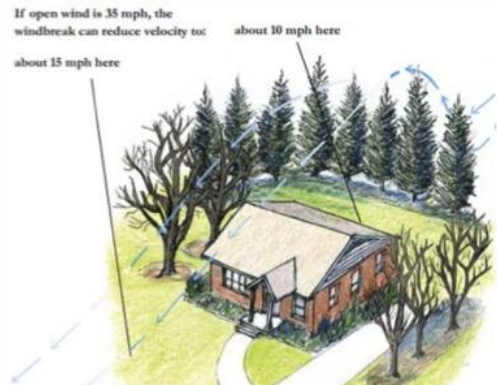
## Trees Can Save You Money!



### Trees Reduce Utility Bills!

- Properly placed trees can reduce AC costs by 35%.  
(Arbor Day Foundation)
- AC units shaded by trees increase energy efficiency by 16% (When trees are properly spaced!) (Florida Solar Energy Center).
- Evergreen trees can reduce heating costs by up to 50% by acting as wind blocks! (Maryland Department of Natural Resources).

### Winter Windbreak



Images Provided by Bristol Tennessee Essential Services

## Trees Can Save You Money!

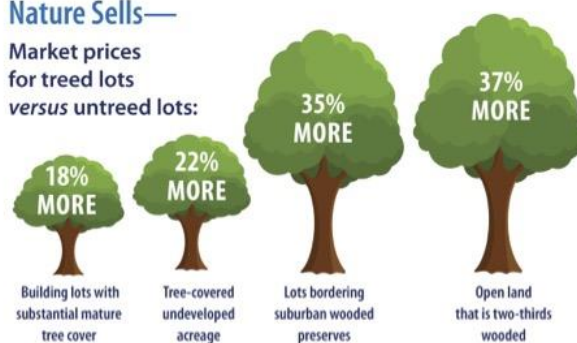


### Trees Increase Property Values!

- Trees provide curb appeal to potential buyers.
  - Homes with trees sell faster and for more money than those with bare lawns! (HGTV)
- One large, healthy, tree in front of a home can increase its value by up to 15%!
  - That would add \$45,000 to an average \$300k home! (Arbor Day Foundation)
  - This increased value is not taxable!

### Nature Sells—

Market prices  
for treed lots  
versus untreed lots:



Source: Kathleen Wolf, 2007, City Trees and Property Values.

## Trees Can Save You Money!



### Trees Increase Property Values!



## Trees Can Save You Money!



### Trees Increase Property Values!



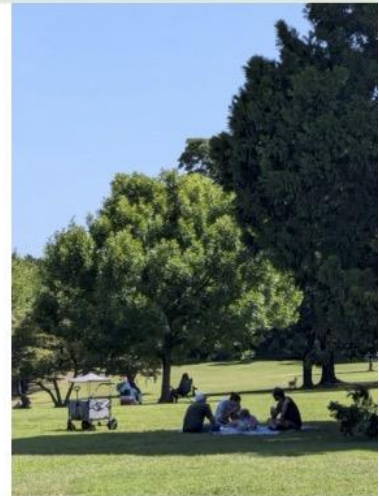


## Trees Keep You Cool!



### Trees Provide Shade and Reduce Temperatures!

- Neighborhoods with high tree canopy percentage can be up to 10°F cooler! (The New York Times)
- Areas directly shaded by trees can be up to 25°F lower than in full sun!
- Tree planting has shown to be 3.5 times as effective as other cooling materials. (Vibrant Cities)



## Trees Keep You Cool!



### Trees Provide Shade and Reduce Temperatures!

- In 2023, 2,302 deaths were heat related, almost 600 more than 2022 (US Health and Human Services)
- Urban trees can reduce these deaths by 40%. (American Society of Landscape Architects)



