

# A City Losing Shade

By Joe Wilhelm, Jr.

City officials and subject matter experts are addressing Jacksonville's shrinking tree canopy and discussing ways to improve it.

Adapt: State of the Canopy discussed the importance of a healthy tree canopy at WJCT studios on Sept. 17.

"Jacksonville Today" editor Jessica Palombo led the discussion with panelists Lisa Grubba, executive director of Greenscape of Jacksonville, Billy Burke, vice chair of the City of Jacksonville Tree Commission, and Dr. Jenny Hinton, City of Jacksonville Deputy Chief Resilience Officer. The panel responded to the results of the 2023 Urban Tree Canopy Assessment, commissioned by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, which stated Northeast Florida experienced a 4% loss – or 22,308 acres – of its trees from 2013 to 2021. The City of Jacksonville – the region's largest municipality – accounted for 18,681 acres of lost tree canopy in that area.

"To put that into context, an acre is a football field without the end zones, so that is a large amount of acreage," said Hinton. "Our parks across Jacksonville are roughly 20,000 acres of city-owned land, so that is a pretty substantial loss that we are facing."

This concerned the panel because trees perform a variety of functions to help their environment. Trees provide shade and reduce ground temperature, filter the air, provide oxygen, and absorb water to reduce groundwater and provide defense against flooding.

"We have some parts of town, especially the more urban parts of town, that have no

shade at all due to urban infill," said Grubba. "We have prioritized planting in low-income neighborhoods or in those neighborhoods that don't have trees."

Greenscape of Jacksonville is a nonprofit organization that plants, protects, and promotes trees in Northeast Florida, with a majority of its work occurring in Jacksonville.

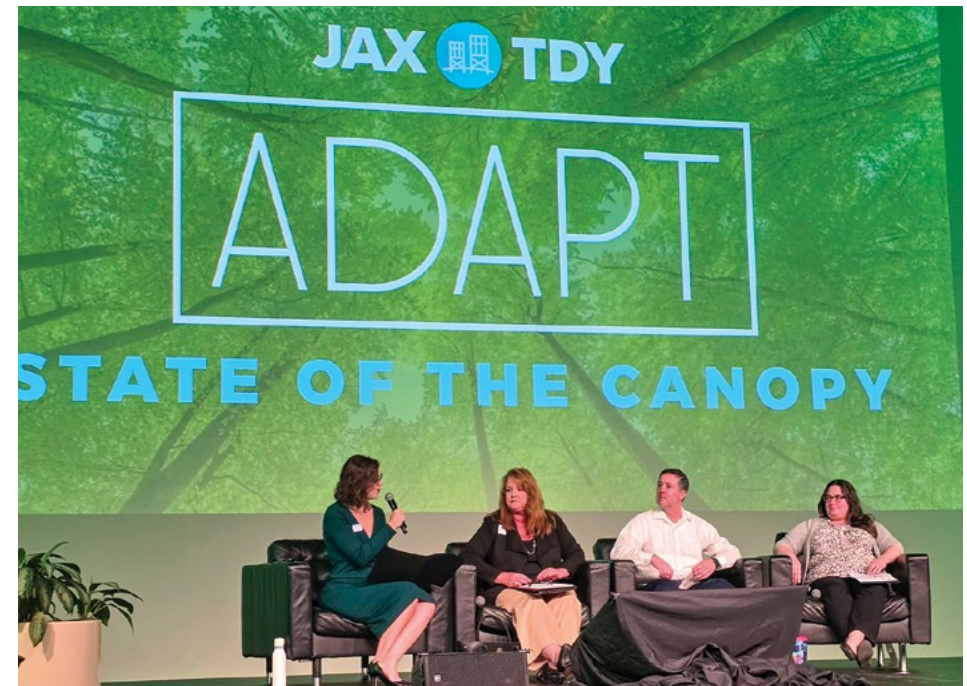
Without shade, buildings have a harder time cooling down at night because they experience direct sunlight throughout the day. All that absorbed heat makes the cooling systems work harder to bring down the temperature inside.

"In some parts of town, the air conditioning can't keep up with cooling down the buildings," said Grubba. "We've already seen it in the last few years, the mayor sending out cooling stations, JTA buses, around town so people can cool down."

The City is working to identify areas that would benefit from tree planting and how to manage its current tree canopy through its first Urban Forestry Plan.

"It will guide the direction of urban forestry throughout Jacksonville to help set a clear vision and goals for the City's urban forestry program," said Hinton. "Making sure our urban forests have the adaptive capacity to withstand climate change and upcoming storm events, that they are drought resistant."

The plan will also be guided by the City's Comprehensive Plan, development regulations, design standards and the Resilient Jacksonville Strategy.



The panel of Jessica Palombo, "Jacksonville Today" editor, Lisa Grubba, executive director of Greenscape of Jacksonville, Billy Burke, vice chair of the City of Jacksonville Tree Commission, and Dr. Jenny Hinton, City of Jacksonville Deputy Chief Resilience Officer, talk about the need for healthy trees Sept. 17 at the Adapt: State of the Canopy event.

The panel also discussed how the public can get involved with improving the tree canopy.

"The majority of the land in Northeast Florida is in private hands and so if the City did absolutely everything perfectly, it would not be enough to save the tree canopy," said Grubba. "The majority of the land is in your

hands, so what you can do is learn how to take care of the trees on your property. You can add trees or encourage your neighbors to plant trees."

TO READ THE 2023 URBAN TREE CANOPY ASSESSMENT ONLINE VISIT [www.RESIDENTNEWS.NET](http://www.RESIDENTNEWS.NET)



## Questions about growing and caring for trees:

UF/IFAS: [sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/duval/](http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/duval/)

## Information on having a tree planted by the City or to report tree issues on public land:

COJ- Urban Forestry: [www.jacksonville.gov/trees](http://www.jacksonville.gov/trees)

## See where the City is planting trees:

Jax Tree Mitigation: [jaxtreemitigation.coj.net/](http://jaxtreemitigation.coj.net/)

## Tree pruning near utility lines or to get free mulch:

JEa Tree Trimming: [www.jea.com/treetrimming/](http://www.jea.com/treetrimming/)

## Find an arborist:

Trees Are Good: [www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist/findanarborist](http://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist/findanarborist)