



Tree City USA: Foundation for Better Tree Management

TREE CITY USA®
BULLETIN

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When a storm dropped wet, heavy snow late one spring on the city of Waukesha, Wisconsin, the damage to trees was devastating. The city forester went to the finance committee for emergency funding to conduct restoration pruning on damaged trees that survived. He reports that the response to his request was, "We are a Tree City USA; we are proud of the designation, and we intend to keep it." The vote was unanimous in favor of the forestry's request.

This and other testimonials received regularly by the Arbor Day Foundation provide a glimpse into the benefits of the Tree City USA program. This flagship program of the Foundation and its partners was created in 1976 as a way to recognize cities, towns, military bases, and urbanized counties that are taking

the first steps toward effective management of their trees. By establishing four basic standards that must be met to become a Tree City USA, the goal was — and is — to provide a framework that leads to systematic, continuous tree planting and care.

The result of this innovative and positive approach is now felt in every state in the nation. Thousands of communities form the Tree City USA network. In some cases, there are tangible budget-related results, such as in Waukesha; in others, it may be solely a source of pride — but it is that civic pride that often attracts new businesses and helps residents appreciate and enjoy their living environment. Tree City USA is also the kind of educational program that leads to better care of trees and a safer urban or community forest.



Arbor Day Foundation
100 Arbor Avenue • Nebraska City, NE 68410

Benefits of Being a Tree City USA

Every community, regardless of size, benefits in a different way from being a Tree City USA. Reports of these benefits have reached the Arbor Day Foundation through the years and are summarized below in six general categories:

1 FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

Meeting the four standards for becoming a Tree City USA provides initial direction for an urban or community forestry program. Like the first rungs on a ladder, the standards help get a community started toward annual, systematic management of its tree resources.



Annual, systematic tree care is essential in a good community forestry program.

3 PUBLIC IMAGE

A community's public image is a very real phenomenon and important in many ways. Being a Tree City USA helps present the kind of image that most citizens want to have for the place they live or conduct business. The Tree City USA entrance signs along public highways tell visitors that this community that



2 EDUCATION

Education begins with discussion of the standards and getting organized to apply for Tree City USA status. It continues as the desire for Tree City USA recognition leads to contacts with the state forester's staff. In turn, this can set in motion aid from a variety of professionals in the form of technical advice, literature, films, and other assistance.



Applying for Tree City USA recognition puts a community in touch with experts who can help with technical advice.

cares about its environment. They are also an indication to prospective businesses that the quality of life may be better here. It has even been known to be a factor in where meetings or conferences have been held. This reason alone caused a motel owner to start action for his community to join the network.



A Tree City USA award instills pride among volunteers, staff, and residents.

4 CITIZEN PRIDE

Pride is sometimes a less tangible benefit. Gaining and retaining Tree City USA recognition is an award to the tree workers, managers, volunteers, tree board members, and others who work on behalf of better care of a community's trees. Non-involved citizens, too, often share a sense of pride that theirs is a Tree City USA.

5 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Preference is sometimes given to Tree City USA communities over other communities when allocations of grant money are made for trees or forestry programs. The reason is that there are invariably more requests than available funds when grants are available through state or federal agencies. If requests are equally worthy, some officials tend to have more confidence in communities that have demonstrated the foresight of becoming a Tree City USA.

6 PUBLICITY

Presentation of the Tree City USA award and the celebration of Arbor Day offer excellent publicity opportunities. This provides one more way to reach large numbers of people with information about tree care.

As one forester put it, "This is advertising that money can't buy — and it is free."



TREE CITY USA®



MATT ULREY

PARKS & URBAN FOREST MANAGER
Westerville, OH (Population 37,530)

... To be a part of a city that supports trees not only at the government level, but as a community as a whole is wonderful. Our residents truly value street trees and the extensive parks system. There is an undeniable sense of community pride and ownership for the trees in Westerville. And over the past 40 years, residents and visitors have seen how a commitment to trees brings numerous benefits to Westerville, and ultimately, leads to a healthier and happier lifestyle for all.



