

GROWTH OF SPECIAL DISTRICTS COULD BOLSTER CITY LANDSCAPES

City and park landscape maintenance often overlap according to a survey by *Weeds Trees & Turf* of its municipal landscape management circulation. Furthermore, the growth of special park districts may provide future strength to this field despite widespread budget tightening at the city level.

The U.S. Census Bureau recently announced a dramatic growth and in "special districts". In the last five years, the number of special districts has grown by 11 percent, according to the Census Bureau, but spending by special districts has increased to almost \$25 billion from \$9 billion.

The Census Bureau said these independent agencies, which often overlap other government districts, provide services for fire protection, sewage disposal, housing, health care, transportation, water, recreation and natural resource protection.

School districts are not part of the special agency category. The number of public school districts has decreased in the last five years. Results of the survey showed a

large overlap in city and park landscape management, but not park and school or city and school. More than 75 percent of the survey participants were responsible for both park and city landscape management and held the title of Director of Parks and Recreation.

The Census Bureau reports the following count of government agencies:

Cities/Municipalities—19,083

Counties—3,041

Townships—16,748

School—15,032

Special Districts—28,733

The only figure to increase in the past five years is the special district number.

The budget security of these special districts stems from the independence of their management from elections or political pressure. The voting public sees special agencies as more efficient providers of public services since they are often funded by more than one voting area. They see special agencies as reducing the number of services required from city or county government and relate the

term special to specialist. These impressions by voters make sense, something local government fails to do occasionally.

Even though the majority of the respondents held the title of director of parks and recreation, they listed the city as their employer. This may change as benefits of special districts for both city and park landscape management become apparent.

Nearly 50 percent of the public landscape managers in the survey anticipate tighter landscape budgets in the future. Less than 20

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percent expected budgets to decrease. More than half also felt the public would support increased spending on landscapes if they could prove it was important.

The average budget, not including salaries, for city and park landscape programs was \$85,956 for an average of 209 acres. That works out to be \$411 per acre. Eighty-six percent responded emergency funds were available if a piece of equipment was needed during the budget year.

The budgeting process for city operated programs begins with the department head of parks and recreation or public works. He sub-

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TABLE 1. Responsibilities of Public Landscape Supervisors.

Responsibility	Percentage City Considering		Percentage Military Considering	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Roadside Mntce.	19	33	37	37
Bldg. Landscape	44	56	63	37
Bldg. Interior	33	23	37	25
Park Mntce.	93	7	13	—
School Mntce.	4	7	—	—
Tree Mntce.	41	30	25	13
Street Mntce.	19	4	37	—
Snow Removal	15	23	13	37
Golf Course	19	4	13	13
Airport	4	11	37	—
Cemetery	15	—	13	13

mits his budget to the city manager, the mayor, or a commission. If it goes to a commission, then the commission sends the budget to the city manager or mayor. The auditor meets with the mayor or city manager before the landscape budget is added to the city budget. The city budget is then presented to city council for review and approval.

Sixty percent felt they could convince the public further improvement was needed.

The city council may also have a budget committee to review each department budget. Finally, the council must approve the budget.

A number of the survey respondents mentioned the importance of a close relationship with the mayor or city manager. The desires of the public are voiced through council. If a department head wants to obtain major new funding, he must work closely with the voters, the council members and the mayor.

The majority of the respondents said they did not promote landscape programs to the public, but those who did had a much better feeling about public support of future programs. Those that make the time get results.

One city director of landscape management works with local newspapers, extension agents, and local schools to generate publicity. Another involves the local Chamber of Commerce in a city beautification program. A third works with the local garden club on a yard of the month award and a yearly clean-up campaign. A fourth lets citizens "adopt a park" where citizens pitch in to help maintain park areas and plant flowers and trees.

If the public associates with the appearance of the community then financial support results, one city manager commented. The public expects results from their support, a noticeable improvement in the appearance of public landscapes. That doesn't mean expensive, high maintenance areas, but simple, attractive, and neat landscapes

along the same lines a taxpayer would have on his own property. His yard then extends into the rest of the community and his interest in his city grows.

We found no consistent pattern of budget planning or buying. The only semblance of a pattern was planning is heaviest in February and March, May and June, and September and October. This spring, summer, fall planning must precede city budget planning. One respondent begins planning in February for a budget which doesn't reach the city council until May nor get approved until June.

Buying for seed, chemicals and equipment appears heaviest in February through April. A second period of equipment buying takes place in September through November, perhaps an effort to replace worn out equipment before entering a new budget period.

