

Cuyahoga County Healthy Urban Tree Canopy Program (HUTC)

Program Year 2026

Applicant Manual

Background & Overview

Tree canopy is the layer of leaves, branches, and stems of trees that cover the ground when viewed from above. Tree canopy provides many benefits to communities: improving water quality, reducing erosion, reducing stormwater runoff, saving energy, reducing air pollution, enhancing property values, providing wildlife habitat, facilitating social and educational opportunities, and providing aesthetic benefits. Additionally, trees sequester carbon, reduce urban heat island effect, and enhance overall mental and physical health.

In urbanized areas, like Cuyahoga County, sustaining a healthy tree canopy can be challenging due to numerous factors. These can include urban development, invasive pests and disease, extreme weather, and inconsistent maintenance. Data from the 2019 Cuyahoga County Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) Assessment shows a net tree canopy loss of 6.1% from 2011 to 2017 in Cuyahoga County.

In 2019, Cuyahoga County established the Healthy Urban Tree Canopy (HUTC) Program to address the declining tree canopy in the county. The program is a collaborative effort between the Cuyahoga County Department of Sustainability, the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission, Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District, and the Cuyahoga County Board of Health. From 2019-2025, through an annual commitment of \$1,000,000 (\$950,000 for project support, \$50,000 for program administration) from the county's general fund, the HUTC Program provided funding support to municipalities, community development corporations, and non-profits to help protect, restore, and maintain trees across Cuyahoga County. This commitment to improving the urban tree canopy has been extended by the Cuyahoga County Council for 2026. **In PY 2026, \$200,000 is allocated to support tree planning, planting, and maintenance activities throughout Cuyahoga County.**

PY2026 Program Administration

In 2025, the HUTC Program shifted from a reimbursable grant-based model to a contracted services model. Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), through resolution from its Board of Supervisors, will once again be administering the HUTC funds in PY 2026

and executing contracts on behalf of program participants to perform tree planning, planting, and maintenance activities.

Eligible Cuyahoga County entities interested in implementing eligible tree planning, planting, or maintenance activities must submit a completed project application no later than **5:00pm on August 28th, 2026** through the online forms at <https://www.cuyahogaswcd.org/hutc/> to be considered for participation in the PY 2026 HUTC Program. Cuyahoga SWCD will work directly with applicants selected for project funding to issue proposals to qualified vendors and execute contracts to implement project work.

Match Requirements

No matching funds are required from applicants to participate in the PY2026 HUTC Program.

PY2026 Schedule

Date*	Activity
Wednesday, August 12, 2026	PY2026 HUTC Program Announcement, Application Form available
Thursday, August 20, 2026, 1:00pm – 3:00pm	Cuyahoga SWCD Application Assistance - Virtual Office Hours
Friday, August 28, 2026, 5:00pm	Applications due
Monday, August 31 – Wednesday, September 9	Scoring of Submitted Applications
Friday, September 11	Announcement of Selected Projects
Monday, September 14 – Friday, September 25	One-on-one project kickoff meetings with awardees and Cuyahoga SWCD

**All Dates Subject to Change*

Cuyahoga SWCD Application Assistance – Virtual Open Office Hours

Cuyahoga SWCD will host virtual Open Office hours via Zoom on Thursday, August 20, 2026 from 1:00pm-3:00pm. During the Open Office hours, Cuyahoga SWCD staff will be available to:

- Answer questions about the HUTC application and required documentation
- Discuss specific project details with applicants

- Provide guidance for navigating the Cuyahoga County Greenprint Explorer

Applicants interested in attending the virtual Open Office Hours must register via the Cuyahoga SWCD website by 12:00pm on Wednesday, August 19, 2026. Registration for the virtual Open Office Hours can be found on the Cuyahoga SWCD website at:

www.cuyahogawcd.org/HUTC

Eligible Projects

Projects in the following categories will be considered for implementation through the PY2026 HUTC Program:

Urban Forestry Planning

- **Eligible Activities:** Development of an Urban Forestry Management Plan, a tree inventory, tree risk assessment, and/or Ohio Urban Site Index evaluations. Development, updates and adoption of municipal Tree Ordinances, including Tree Preservation Ordinances.
- **Eligible Entities:** Municipalities, townships and other units of local government, Community Development Organizations.
- Preference will be given to:
 - Projects in communities without an Urban Forestry Plan, or with a plan that was last updated more than 20 years ago
 - Projects in communities with canopy cover below the county average (34.7%)

Tree Planting

- **Eligible Activities:** Open-space planting of native trees on public property (25 trees or more in a single location), may include riparian reforestation, park planting, vacant lots, etc.
- **Ineligible Activities:** Linear or spot planting, such as street trees
- **Eligible Entities:** Municipalities, townships and other units of local government, Community Development Organizations, Watershed Groups, Non-profit Corporations
- Preference will be given to:
 - Projects in census tracts with less than 20% tree canopy cover
 - Projects in Cuyahoga County Equity Zones
 - Projects that utilize predominantly container or bare root stock (vs. balled-and-burlapped)

- Projects with substantial co-benefits (riparian/wetland buffers, enhanced access to nature, address heat island effects, etc)
- Additional Requirements:
 - Projects that propose to reforest vacant or open parcels of land must include a letter or agreement that shows the property owner or the owner's agent gives permission to the applicant to plant and maintain trees for a minimum of ten (10) years.

Tree Maintenance

- Eligible Activities: Young Tree Training
- Eligible Entities: Municipalities, townships and other units of local government, Community Development Organizations, Watershed Groups, Non-profit Corporations
- Preference will be given to:
 - Projects that maintain trees planted through the HUTC program in previous Program Years (primarily PY2019-PY2022)
 - Projects in Cuyahoga County Equity Zones
 - Projects in communities with canopy cover below the county average (34.7%)

Project Proposal Instructions

Proposals must be submitted by using the online form located at

<https://www.cuyahogaswcd.org/hutc/>.

Evaluation Criteria

Applications are scored by the HUTC Project Evaluation Team comprised of staff from the Cuyahoga County Department of Sustainability, the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission, the Cuyahoga County Board of Health, and Cuyahoga SWCD, using the evaluation criteria in the tables below. The Cuyahoga County HUTC application evaluation process utilizes the project application information submitted via the online web form.

Planning Project Evaluation	
Criteria	Maximum Points
Existing Tree Canopy Cover	25
Equity Zone(s)	15
Project/Community Impact	25
Project Quality	25
Innovation, Partnerships & Co-Benefits	10
Existence/Age of Current Tree Plan	20
Total	120

Planting Project Evaluation	
Criteria	Maximum Points
Existing Tree Canopy Cover	25
Equity Zone(s)	15
Project/Community Impact	25
Project Quality	25
Innovation, Partnerships & Co-Benefits	10
Maintenance/Survivability Plans	20
Total	120

