



TREE CITY USA® BULLETIN

No. **54**

Dr. James R. Fazio, Editor • \$3.00

How to Grow a Great Tree Board

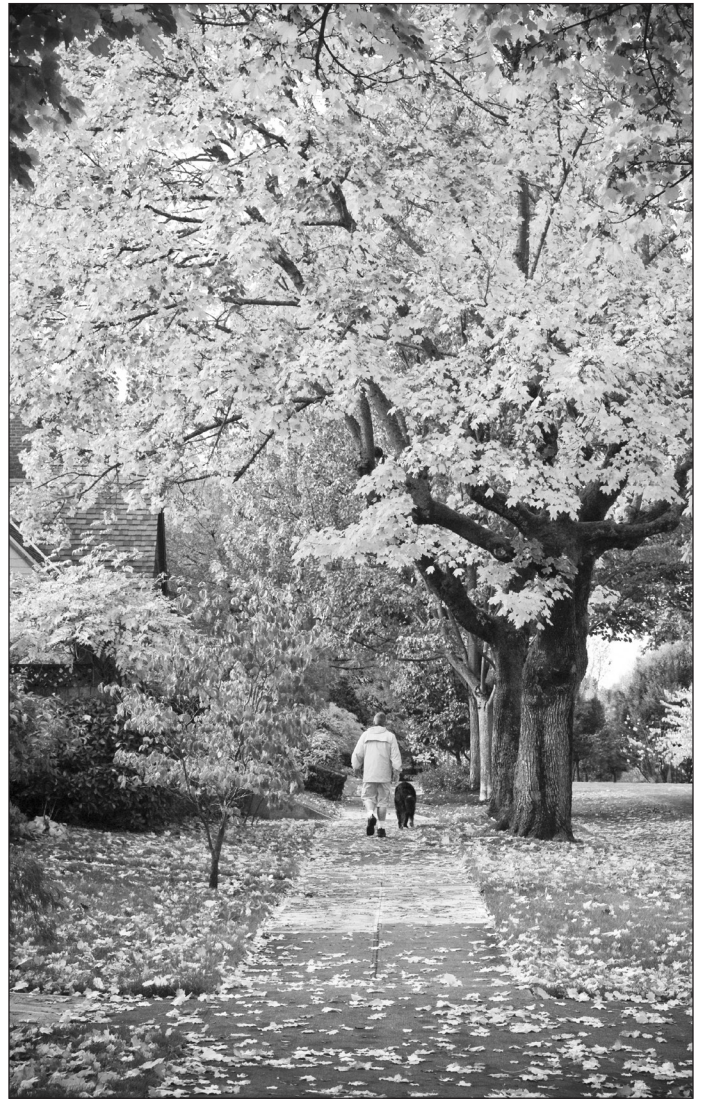
Tree boards are an essential component of the Tree City USA program. They can be a great asset to any community that values its trees. An effective tree board can assist professional arborists and city foresters, serve as an advocate for trees, and help residents and businesses in the community understand and appreciate the benefits of maintaining trees. A well-organized tree board provides immeasurable service to the community today and its citizens of the future.

The rising number of American communities that receive a Tree City USA award each year is a good indication of the interest that citizens and city officials have in the trees that grace their streets, parks and yards. In these progressive communities, tree planting and care is recognized as essential for protecting and enhancing investments in the green infrastructure. In all cases, tree boards play an important role.

Tree boards go by many names, including commissions, councils and committees, but their potential for service is universal and they are needed in communities of all sizes. Their activities range from simply conducting an Arbor Day program once a year to serving regularly as a quasi-judicial body for tree-related disputes. Importantly, when a community is large enough to have employees to look after its tree resource, the role of a tree board is to compliment, not replace professional leadership.

From his association with tree boards over the years, retired community forestry administrator Roger Blanchard of Moscow, Idaho says there were many ways the board contributed to success of the urban forestry program in his city. "In my case, where I was pretty much the only staff, the board provided a great support group. If I had an issue, I could take it to the board members to help me work through it. They also helped complete an inventory, develop a management plan, and develop a tree guide. There is no way I could have done these things by myself." Roger cites other functions provided by the board such as: providing advice on the general direction of the program; conducting outreach projects and developing good public relations; and giving citizen 'feedback' on what is working or what needs to be changed.

An active tree board is the keystone between the citizenry on one side and elected officials and city employees on the other. If you are part of a board, we hope this issue of the bulletin will help you find ways to make your group the best it can be in serving your community. If you do not have a tree board, we hope these pages inspire you to become the spark that ignites action.



