Urban and Community Forestry in Pennsylvania

Sustaining and Funding an Urban Forestry Program

Creating a community tree program that can be sustained is a major challenge. You should begin by evaluating the situation in your community and developing a feasible program that meets your needs. Citizens and communities must find revenues and develop strategies for long-term mainte- nance of their programs, including the following:

■ Encourage citizen involvement by creating *volunteer organiza- tions and activities*, such as street tree and "teens for greens" associations.

■ Advertise and celebrate *special events,* such as Earth Day and Arbor Day, to help increase community support and educate community members to the importance of tree planting.

■ Develop and use *advertising and media strategies*, including local media reports, newsletters, newspaper columns, door-knob hangers, and program brochures that promote proper tree planting and care.

■ Develop activities and programs that involve *everyone* in the community, including people with diverse backgrounds and with disabilities. Work with children and seniors.

Gain the support of legislators and community leaders by increasing their participation and knowledge.

■ Understand and get involved in the *local planning process* and in local government. Communicate with legislators.

■ Establish and empower a *shade tree commission.*

■ Formalize and legalize commu- nity tree programs through *street tree inventories, urban forestry master plans,* and *street tree ordinances* that regulate removal, pruning, and planting of trees within public rights-of-way.

Take steps to ensure the quality of your efforts and create a beautiful and healthy urban forest.

■ Communicate and meet with *electric utility companies* to discuss concerns about pruning community trees.

■ Communicate with *contractors* and *utility companies* to help ensure that trees are not dam- aged unnecessarily during con- struction or placement and maintenance of utilities.

■ Use certified or other qualified *arborists* for tree work.

■ Plant a *diversity* of tree types, selecting the *right tree* for a particular spot. Large trees should be planted where they will have room to grow and will not block desired views and sunlight or interfere with sidewalks, roads, and utility lines.

An important goal of any urban forestry program is to obtain funding for program activities and growth. You should be creative initially, but also seek long-term and stable funding. By being cre- ative, you can take advantage of various funding options and oppor- tunities, including the following:

Special improvement districts can be formed by a group of property owners who vote to assess them- selves for tree or park improve- ments. While some effort is re- quired to establish these districts, they are successful because the group has agreed and is committed to making improvements.

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Tree trusts or endowments can be established by communities, and the interest on the principal can be used to purchase trees or pay for maintenance.

Memorial tree funds enable friends and relatives of the living and the deceased to support a commemorative tree planting.

Adopt-a-tree or adopt-a-street programs enable individuals, businesses, and community clubs to plant or care for trees and flowers in selected areas of the community.

Donations from businesses, service clubs, and individuals can be used to fund a community tree endowment, tree plantings and care, or green-space acquisition.

Special sales of T-shirts, bumper stickers, books, baked goods, or donated items can help communities raise funds for urban tree programs.

Grants are available from federal, state, and private sources for tree planting, beautification efforts, historic preservation, and green-space acquisition.

Volunteers and in-kind donations help many municipal programs.

Service clubs, church and youth organizations, and school groups can help plant and maintain the urban forest using donated labor, equipment, and construction materials.

Youth collection drives, such as Pennies-for-Parks and Donate Spare Change, can raise funds quickly with containers placed on check-out counters citywide.

E mphasize that trees and greenspace benefit everyone and the use of general revenues is a justified and wise community investment.

General tax revenues of municipalities can be used to fund urban forestry programs.

Municipal revenue bonds are issued to pay for improvement projects, such as street repairs. Tree planting and removal can be included in these projects. Like roads, sewers, and utilities, street trees are a valuable part of community infrastructure.

Direct billing assesses individual property or business owners for tree planting and maintenance.

Special assessments pro-rate tree care, usually based on linear feet of street frontage, but such assessments can appear to be unfair or an added tax burden.

Permit fees and surcharges can be imposed on construction activity for planting and care of community trees and green-space purchases. In business areas where little or no construction is taking place, a small surcharge may be added to business licenses.

Development conditions can mandate planting trees or providing usable green space. A builder also can be required to protect existing street trees and green space.

Revenues from municipal shade tree ordinance enforcement and permit processes can be used for tree planting and care.

Insurance settlements for municipal trees that are damaged or destroyed in an accident may be sizable and can pay for new plantings.

Revenues from community-owned concessions, golf enterprises, property rents or leases, and hotel/motel taxes also can be used for tree programs.

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