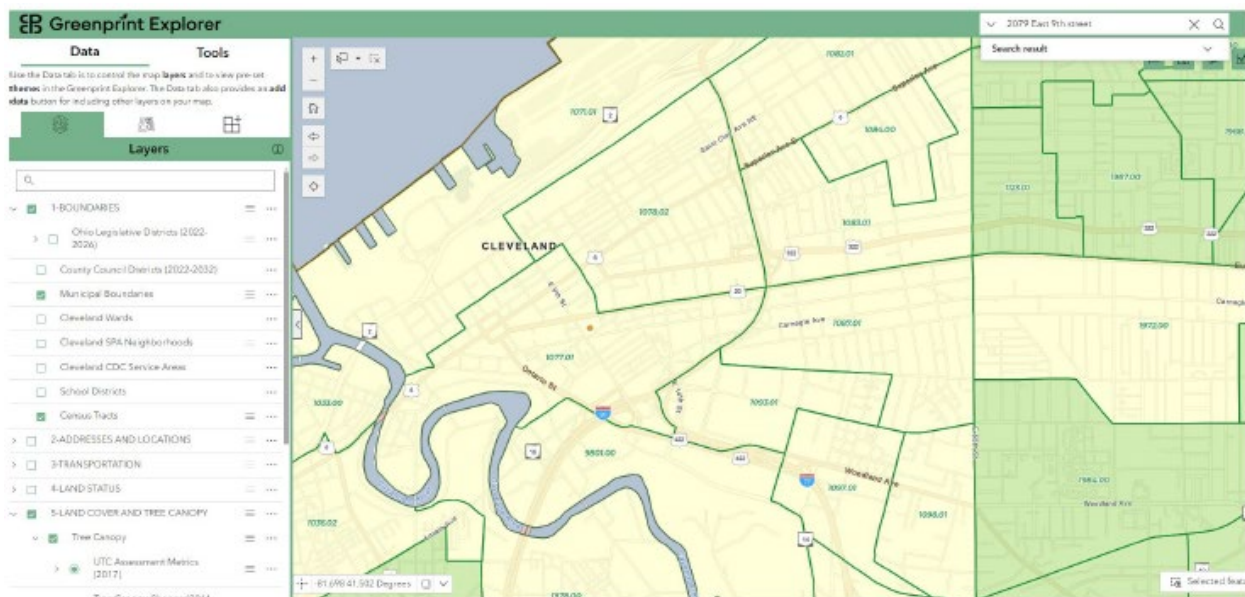
Maintenance Project Evaluation	
Criteria	Maximum Points
Existing Tree Canopy Cover	25
Equity Zone(s)	15
Project/Community Impact	25
Project Quality	25
Innovation, Partnerships & Co-Benefits	10
Includes HUTC-planted Trees	20
Total	120

Data References

Census Tracts, Tree Canopy Cover and Equity Zones

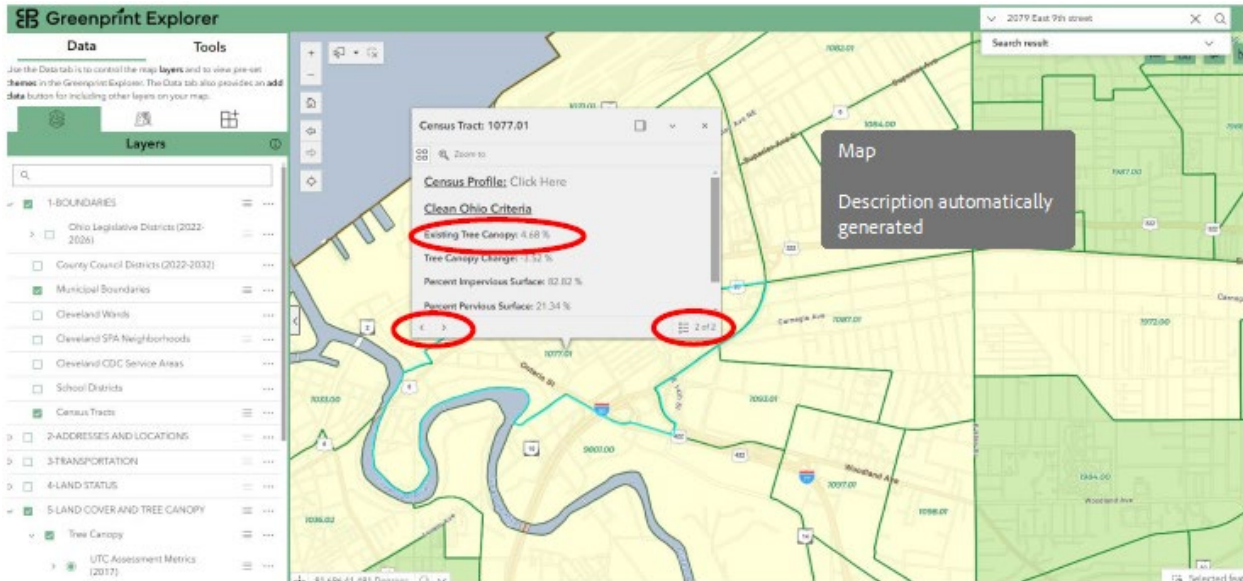
Identify the census tract(s) where your project is located using the Cuyahoga County [Greenprint Explorer](#). Zoom in to the proposed project area(s) with standard pan/zoom tools or enter an address to find the census tract data and the associated Percent Tree Canopy using the following steps.

