

Amendment 31 to Council Bill No. 28 -2023

**BY: The Chairperson at the Request
of the County Executive**

**Legislative Day 11
Date: October 2, 2023**

Amendment No. 31

(This Amendment makes a technical correction to use updated tree canopy information.)

- 1 In the *HoCo By Design* General Plan, attached to this Act as Exhibit A, amend the following
- 2 pages as indicated in this Amendment:
 - 3 • Chapter 3, Ecological Health – pages 33, 35 and 36
 - 4
- 5 Correct all page numbers, numbering, and formatting within this Act to accommodate this
- 6 amendment.

— ☁ —
Trees are infrastructure.
— ☁ —
- HoCo By Design process participant

EXPANDING TREE CANOPY AND FOREST COVER

Tree canopy and forest cover help reduce and filter stormwater runoff, minimize erosion and sedimentation of streams, create wildlife habitats, sequester carbon, improve air quality, provide health benefits, and moderate local temperatures. They form visual buffers and are scenic in their own right. Increasing tree and forest cover is also an effective measure for climate change mitigation and adaptation. For these reasons, establishing goals for forest cover and forested stream buffers by watershed helps to achieve multiple objectives. In more developed watersheds, it may be more appropriate to establish a tree canopy goal.

Existing Tree Canopy and Forest Cover

~~A Report on Howard County, Maryland's Existing and Possible Tree Canopy was published in 2011 by the U.S. Forest Service and the University of Vermont. This report defined tree~~ Tree canopy is defined as the layer of leaves, branches and stems of trees that cover the ground when viewed from above. Tree canopy includes individual trees, such as those found within a parking lot or residential lawn, as well as trees within a forest. ~~Using 2007~~ Based on 2018 tree canopy data, ~~the report found that~~ the County contained approximately 79,460 ~~80,000~~ acres of tree canopy or 50 ~~49~~% of the County had tree canopy cover. The County tree canopy cover in ~~2007~~ 2018 is shown in Map 3-3.

A forest is a natural ecological community dominated by trees, generally including woody understory plants such as shrubs and young trees, and herbaceous vegetation such as grasses and flowers. To be fully effective as a complex environmental community, forest areas need to be large enough to provide space for a variety of native plant and animal species, to afford protection from outside intrusions, and to be able to mature and regenerate themselves.

Based on a separate analysis by the County of 2009 forest cover data, the County contained approximately 45,460 acres of forest or 28% of the County was in forest cover (distinctive from tree canopy). Forest cover in the eastern portion of the County is prevalent primarily within stream valley areas where sensitive resources have discouraged development or within publicly-owned conservation areas, such as the Patapsco Valley State Park and the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area. In the Rural West, upland and stream valley forests are more extensive. County forest cover in 2009, the most recent data available when the HoCo By Design scenarios were developed, is shown in Map 3-1. Countywide forest cover data should be updated on a regular and consistent basis to help assess changes in forest cover and manage forest resources over time.

Forest loss and fragmentation result in a continuing decline in forest interior habitat, which is generally defined as forest at least 300 feet from the forest edge. Forest interior habitat is generally more isolated from disturbance than forest edge habitat, and has a closed canopy that creates moist, shaded growing conditions, with less predation by forest edge species (raccoons, crows, cats) and fewer invasive species. In 2009, only 17% of the forest cover in the County was forest interior habitat. The loss of forest interior habitat threatens the survival of species that require this type of habitat, such as reptiles, amphibians and migratory songbirds.