JOSEPH A. SEXTON III

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR PARAMUS
SHADE TREE AND PARKS COMMISSION
Paramus, NJ (Population 26,674)

We, the Tree City USA communities around the country, are all the stewards of our urban, suburban, and rural forests; as such, we are preparing the stewards of the future through each community's arboristic endeavors, education, and participation in the Tree City USA program.



This bulletin was produced in cooperation with Thomas Schmidt of the Public Land Management Program; David Mooter, Community Forestry Program Leader, retired; Kris Irwin, Assistant Community Forester; and the Nebraska Forest Service. Tree City USA is a cooperative program of the Arbor Day Foundation, National Association of State Foresters, and the U.S. Forest Service.

How to Become a Tree City USA

STEPS TO BECOMING A



1. Go online to arborday.org/treecity to complete your application or obtain a paper application from your state forester or the Arbor Day Foundation.
2. At a point where a community finds that it meets the standards and can proceed with the application, see Step 3 below. If, on the other hand, it discovers it has additional work to do, the next step should be to seek help from the state forester's office.
3. When your community meets the four standards, have the application and supporting materials submitted to your state forester by the mayor or other city official no later than Dec. 31. There is no fee.
4. Verification and approval is done by staff in the state forester's office, and the application is forwarded to the Arbor Day Foundation.
5. State foresters present the Tree City USA awards in various ways. Most commonly, the awards are given at an Arbor Day ceremony in the community or at a statewide awards program, usually in the state capitol and sometimes with participation of the governor. Community officials receive a Tree City USA flag, two road signs, a plaque, and several commemorative items.
6. Recertification announcements are sent to communities annually, as well as an application for a Tree City USA Growth Award. The Growth Award encourages continual improvement of community forestry programs (See Bulletin No. 18).

THE FOUR STANDARDS — HOW TO PUT THEM TO WORK

To qualify for Tree City USA status, a town or city must meet four standards established by the Arbor Day Foundation and the National Association of State Foresters. These standards were established to ensure that every qualifying community would have a viable tree management plan and program. Importantly, they were also designed so that no community would be excluded because of size.

A TREE BOARD OR DEPARTMENT

Someone must be legally responsible for the care and management of the community's trees. This may be a professional forester or arborist, an entire forestry department, or a volunteer tree board. Often, both a professional staff and advisory tree board are present, which is a good goal for most communities.

A tree board, or commission, is a group of concerned volunteer citizens charged by ordinance with developing and administering a comprehensive tree-management program. Boards function best if not composed entirely of tree-related professionals such as forestry professors, nursery operators, arborists, etc. Fresh ideas and different perspectives are added by citizens with an interest in trees that is entirely avocational. Limited, staggered terms of service will prevent stagnation or burnout, while at the same time ensuring continuity.

A COMMUNITY TREE ORDINANCE

The tree ordinance must designate the establishment of a tree board or forestry department and give this body the responsibility for writing and implementing an annual community forestry work plan. Beyond that, the ordinance should be flexible enough to fit the needs and circumstances of the particular community.

An ordinance provides a chance to set policy and back it with the force of law when necessary. Ideally, it will provide clear guidance for planting, maintaining, and removing trees from public places.



For tips and a checklist of important items to consider in writing or improving a tree ordinance, see Tree City USA Bulletin No. 9.

A COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM WITH AN ANNUAL BUDGET OF AT LEAST \$2 PER CAPITA

Evidence is required that the community has established a community forestry program that is supported by an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita. At first, this may seem like an impossible barrier to some communities. However, a little investigation usually reveals that more than this amount is already being spent by the municipality on its trees. If not, this may signal serious neglect that will cost far more in the long run. In such a case, working toward Tree City USA recognition can be used to re-examine the community's budget priorities and redirect funds to properly care for its tree resources before it is too late.

Ideally, this standard will be met by focusing funding on an annual work plan developed after an inventory is completed and a report is approved by the city council. Such a plan will address species diversity, planting needs, hazardous trees, insect and disease problems, and a pattern of regular care, such as pruning and watering.

AN ARBOR DAY OBSERVANCE AND PROCLAMATION

This is the easiest and probably the most enjoyable standard to accomplish. An Arbor Day celebration can be simple and brief or an all-day or all-week observation. For children, Arbor Day may be their only exposure to the green world or a springboard to discussions about the complex issue of environmental quality.