Image Provided by World Meteorological Organization



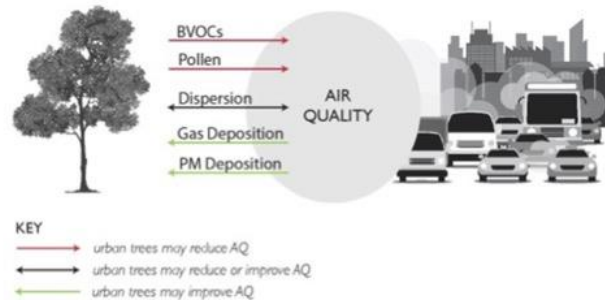


## Trees Make Your Family Healthier!



### Trees Reduce Asthma Rates in Children!

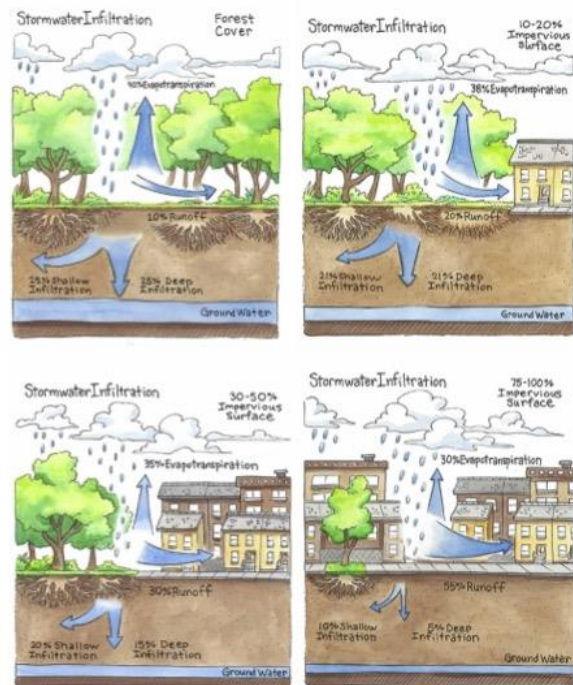
- Leaves prevent particulate matter from entering the lungs by catching the particles of various origins that linger in the air.
- Studies in NYC showed that children living near street trees had **lower rates of asthma**. (National Library of Medicine).



Graphic provided by Landscape and Urban Planning Vol. 187

### Trees Reduce Flooding!

- One medium tree can absorb 2,380 gallons of water per year. (US Forest Service).
- Trees improve water quality by capturing stormwater runoff containing nitrogen and phosphorus (US Forest Service).



## What Does a Greener Petersburg Look Like



### For Our Businesses?

- A rejuvenated, welcoming business district
- Visitors are encouraged to walk, linger, eat, and visit local shops.
  - Shoppers are willing to pay 12% more for goods from stores in well treed areas! (U.S. Forest Service)
- Help show customers how Petersburg values and takes pride in its beauty and businesses.



## What Does a Greener Petersburg Look Like



### For Our Children?

- Improved mental and physical health
  - Trees encourage outdoor activities and recreation.
  - Play outside in green space helps reduce symptoms of ADHD.
  - Providing views of trees through classrooms windows has shown to improve student's test scores.
- Safer areas to play.
  - Tree-lined streets slow traffic.
  - Encouraging more play time at local parks!
- Taking care of trees can teach responsibility and inspire growth.
  - Instills community pride. Taking care of a tree gives children pride and ownership.
  - Teaches how to care for others, have patience, and heart can help make things grow.





## What Does a Greener Petersburg Look Like



### For Our Future?

#### A more resilient Petersburg

- Trees will help combat excess heat, flooding, and extreme weather.

#### A more beautiful Petersburg

- Mature trees will help emphasize the historical beauty of the city.
- Encourage tourists to see first hand the history of Petersburg.

#### New workforce development

- Trees create jobs via care, planting, woodworking, nurseries, etc.

#### A healthier Petersburg

- With cleaner air, cleaner water, more outdoor activity, and even fruiting trees, Petersburg can become a much healthier place to grow and raise a family.

