

# **Tots for Trees**

## Concept Paper

### **Introduction**

The number of trees in the District of Columbia has decreased dramatically in the past twenty years. In the course of one generation, the “City of Trees” eroded its canopy to the point where it now has a deficit of over 550,000 trees.

The economic, social and ecological benefits that come from healthy cities and parks must not be denied to another generation. Tots for Trees is committed to reversing this trend. The mission of the organization is to plant and preserve trees in places where kids live, learn, and play.

### **Survey of the Problem**

American Forests, a nonprofit organization, conducted an Urban Ecosystem Analysis of the District of Columbia to determine how the landscape has changed over time. The analysis assessed the loss of tree canopy and its associated values using data from satellite images spanning a 24 year period from 1973 to 1997.

The results were stunning: heavy tree cover in the District of Columbia has declined by two-thirds. This reduction has contributed to other environmental problems including increased storm water runoff, deteriorating air quality, and increased energy consumption for indoor heating and cooling. The estimated economic impact of these changes is no less than an estimated \$900 million.

The roots of this problem actually go much deeper, though, into the core of how children are raised in DC. Kids experience that loss of trees from a perspective wider than simply economics. An abundance of trees create the District’s natural beauty and ensure healthy air to breath. Trees provide a cool place to sit in the shade on a hot summer day. The recreational and educational enrichment that has been lost is immeasurable. The statistics on the increase of asthma and other air quality ailments speak for themselves.

### **Organization Description**

Existing local nonprofit organizations and government agencies are addressing the issue from an adult perspective, focusing on surveying street trees and protecting historic specimens. Contrastingly, Tots for Trees will plant and preserve trees in places where kids live, learn and play, such as in pocket parks and school yards.

The organization will leverage the priorities, enthusiasm, and leadership of the children, with adult mentorship and supervision as required. Tots for Trees will tap the creativity that kids use to solve problems.

The lessons of other youth-led initiatives, such as the National 4-H Council's Community Tree Planting Program, will be integrated into the design and implementation of Tots for Trees' efforts. For instance, involving students in the planning and implementation will take more patience and learning than letting adults define and solve the problem. The adults participating in the organization must commit to share their experience, real-world contacts, and financial resources, but they are not there to tell kids "the right answer."

The Board of Directors will consist of 15 people:

- one youth under the age of 16 from each of the District's eight wards;
- three school teachers or librarians who work the District;
- three people with significant experience with preserving trees and nature; and
- one lawyer or government employee who understands the legal issues related management of public space, parks, and forests.

The operations will be led by volunteers organized into the following committees:

- Planning,
- Events,
- Site Rankings,
- Fundraising,
- Outreach/Public Relations,
- Partnerships,
- Education, and
- Governance/Legal.

## **General Goals**

Tots for Trees will concentrate on the creation and maintenance of list entitled "Top 25 Kids' Places in DC that Need Trees." The list, updated quarterly, will reflect the locations where kids want to plant trees ASAP. The places will include schools, parks, streets, recreation centers, and other public areas that would be more beautiful and fun for kids if more trees were planted. The list should target locations reflecting the diversity of neighborhoods in the District.

All tree planting events will focus on locations identified in the list. Locations will be removed from the list when an event or series of events has produced sufficient progress. Locations will also be removed from the list when another

nonprofit organization or government agency has planted enough trees to make the location beautiful and fun.

As a secondary goal, the Tots for Trees will help kids develop leadership skills, become active and involved District residents, and learn about trees and nature.

### **Looking Forward**

During the next six months, Tots for Trees will focus on the following activities to build the capabilities of the organization:

- Recruit a Board of Directors and committee members.
- Identify an attorney and accountant to provide guidance regarding legal, bookkeeping, and tax issues.
- Begin necessary filings with the District and federal government.
- Form partnerships with nonprofits and government agencies that have expertise and resources related to the Tots for Trees.
- Create an initial budget and operating plan.
- Develop specific criteria for identifying the “Top 25 Kids’ Places in DC that Need Trees.”
- Develop methodology for selecting trees for events (for example, cost, heartiness, rate of growth, and native to DC).