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Tree Management in Michigan Communities

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A community forestry program can be developed or improved in nearly all cities and villages in Michigan. Tree management is important, especially when community property and landscape values are considered. Good trees are civic assets of great value.

Many "larger" cities in Michigan have a forestry department to handle tree management activities—planting, trimming, maintenance, removal and public educational programs. These cities recognize that trees and tree management are important. "Smaller" Michigan communities recognize tree values, too. However, they usually don't have a full-time forestry department.

All Michigan communities have trees in their parks, public grounds and along their streets. The question is—how can your community take better care of these trees at a reasonable cost?

This publication will help your community develop a more effective tree management program. Sources of technical assistance will also be identified.

WHY SHOULD YOUR COMMUNITY BE CONCERNED ABOUT ITS TREES?

—**Because** trees perform useful functions in the community. They provide environmental, social, architectural, engineering and climatic benefits.

—**Because** trees are a dominant landscape feature in the community.

—**Because** a community rich in trees and green spaces has a character and personality its citizens can be proud of. This produces a healthier business and residential climate.

—**Because** trees create wealth. They have an actual dollars-and-cents value that is recognized by real estate experts, landscape professionals, arborists, tree experts, foresters, tree nurserymen and others. The value of homes along tree-lined streets is usually higher than the value of homes along streets without trees. Trees are an investment that should be protected.

—**Because** trees that are well cared-for rarely cause property damage from falling branches or up-rooting. Thus, risk of damage claims is reduced. The cost of a good tree maintenance program may be



The ideal situation: Well-maintained trees along city streets.

much less than one damage or liability suit against the community.

—**Because** well-managed trees are better able to withstand costly ice and storm damage, as well as insect, disease and "people" damage. This reduces the need for emergency tree work, continual and costly limb pickup and citizen complaints about trees.

—**Because** the cost of removing a dead tree and planting a new one greatly exceeds the cost of proper maintenance to keep a tree healthy in the first place.

—**Because** well-placed and well-maintained trees will reduce or eliminate the risk of interference with street lights, utility wires, sidewalks, sewers, clear vision areas and private or public structures.

DOES YOUR COMMUNITY ALREADY HAVE A TREE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM?

You may find that there is already a management plan or policy for taking care of your community's trees. There may be a tree ordinance which controls street tree planting and other tree management activities. Also, a particular community department, official or commission may already be responsible for public tree management.

Many times, civic clubs, garden clubs or service organizations in your community have started tree planting projects which (after a good beginning) have fallen by the wayside. Why did this happen?

You may find residents who would remember past plans for tree planting and beautification. These earlier plans can be very useful in laying the groundwork for a new and improved tree management program.

If your community has a tree management program, is it *effective* and *economical*? Do you know what it should be accomplishing? Is it time to re-evaluate your program?

WHAT IS THE COST OF A GOOD TREE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM?

Are you getting the most for your tree management dollar? If you are **already** spending money for tree work, a good tree management **plan** will help assure that this money is being spent wisely and effectively.

A recent national survey (1975) by the Department of Forestry at Michigan State University showed that cities with populations of over 2,500 in the north-central states spent between \$1.00 and \$3.00 per capita for shade tree management.

WHAT ARE SOME SOURCES OF REVENUE FOR TREE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS?

The following revenue source information is taken from the 1975 national survey cited above:

"Cities rely most heavily on local funding for tree care programs, with limited funding received from state and federal governments. The most frequently reported source of local funding is the general property tax.

Eleven percent of the cities reported the city income tax as a source of tree care funding. In addition, to assure adequate funding, some cities employ specific devices such as special frontage taxes, mill levies or endowments specifically earmarked for tree maintenance.

State funding most commonly arises in the form of gas and weight taxes for roadway maintenance, vehicle licensing funds or project grants to the cities.

Federal revenue sharing was reported by 19% of the cities as a source of tree care program funds. Federal funding has also been secured in the form of Emergency Employment Act funds (particularly in cities of over 100,000).

The EEA program has been phased out and replaced with a more aggressive federal jobs program, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), and many more cities are availing themselves of this latter program. Current funding is also available through Title X federal funding. These funds have been used by cities for large-scale planting, trimming and removal projects."

For additional information on possible sources of tree management and other grant funds, contact your community grantsman, your county or regional planning department or the technical assistance sources listed in this publication.