Tree Planting Priorities for Economically-Vulnerable Communities

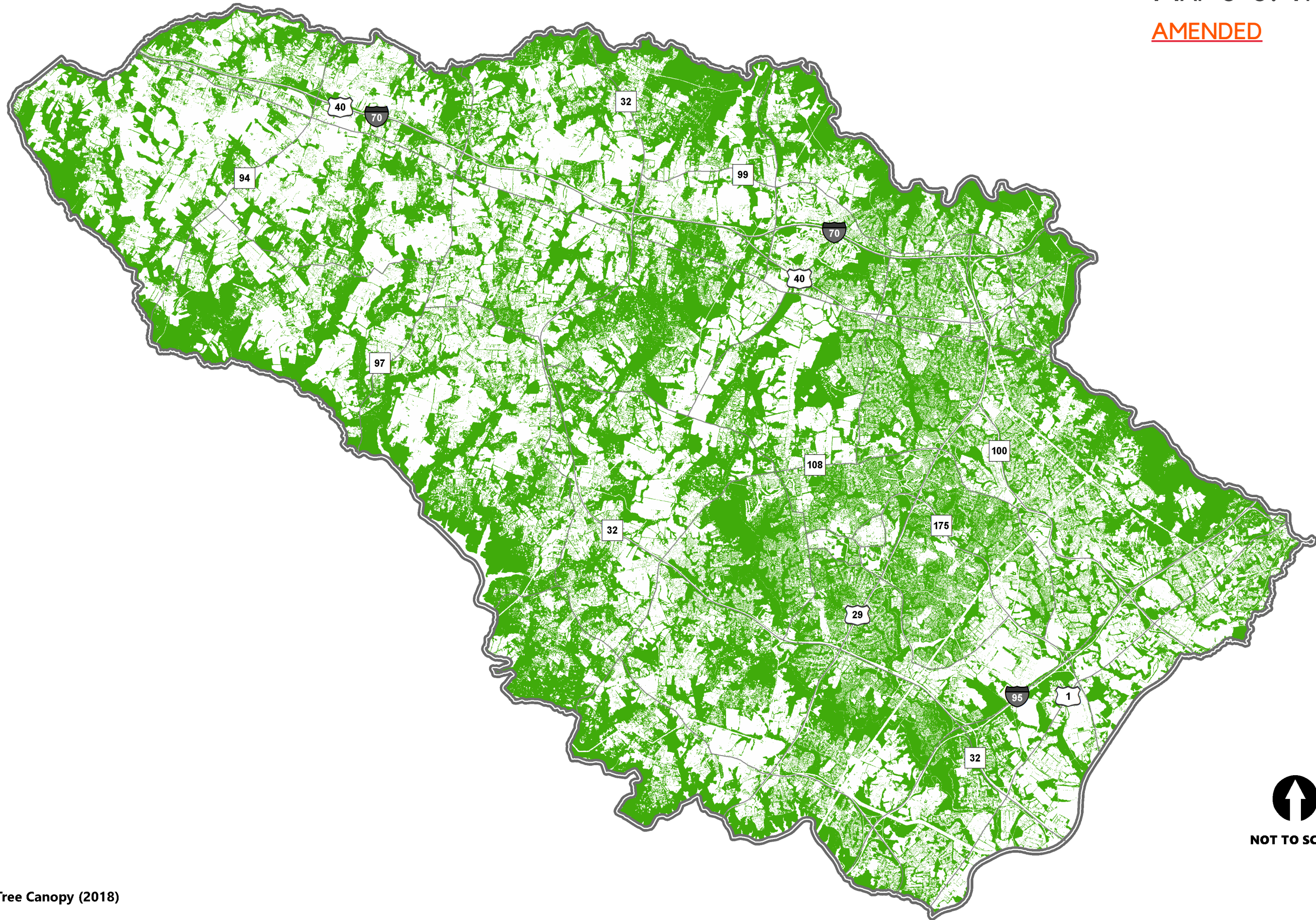
Howard County does not have an overall goal for tree canopy or forest cover, but Maryland has a policy that 40% of all land in the State should be covered by tree canopy. The County has several programs that provide free native trees to help increase tree canopy cover on qualifying residential properties, including the Stream ReLeaf and Turf to Trees Programs, along with an annual tree giveaway.

Map 3-4 shows tree canopy cover by subwatershed and census tracts with average household annual median income under \$50,000. There are four subwatersheds with less than 40% tree canopy coverage that contain one or more of these census tracts. Map 3-5 shows subwatersheds that have less than 40% tree canopy cover and impervious cover over 25%, along with census tracts with average household annual median income under \$50,000. Watersheds with higher levels of impervious cover and lower levels of tree canopy cover will experience greater heat island impacts, and households in these census tracts may have economic difficulty addressing these impacts. There are three subwatersheds that reflect these conditions and contain one or more of these census tracts. These subwatersheds should be prioritized for native tree planting programs, with a focus on residential areas within these census tracts, where there are willing participants.



MAP 3-3: TREE CANOPY

AMENDED



 Tree Canopy (2018)



NOT TO SCALE