Arbor Day is a golden opportunity for publicity and to educate homeowners about proper tree care. Utility companies can join in to promote planting small trees beneath power lines or being careful when digging. Smokey Bear's fire prevention messages can be worked into the event, as can conservation education about soil erosion or the need to protect wildlife habitat.

Still another way to develop Arbor Day is to link it with a tree-related festival, such as the Cherry Blossom Festival in Macon, Georgia, that annually brings more than \$4.25 million into the local economy.

In meeting the four standards, help is available. The urban and community forestry coordinator in your state forester's office will be happy to work with communities in taking these first steps toward better community forestry.

HOW YOU CAN HELP TREE CITY USA

More than 3,400 communities ranging in population from less than 100 to more than 1 million have been awarded Tree City USA status. The results touch the lives of some 140 million people who live in these towns and cities. You can help these numbers grow.

If you are not a resident of a Tree City USA, follow the steps on page 4 to help your community achieve this distinction.

If you live in a Tree City USA, let your officials know you support the community forestry program and hope to see it maintained and strengthened in the years ahead. You can also make an important contribution by encouraging other communities to become Tree City USAs. Simply write for additional copies of this issue of the Bulletin and send it to friends or municipal officials in non-Tree City USA communities along with your personal recommendations.

WHAT HELP YOU CAN EXPECT

Any new Tree City USA community can expect lots of help getting started.

The urban and community forestry coordinator in your state forester's office is ready to guide you through the application process, answer questions, make suggestions for Arbor Day, and help in many other ways. A directory of all state coordinators can be found at arborday.org/foresters.

The Arbor Day Foundation has a program team assigned to facilitate the activities of Tree City USA. The program team maintains the records received from each city, provides the flags, plaques, signs, and other materials, and can help with questions. For assistance, call 888-448-7337.

Publications are available through the Foundation, including the Tree City USA Bulletin series and an annual report, as well as books such as the *Tree Board Handbook* and *Urban & Community Forestry: A Practical Guide to Sustainability*. Visit arborday.org/bulletins for quick links to both publications.

Tree City USA and Community Forestry

THE ROLE OF URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTERS

From the inception of the Tree City USA program, its success can be credited to an active partnership among the U.S. Forest Service, National Association of State Foresters, and the Arbor Day Foundation. The U.S. Forest Service has consistently provided financial assistance and technical advice; state foresters have provided local assistance and served as key promoters, certifiers, and coordinators in each state; and the Foundation provides educational materials and management of the cooperative venture. In addition, hundreds of professionals and volunteers work together on behalf of Tree City USA, and the program is endorsed and promoted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National League of Cities.

Looking into the future, the key individuals for making the program grow are the state urban and community forestry specialists. This cadre of professional men and women has expanded in recent years in response to greater emphasis on community trees and their role both in local environmental quality and environmental well-being on a global scale. Some states have a single coordinator; others have a staff in one central location; and others have individuals scattered throughout the state with single- or multi-county reasonability. Whatever the administrative structure, the common goal is to promote better management and health of the state's urban and community forests.

Tree City USA has proved to be an excellent way to help achieve this goal, so it is no surprise that many urban and community forestry specialists are among the program's best ambassadors.



The Arbor Day Foundation, cooperating organizations, and the nation's media work together to educate the public about the value of community forestry and Tree City USA through print and broadcast public service advertising.



One year after a community receives a Tree City USA award, it may apply for a Growth Award. This honor is given when a community exceeds the four standards outlined on pages 4 and 5. Growth Award criteria serve as an excellent guide to expanding and improving any community forestry program. Contact your state forester's office or the Arbor Day Foundation (arborday.org/treecity) for the award criteria and/or a paper application form.

THE 'SOFT SELL' WORKS BEST

To help others use Tree City USA to promote community forestry in more towns and cities, several veteran foresters were asked to share their insights on what approach has worked best. They often use Tree City USA as the “hook” or the “carrot.”

But they also call their approach the “soft sell,” which means the real key to success is working their program ideas into the communities rather than inflexibly trying to impose the same program in all places.