Tatiana Boyle / iStockphoto

The end result of a great tree board is a great community forest.

Published by



Arbor Day Foundation®

100 Arbor Avenue • Nebraska City, NE 68410

The 'Right' Board Members

It has been said that the best way to fire someone is to not hire him or her in the first place. The message in this is that many problems would be prevented by taking the time to carefully screen candidates for any position. This is just as true for tree board members, especially in larger communities.

What Expertise is Needed?

The key criteria for being a contributing tree board member are enthusiasm and dedication, not technical expertise. It always helps to have at least one member who is involved in a green industry such as a local nursery or tree-care company, but it is even more important to have members who are willing to dedicate time and energy to attending meetings and events, sharing the work load, and compatibly interacting with other members. Connection with the community is also important. It helps if board members are involved in business organizations, the Garden Club, fraternal organizations, and others. This expands the board's networking opportunities and chances to enlist help with projects. Two ex-officio members round out the ideal board: a person from the city department responsible for tree care and a member of city council to serve as liaison.

Age is clearly *not* a criterion. Active board members have ranged from 16 to 86. Older members can provide perspective and inspiration. Young people are important for new ideas and building leadership for the future. If a college is located nearby, having a student member enhances the opportunity for that institution to qualify for a Tree Campus USA award.

Diversity is another consideration. A span of backgrounds and interests enriches a tree board and helps build broad support. While 'quotas' are usually a bad idea, it does help to make sure that ethnicities represented in the community have a place on the board.

In all cases, a sincere interest in trees and how they benefit the community is the primary requirement for being a contributing board member.

A Volunteer's Job Description?

No one would be recruited for or accept a job without a clear description of what is expected. A volunteer position on a tree board is no different. A written description of the responsibilities, meeting attendance and time commitment can help candidates decide if board membership is really what they want. The description can be very brief and needs to be tailored to the nature of the community, but the accompanying illustration suggests one way to write this helpful document.

Position Description

Volunteer Tree Board Member Pleasantville, Anyplace

General Responsibilities: Serve in an advisory capacity to city council, assist the city forester in educational efforts, plan and conduct annual Arbor Day activities, and participate in special projects such as tree plantings.

Qualifications:

- U.S. citizen and resident of the City of Pleasantville
- At least some knowledge of common tree species and tree care
- An interest in trees and how they benefit the community
- The ability to work as a team member and actively participate in scheduled events
- Willingness to commit approximately 6 hours monthly including one evening meeting per month, usually on Tuesdays

Activities:

Activities are variable and some depend on the interests of board members. Those of a routine nature include:

- Assisting the city forester in developing and/or reviewing annually and updating as necessary a long-range plan for the city's urban forest
- Reviewing with the city forester annual work plans related to the urban forestry program
- Advising the mayor, city council and city departments on matters concerning trees and related resources, including revisions of the city tree ordinance
- Serving on an appeals panel regarding decisions to remove or allow the removal of trees in the city right-of-way
- Helping to plan and conduct an annual Arbor Day celebration on the last Friday of April
- Participating in educational campaigns that may include occasional school and civic organization presentations, interviews with mass media, and creation of printed materials
- Serving as liaison with organizations planning and conducting tree-related events or projects

What A Small Group Can Do

Urban forestry coordinators nationwide report the same thing about tree boards – all it takes is one ‘spark plug’ to get it started and get things done. So it was in 1992 when a University of Maine Extension specialist and the director of parks & cemeteries in Bath, Maine suggested to the city council that a tree board be established. The city officials agreed and an ad was placed in the local paper asking for volunteers. Numerous citizens stepped forward and nine were chosen to form the Bath Community Forestry Committee.

One of the founding members was Geraldine Coombs who at the date of this publication was 86 years old and still very active promoting good urban forestry. “I do things other people don’t have time for, and I have fun,” said Geraldine in an interview.

Fun is definitely part of an effective tree board, but in Bath, Maine, Geraldine and her group have worked wonders for their community. Two years after being organized, the committee arranged for a trust agreement with the city to facilitate receiving private donations and guaranteeing continuous tree care into the future. A direct mail campaign is conducted every other year and residents have been generous in donating to the fund. Interest-only is used from the fund and the money helps support a full-time city arborist.