Too many communities have this: space for trees, but no trees.

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A TREE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM?

A good tree management plan will allow a community to do a better job of:

- tree management education and training
- tree selection and planting
- tree trimming or pruning
- tree maintenance and protection
- tree and stump removal
- tree and wood residue utilization
- tree management planning and budgeting

Here are some steps to help you start a good tree management program. Don't hesitate to seek technical assistance.

—**Prepare a tree management and control ordinance.** This provides the legal basis for community tree management activities. It should assign responsibility for the tree program to a community administrator, department, board or tree commission.

There are many benefits to a tree ordinance. For example, tree species planted on public property can be controlled. Undesirable trees can be prohibited and controls established for "planting the right tree in the right place." A reasonable, practical and enforceable ordinance should be the first step in developing a long range tree management program.

Tree ordinances from other Michigan communities can be obtained, and the Michigan Municipal League has an analysis of Michigan city tree ordinances which is quite useful.

—**Conduct a tree inventory** to gather data about tree species, locations, conditions, maintenance and removal needs and areas needing planting. This will give you information for more effective work-planning and budgeting.

—**Prepare a tree management plan** based upon the inventory data and other information.

This plan should specify objectives, needs and priorities in the areas of tree removal, maintenance, planting, etc. Available funds can then be directed more effectively toward the greatest needs. An updated plan will continue to be an effective tool for determining expenditures and work priorities.

A tree management plan should also include objectives for tree management publicity and promotion in the community. For example, Arbor Week activities could be recommended and "Trees For People" themes developed.

—**Prepare tree work standards** and specifications for tree management work to be done in the community. Good standards and specifications are the basis for consistent and high-quality tree manage-

ment. This will be important whether you use tree service contractors or your own personnel.

At the same time, employees should be trained to recognize both good and bad tree maintenance practices. This will allow them to develop and understand tree work standards and specifications and to check tree work performance.

—**Develop a tree management library** for your community offices. Reference books and bulletins are available from a variety of sources.

—**Make a special effort to have community trees inspected** during the spring and summer to detect insect, disease or other problems that might require control.

This not only helps protect your trees more effectively, but allows you to get a more frequent look at your trees and to learn more about them.

—**Have Arbor Day proclaimed by community officials** with appropriate ceremonies, and have a commemorative tree planting project in your community each year.

SEVERAL OTHER IMPORTANT QUESTIONS SHOULD BE ASKED ABOUT COMMUNITY TREE MANAGEMENT

—How can a tree management program be used to bring special attention, recognition and increased business activity to your community?

—How can you develop a tree management program that can compete favorably for local revenue with other community service and protection programs?

—What construction projects or other capital improvement programs will affect trees in your community? Are trees being **considered** in these projects and programs? Are trees **part** of the design plan? Remember to protect existing trees and to plant new ones.

—How can you make better use of the brush and wood residues from pruning in your community?

—What tree work should be contracted and what could you do yourselves if your employees were properly trained and equipped?

—Are you planting the **right** trees in the **right** places?

WHERE CAN YOU GET ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE AND INFORMATION?

—The MSU Cooperative Extension Service can provide tree management training and educational assistance to cities and villages in Michigan. These offices can be found in nearly every Michigan coun-



With a good tree-planting and maintenance program and several years growth, streets can be more aesthetic.

ty. Call your County Extension Director for access to urban forestry specialists at Michigan State University.

—Several consulting foresters and consulting arborists offer tree management help to communities on a fee basis. They can be contacted directly or through the other sources listed here.

—Professional tree service companies and tree experts are vital in helping communities plant, trim, maintain and remove trees. They are usually available on a local basis.

—Landscape nurserymen, tree growers, landscape contractors, landscape architects and horticultural experts are available to help communities with planting and landscaping programs.

—The Forest Management Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

provides tree management planning services to smaller communities in southern lower Michigan that do not have a full-time forestry staff or program. Call your local DNR Area Forester for access to the DNR Urban Forester.

—City foresters and arborists in Michigan's larger cities are usually willing to discuss tree management problems with other cities and villages. Remember, however, that these professionals have a primary responsibility to the city that employs them. You may have to visit them at their offices.

—Nearby cities and villages may have tree management problems similar to yours. Perhaps you can help each other in developing tree management programs.

Contact these people for help in developing your community tree management program.