Here are 10 suggestions based on the success of these community forestry coordinators:

- 1.** Begin with **SOLID STAFFING AT THE STATE LEVEL**. Be sure the hiring process screens for professionals who are technically competent and enjoy working with lay citizens in an education and support role. Communication skills — including the ability to listen — and plenty of patience are essential.
- 2.** Let all communities know you are there to help and give them an idea of **WHAT SERVICES CAN BE PROVIDED**. Then, respond to requests and prioritize your efforts based on the degree of interest expressed by the various communities.
- 3.** **IDENTIFY POTENTIAL LOCAL PARTNERS**. There is usually a group, maybe several, that can be brought into the initial meetings. At the same time, identify the one or two individuals who are the “doers” — the natural leaders. They need not be knowledgeable about trees, but they do need enthusiasm and lasting commitment. Without at least one such person, a community forestry program cannot exist.
- 4.** **WIN CITY COUNCIL SUPPORT**. When there is interest in the community, go before the city council to win its support and have a tree board officially established.
- 5.** As a matter of routine practice, make sure that **CITY STAFF ARE INVOLVED IN ALL DECISIONS**. Park, utility, street, budget, and attorney’s office personnel can be the key to long-term success or an impassable barrier.
- 6.** **BEGIN WITH SIMPLE PROJECTS** that are sure to succeed. A few park plantings or beautification around an entrance sign will do more to launch a lasting program than a grandiose plan or exhausting project. Follow up with other “bite-sized” projects.

- 7.** Develop a plan, but **FIT THE PLAN TO THE COMMUNITY**. A plan hammered out in a local cafe and written on a paper napkin may be more effective than an inch-thick document. However, in most cases, a street and park tree inventory is the way to begin, using it to then develop a five-year or longer action plan. The i-Tree software suite available free from the U.S. Forest Service provides all the tools necessary to keep track of a tree inventory and provide analysis of the tree resource. You can download it at itreetools.org.

- 8.** **USE AWARD RECOGNITION** to build awareness and support. The appropriate time to introduce potential Tree City USA recognition will vary with the circumstances, but usually this is done best at one of the initial meetings. When the interest is there, assist in preparation of the application and support materials. Use the award as a way to publicly recognize accomplishments to date and all who have helped.

- 9.** **KNOW WHEN TO LET GO**. In a successful program, the local board will want to make the decisions. The state community forester’s job is to provide enough education to ensure that good decisions will be made and to be available with technical advice as needed.

- 10.** **KEEP IN TOUCH**. Through newsletters, invitations to workshops, and occasional personal visits, keep each new program moving forward. The Tree City USA Growth Award can be useful for suggesting new projects that help make a good community forestry program even better.

Through the cooperative efforts of all who make these programs work, it is indeed possible to improve America’s urban and community forests. Instead of more trees succumbing to disease or other sources of destruction than are being planted, we can work toward replacement and filling the empty planting sites. We can work toward diversity of both species and age classes and toward matching the right tree to each site. Hazards can be reduced and energy-conscious placement can be encouraged. In short, working together — with the full support of municipal government — we can transform neglected or deteriorating situations into managed community forests that are healthy, safe, and a source of pride. These are the goals of Tree City USA.

Three Kinds of 'Cities' in Tree City USA



Most Tree City USA communities are municipalities like Lincoln, Nebraska.



Some counties are also awarded Tree City USA designation. In most cases, these are heavily populated, urbanized counties such as Montgomery County in Maryland.



Military bases at home and abroad can qualify as Tree City USA communities when they meet the same standards as other cities. Airmen at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada include local schoolchildren in their Arbor Day activities and other Tree City USA projects.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

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THE TREE CITY USA PROGRAM IS SPONSORED BY THE Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service and National Association of State Foresters. To achieve the national recognition of being named as a Tree City USA, a town or city must meet four standards:

- Standard 1: A tree board or department
- Standard 2: A tree care ordinance
- Standard 3: A community forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita
- Standard 4: An Arbor Day observance and proclamation

Each recognized community receives a Tree City USA flag, plaque, and community entrance signs. Towns and cities of every size can qualify. Tree City USA application forms are available from your state forester, the Arbor Day Foundation at arborday.org/treecity, or your state forestry agency.