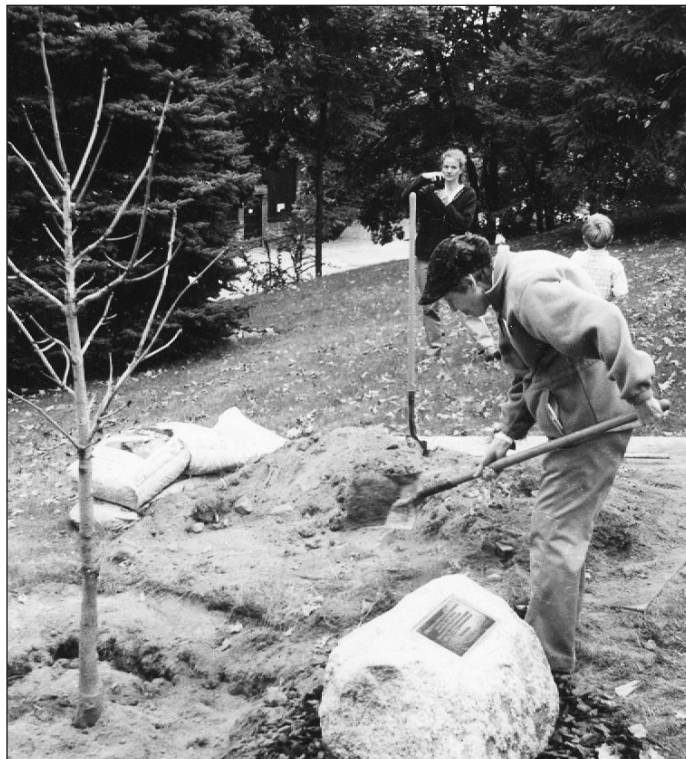
Between Geraldine’s committee and city arborist Thomas Hoerth, Bath developed an exemplary urban forestry program. Its activities have included:

- Passage of a tree ordinance, completion of an inventory, and development of a management plan
- Tree planting and regular tree care, such as pruning and hazard removals
- A sawmill that produces lumber for the Rotary Club that in turn sponsors the construction of houses by vocational education students
- Receiving Tree City USA and Growth Awards
- A city tree nursery
- Landscaping the city’s beautiful parks and cemeteries, including restoration of a neglected, historic park
- Managing several coastal natural areas
- Presenting educational programs for children and adults
- Publishing a newsletter twice a year

Bath, Maine is known as ‘The City of Ships’ and has a long maritime history. Work by the local arborist and community forestry committee in recent years suggests it should be called ‘The City of Ships and Trees.’

Geraldine told us, “It all comes down to people with a passion for their environment and trees. People need to envision the future and see what needs to be done to enhance their community.” Citing the creation of a Nature Explore Classroom in the heart of New York City that she read about in the *Arbor Day* newsletter, Geraldine said, “That is a wonderful example of what can be done when people have enthusiasm and vision.”

Enthusiasm and vision seem like the hallmarks of Bath’s Community Forestry Committee. And it all began with nine volunteers. Their service has inspired community-wide appreciation for trees and gained the support of citizens and businesses throughout the city.



Gail Spath

Geraldine (‘Gerry’) Coombs, a founding member of the Bath, Maine Forestry Committee, plants an Arbor Day tree donated by the community in her honor.



© Heather Perry Photography

Making it Clear – The Legal Authority

Legal authority for tree boards is by charter, generally ordinance or statute, but occasionally by executive order or other administrative action. However chartered, tree boards must have responsibility and authority. They must also have continuity.

– Gene W. Grey
A Handbook for Tree Board Members

Legal recognition of a tree board as part of municipal government helps assure that trees will have standing in the community. The actions of the tree board will be taken more seriously. The most common source of this recognition comes as an ordinance, either a ‘stand alone’ ordinance that creates the tree board, or as part of a broader tree or community forestry ordinance. Either way, the ordinance should be written to clarify the role of the tree board, define its composition, and provide guidelines for its operation.

Regardless of the mechanism used to create a tree board, here are some provisions that should be included:

✓ **The general purpose. An example might be:**

To help assure the maintenance and expansion of the city’s tree canopy and the health and safe condition of trees in the community, the Pleasantville Tree Board shall advise the mayor and city council regarding preservation, protection and management of the community forest, act as an appellate body for licensing and/or certification pursuant to the Community Forestry Ordinance and shall coordinate the ordinance’s activities regarding public trees.

