

Equity for All Arizonans

ARIZONA SUSTAINABILITY ALLIANCE COMMUNITY TOWN HALL

November 1, 2023 – Mesa, AZ

DEFINING TREE EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Tree equity is a relationship to the natural world and the health of our communities. Trees have cultural significance for all communities. Tree equity involves global access to trees and planting of more trees in areas where they are lacking. The lack of trees in certain areas reflects the lack of investment in infrastructure, and the history of redlining. Neighborhoods that are less wealthy have fewer trees. But all people should have access to shade and the health and cooling effects of trees. Your zip code should not determine your health.

Trees provide shade and cool the environment; they provide a connection to nature; they are important to health, mobility, comfort, psychological benefits, and lifestyle. People choose neighborhoods based on factors that include tree canopy. Trees are an important part of our community infrastructure.

We should be aware of the factors that encourage or discourage the planting of trees. Sometimes trees are perceived to interfere with the functionality of a space, such as school facilities. Sometimes there is concern about maintenance and watering. People are more likely to support the planting of additional trees if the issues are framed in terms of shade and temperature reduction.

OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Trees are an important part of any community. They provide shade, cool the environment, contribute to mental health, make it easier for people to walk to work, and contribute to economic development. Trees increase property values. Green spaces bring people together and create a sense of place. They provide a connection to nature that improves the wellbeing of the entire community. This connection to nature is a basic human need. Equity considers that everyone has basic needs that differ based on their circumstances, and everyone deserves to have those needs met.

Green spaces should be considered part of the municipal infrastructure and should be planned systematically. To best address tree equity issues, it is important that people understand the terms (such as equity) that are being used and look at the data before taking action. It is also important to understand the historic context that led to the current situation. Those planning to develop tree planting programs should talk with the communities that will be affected and take care to engage people broadly and ask good questions.

The best approach will involve combining the efforts of interested individuals and organizations. Government at all levels (national, state, tribal, and local) should partner with individual leaders, concerned citizens, and students. These groups may include people who are interested in related issues, such as heat deaths. In fact, if every student in Arizona planted one tree before graduating from high school that would result in thousands of trees per year being planted.

We should consider using incentives to encourage people to plant trees and provide for teaching the basic skills people will need to care for trees once they are planted. In communicating about this issue, interested people should be clear about the benefits of creating a tree canopy.

NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

Communities play an important part in taking action on tree equity. Homeowner Associations (HOAs) are a significant force within communities. Getting HOA board members involved, and presenting HOAs with useful information, subject matter experts, and data, will be helpful to implementing a tree planting and tree equity program. People who have participated in the master gardener program, and representatives of the Desert Botanical Garden, are candidates for this type of speaking engagement.

In designing a tree-planting program, the community should look at private as well as public property. While schools and parks could benefit from additional tree plantings, there are other places, such as trailer parks and apartment complexes, that don't have many trees and could benefit from planting additional trees. People should have access to information about how to care for the trees, what species are best suited for a specific location, and the other environmental benefits that might be enhanced by planting trees in a particular area.

Public and community education will be an important component of any tree equity program. Having translators or bilingual presenters will be important to make sure that residents who are not primarily English speakers can receive the information. More youth voices should be incorporated in these efforts. Sponsors should be sought to support the effort financially. Partnerships of all kinds involving interests related to tree equity should be leveraged to create the greatest impact. Grant funding may be available to help support these efforts.

Students can be engaged in informational efforts and public outreach efforts, as well as planting trees. Students are very supportive of the idea of creating a county-wide student movement to plant trees as a rite of passage. Various incentives could be effective in promoting participation in such a program. For example, students might earn a cord and pin for graduation based on participation in this program. These efforts could be expanded to include college students and clubs. When talking about tree planting, we need to also discuss maintenance issues.

INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Arizona Sustainability Alliance Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Give trees as gifts.
- Donate to organizations that plant trees.
- Invest in educating my children, be an advocate for tree equity wherever I can, be on the look-out for opportunities to increase tree cover in the right areas.
- Continue to work with American Forests to improve tree equity in Maricopa County and all of the Southwest.
- Plant trees around my house and take an educational approach to understand and be part of tree equity.
- Bring "tree equity" to the conversation.
- Give trees to my kids for birthday gifts.
- Volunteer with my nieces to plant trees; ensure to vote in local, state, and federal elections, and bring awareness to others who are not in the room.
- Continue to start/share these conversations; plan plant a tree event at work with friends.
- Plant and take care of a tree.

- Follow up with new contacts and do more research on factors leading to tree death.
- Work to increase the number of trees at our schools and help our students not only understand the importance of trees, but also empower them to share trees with others in their neighborhood and community.
- Continue to engage in family activities that support plantings for tree equity and continue giving trees as gifts.
- Support political candidates who focus on the preservation of democracy and the critical work around environment, water, health, tree, and food equity.
- Continue to be a voice within my community.
- Give opportunities to others and use my position to make a lasting impact.
- Continue to get involved to make a change.
- Plant more trees and identify other locations to plant them, not just parks or schools.
- Help by planting at least one tree before I graduate high school.
- Help my community with making sure that the plant's health is maintained.
- Help with the Superstitions Springs mall tree planting project.
- Promote and help organize student tree growing projects, give trees as gifts, and teach students about tree equity.
- Focus on trees in and for marginalized and disadvantaged communities, both professionally and personally.
- Continue to help educate people in my personal and professional life about the importance of the right tree, right place, native/desert adapted trees and tree care and maintenance.
- Plant one tree and if I had the resources commit to planting 3 million trees.
- Share the information I learned today and inspire more people to start planting more trees.
- Keep teaching about it and involving students in learning about tree equity, green jobs, and tree plantings.
- Bridge conservation with enterprise, finance, economics, policy, and social justice.
- Make funding and volunteer partnerships to support our tree plantings at Arizona Sustainability Alliance (AZSA).
- Plant a tree in my yard.
- Volunteer my time and skills to help with the City of Mesa's tree planting initiative.
- Start planting a tree on my birthday that benefits my environment.
- Review Life Science standards in school and education that relates to local growing needs.
- Help educate the community, join plant a tree events, and give trees to plant.
- Collaborate with AZSA to give a talk to Prescott College students about tree equity and plant more canopy on my campus at Prescott College.
- Think more creatively about intersectional partners and the unhoused.
- Plant a tree at my house.
- Continue my work with my organization Valley Leadership to galvanize our leaders to support this effort, take part in trees plantings, and support AZSA.

- Promote and share the objectives and impact of this initiative as well as promote the protection of the native species around my community.
- Volunteer for a tree planting day, gift a tree for the holidays, and work in South Phoenix to increase shade cover through local business participation in Green Business Bootcamp.
- Continue my work with Valley Leaderships, who is partnered with the City of Phoenix and American Forests. We are currently focused on increasing tree canopy and private property (mostly commercial) and having private businesses contribute.
- Distribute funding equitably ensuring grant programs are accessible, easy, translated into Spanish, and evaluation of funding impacts.
- Put free trees out in front of the house, don't pull the sapling, dig it out and put it in a planter and make it available for anyone to take and plant.
- Educate and engage our workforce (and their families) around the importance and passion of tree equity.
- Be a leader in tree equity and work to make my community a healthy and tree filled place.
- Share what I have learned.