1. Census Tracts - Select the BOUNDARIES group and the Census Tracts layer. Indicate in the associated census tract number(s) where the project is located.
2. Percent Tree Canopy – Keep the Census Tract Layer activated and select the LAND COVER AND TREE CANOPY Group and Tree Canopy Layer.



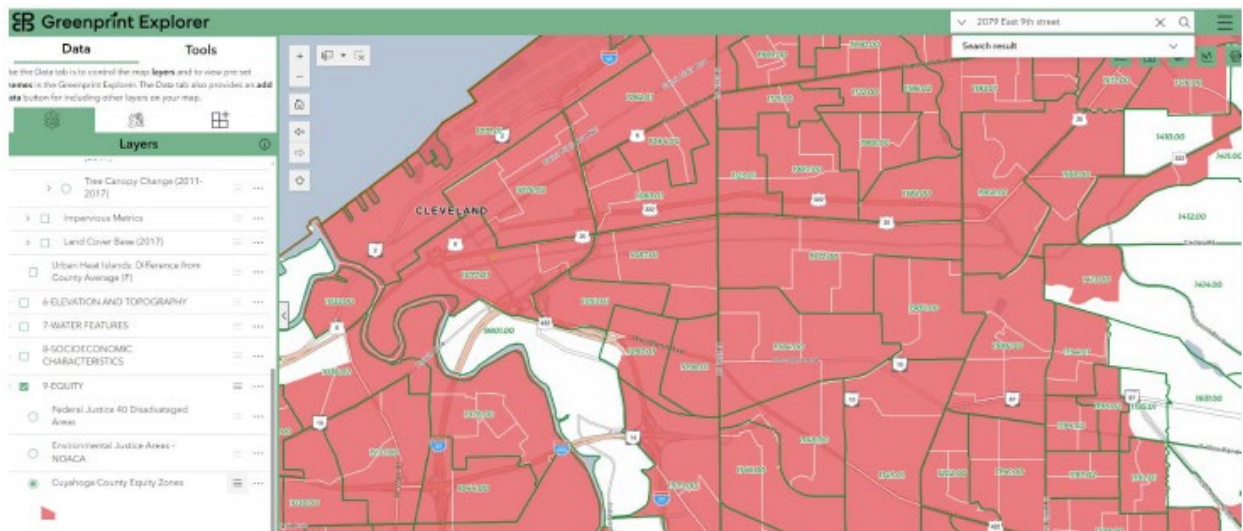
Click on the Census Tract, and toggle to page two (2) on the pop-up box to find the specific tree canopy data.

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Indicate if your project is located in an Equity Zone. Use the Cuyahoga County Greenprint Explorer. Zoom into the proposed project area with standard pan/zoom tools or enter an address to determine if the location is in an Equity Zone using the following Steps:

1. Census Tracts - Select the BOUNDARIES group and the Census Tracts layer.
2. Equity Zones – Keep the BOUNDARIES and Census Tract Layer activated and select the EQUITY group and the Cuyahoga County Equity Zones layer. If your project location is in a shaded area, select yes.



Using the Cuyahoga County Greenprint Explorer, create and upload the following required Maps. Screenshots are acceptable.

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- Equity Zone Location in reference to the project location
- Existing Percent Tree Canopy Coverage

The general project location map may be created using Greenprint or other appropriate tools.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Questions about the PY 2026 HUTC Application or the Neighborly Application Portal should be sent via email to Jared Bartley at jbartley@cuyahogawcd.org.