Nearly 75 percent of those responding specify products. One public works director uses a standards book to plan his work and select types of material. The book was prepared by a consulting engineer and covers all city functions from lawn seeding to sidewalk construction. A separate survey to military landscape managers showed a greater reliance upon standards by the military than most city landscape managers.

Public agencies have the reputation of requiring bids for nearly everything. We found that purchase orders without bids can be used if the amount of purchase is below a specified figure, ranging from \$250 to \$2,500 among respondents. Generally there are three limits: for purchases under \$250 a purchase order signed by the department director is needed; for purchases from \$250 to \$1,000, two bids may be required and the auditor or city manager must sign the purchase order; for purchases over \$1,000, bids will probably be required and the city council must approve. Any landscape project of decent size will require purchase orders. Equipment purchases almost certainly come under review by city council or a park board.

City and park landscape managers depend a great deal on extension agents, local university and

vocational school instructors, the supplier's salesman, and magazines for making buying decisions. Less than five percent mentioned getting advise from a landscape architect or consultant.

According to the survey the primary functions of a public landscape manager are park maintenance, care of landscapes around public buildings, and management of city trees. Very few of the respondents did school landscape maintenance. Secondary responsibilities listed were roadside maintenance, snow removal, and care of street trees. Care of public building landscapes comes after park maintenance, with tree care a close third. More than 80 percent are responsible for athletic fields. Additional duties included care of utility rights-of-way, cemeteries, public golf courses, city streets, and building interiors.

Ninety percent reported most equipment maintenance was handled by city repair crews, who then work with local suppliers for parts.

Less than half of the respondents contract out landscape jobs to local landscape contractors. Those that do contract out mainly plant installation, tree trimming, and spraying.

A third of the public landscape managers felt major renovation and improvement was needed. Another third felt their landscape was passable. Another third felt they had their landscapes in good shape. But, 60 percent felt they could convince the public further improvement was needed.

More than half the respondents felt a college degree in horticulture or business is needed to perform the duties of public landscape manager.

Respondents anticipate landscape staff to stay the same. Only 15 percent expect staff size to decrease. Almost a fourth expect staff size to increase.

Overall, the future for public landscape management is comparatively good. The dominance of the park manager, pride in community appearance, recognition of horticultural expertise, and a fairly positive attitude about selling improvements to the public give the city, county, state, and park manager an edge over schools and the pri-

vate sector. A slight resistance to contracting out landscape work may be bad for the landscape contractor but good for the public landscape manager.

Military

The title engineer is most common to our respondents in charge of military landscapes. In most cases the landscape budget is part of the base budget controlled by the base commander, who tops a chain of command. Many areas, excluding golf courses, fall under uniform guidelines meant to provide a practical and organized environment for military training.

Most of the respondents were civilian employees of the military. Efficiency, not creativity, is the purpose of the landscape. Acreage is very large and budgets fairly small per acre. The typical respondent was responsible for 1,200 acres and had a materials and supply budget of less than \$15,000.

Outside contractors were used by less than 20 percent of the military landscape managers. Plant installation and tree care were again the main uses of outside contractors.

Military managers feel, to a man, that the landscape they manage is satisfactory for its purpose, and that improvement would be hard to justify. Budget planning was most common in January, July and August. Purchasing was most common January through March with a second phase of equipment buying in August.

The primary responsibilities of military landscape managers are building and roadside maintenance. Street care and airport maintenance are also primary tasks. Secondary tasks are snow removal and utility right-of-way maintenance.

Materials Purchased

The government and military landscape managers in the survey had no more equipment than a mid-sized landscape contractor, with the exception of trucks and tractors. They had an average of 7.5 small push mowers and 3.5 large mowers, 3 line trimmers, 1 spray rig, 1.5 spreaders, and 3 chain saws.

About half had a chipper, trencher, bucket lift truck, and turf aerifier. Fifteen percent had a soil shredder.

Government managers are big truck buyers. They averaged 3.5 dump trucks and 4.8 pickup trucks. A fourth of the respondents reported having an average of 3 truckster-type vehicles. They also had an average of 3 tractors each.

Fertilizers and turf herbicides

are purchased by 90 percent or more of the public landscape managers. Two thirds use nonselective herbicides for trimming and other types of weed control. Tree insecticides are purchased by 56 percent of the group, while 40 percent purchase turf insecticides. Fungicides are also bought by 40 percent. Wetting agents and growth regulators are purchased by 17 percent of the respondents.

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