## Community Forest Revitalization Program



### Phase 1: Build Capacity City Wide

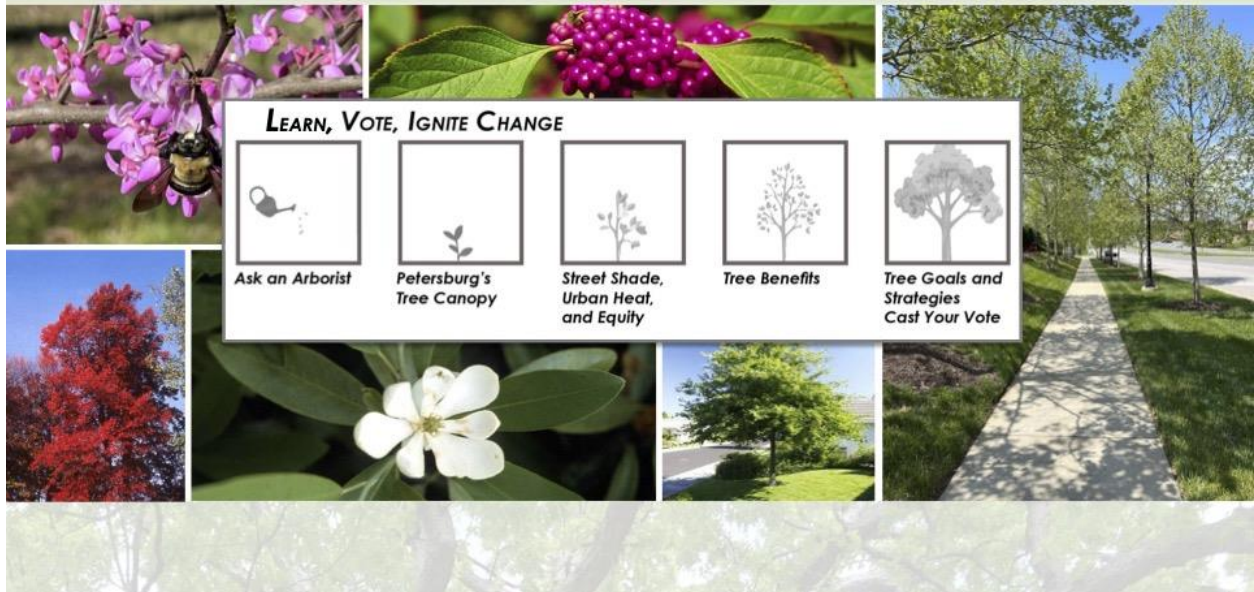
- Writing Tree Code to be adopted
- Workshops with Tree Canopy Advisory Committee to create the maps and content
- Draft goals and strategies for Petersburg's Strategic Tree Canopy Plan

### Greening Petersburg Open House

### Phase 2: Implementation

- Use community votes and feedback to write Petersburg's Strategic Tree Canopy Plan
- Work on implementing strategies
  - Neighborhood greening community-driven plan

## Where to Go?



**LEARN, VOTE, IGNITE CHANGE**

|                                                                                   |                                                                                   |                                                                                   |                                                                                   |                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Ask an Arborist                                                                   | Petersburg's Tree Canopy                                                          | Street Shade, Urban Heat, and Equity                                              | Tree Benefits                                                                     | Tree Goals and Strategies Cast Your Vote                                            |



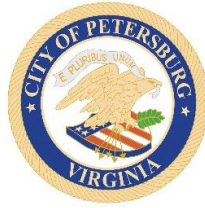
## Partnering for Resilient Communities

Queen Zakia Shabazz





INSTITUTE for  
ENGAGEMENT & NEGOTIATION  
Shaping Our World Together



**Thank You to Our Funders!**



Virginia  
Environmental  
Endowment



INSTITUTE for ENGAGEMENT & NEGOTIATION  
Shaping Our World Together



Virginia Coastal Zone  
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM



An anonymous donor



INSTITUTE for ENGAGEMENT & NEGOTIATION  
Shaping Our World Together



United Parents Against Lead  
in Other Environmental Hazards

Greater  
College of Agriculture



Hosted By the City of Petersburg  
With Support From Community Partners

**GREENING PETERSBURG:**  
**HEALTHY TREES, HEALTHY LIVES**  
**OPEN HOUSE**



## Acknowledgment of RAFT Funders

This RAFT product was created with funding, in part, from:

**Virginia Environmental Endowment**

**Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Coastal Zone Management Program\***



**Virginia Coastal Zone  
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**



We are grateful to these funders for supporting various phases of The  
RAFT from 2015-Present.

Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and National  
Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2017- Present

Virginia Environmental Endowment, Virginia Program, 2017- Present

University of Virginia Environmental Institute, formerly Environmental Resilience Institute, 2018-  
Present

Jessie Ball duPont Fund, 2019- Present

Agua Fund, 2022- Present

Virginia Sea Grant Adaptation and Resilience Program, 2017-2024

Natural Hazards Center, Public Health Disaster Research Award Program, 2022-2024

University of Virginia School of Architecture, Faculty Summer Research Program, 2018, 2022

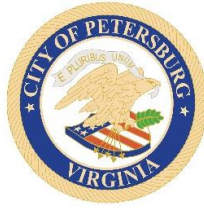
Commonwealth Center for Recurrent Flooding Resiliency, 2021-2022

Anonymous, 2018-2019

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Restoration and Community Stewardship Grant, 2016- 2018

For more information visit The RAFT website: <https://www.coopercenter.org/ien/raft>

\*\* This product was funded in part by the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program at the Department of Environmental Quality through Grant #  
NA23NOS4190255 of the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as



amended. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA, or any of its subagencies.