✓ **The number of members. This will vary depending on the size of the community, but 5 – 9 members is commonly used. An odd number helps prevent tie votes. The various offices within the board may also be listed. For example:**

*Chair
Vice Chair
Secretary*



Kari Koehler / iStockphoto

Sometimes it is helpful to also list officers required for any standing committees believed to be essential in the community:

*Arbor Day Committee Chair
Memorial Tree Committee Chair*

✓ **How appointments are made and terms of office. Staggered terms help assure continuity and term limits help provide ‘new blood’ on the board. An example ordinance provision might state:**

Tree board members shall be appointed by the mayor with the approval of city council. Members will serve three years except that the term of two of the members appointed to the first board shall be for only one year. In the event that a vacancy shall occur during the term of any member, his or her successor shall be appointed for the unexpired portion of the term. Re-appointments may be made for no more than two consecutive terms.

✓ **If there are official qualifications for membership, such as residency, it should be stated in the ordinance.**

✓ **Duties should be listed more specifically than in the statement of general purpose. This not only clarifies what the board should do, but it also limits the extent of its official activities by what is *not* listed.**

✓ **Operational provisions include how many meetings are normally expected, how officers are selected, what constitutes a quorum, what records are required, what city staff may be appointed for liaison or support (administrative duties), and similar details for guiding the smooth operation of the board.**

✓ **Funding. This may range from a terse statement that all participants are volunteers and no funding will be provided, to something more helpful such as this example:**

Board members serve without compensation except for allowable expenses as approved by the city administrator in advance. The board shall recommend an annual budget to the mayor and council for operational expenses and educational activities. The board is authorized to seek outside funding for its projects as may be approved by the council in accordance with city policies.

Keeping Meetings Productive

Half tongue-in-cheek it has been said that the best meetings are those that don't occur. However, if tree boards are made up of enthusiastic individuals, they will have the desire to meet in order to get things done in the community. It is important to tap this source of energy and keep it going rather than suffocate it through poorly run board meetings.

Ten Commandments for Better Tree Board Meetings

In the interest of keeping meetings productive and interest levels high, try these techniques.

- 1. *Send reminders.*** Nothing kills productivity like missing members or unfilled assignments. The chair or secretary should email or phone members a few days ahead of each meeting to serve as a reminder. Members that are consistently absent should be replaced.
- 2. *Start on time – and stay on time.*** Time is a person's most valuable possession. The board chair needs to respect this and clearly ask members to do likewise.
- 3. *Provide for comfort.*** The meeting room, including chairs and room temperature, are important. A pleasant, dignified meeting room will add an ambience of importance to the tree board's work. Beverages and treats help, too.
- 4. *Have a purpose.*** If there is nothing to meet about, cancel the meeting! But there usually are matters for an active tree board to address. The chair should think in advance about what specifically needs to be accomplished at every meeting.
- 5. *Use an agenda.*** Always have a printed agenda ready at the meeting – and use it. Begin by asking if there are additional items and add any that need attention that day. Either formally or informally assign a time limit to each item and use that to comply with number 2 above.
- 6. *Leaders should lead, not take minutes.*** It is the secretary's job to keep the minutes. This frees the chair to conduct the meeting and focus on the discussions.
- 7. *Manage discussion.*** The chair needs to be sensitive to the fact that some people tend to dominate discussions. It is the chair's responsibility not only to keep discussion of any item from dragging on beyond the point of usefulness, but to also draw out those who are more reluctant to speak up on their own.
- 8. *Add variety.*** Board meetings will remain appealing to members if they are not the same time after time. Include in your meetings guest speakers occasionally and training materials – especially good audio-visuals.
- 9. *Summarize.*** At the end of the meeting, review any assignments given to members and make certain that each has a clear due date. (Note: Members who habitually forget or miss deadlines are usually the ones who do not take notes. If this is the case, watch for an opportune time in private and suggest that it would help if they would at least make notations on their agenda sheets.)
- 10. *End on time.*** Remember the 'precious possession' concept and recognize that board members have other obligations and will appreciate being sure they can depend on leaving at a specific time.



Dmitriy Shironosov / iStockphoto

Good leadership is reflected in conducting meetings in a way that tree board members will want to attend.

Projects Keep Interest High

Productive tree boards are busy tree boards. No one wants to be part of a volunteer organization that does little or nothing. Members of tree boards are usually highly motivated individuals who care about their community and their environment. And while Arbor Day – the main annual event for most tree boards – takes energy and creative thinking, here are some examples of other beneficial projects conducted by active tree boards.

Educational Booths and Displays

It is a rare tree board that does not want to educate residents about the benefits and care of trees. One way to do this is to sponsor booths at community events. The key to a good display is having something large and eye-catching and then providing something of value. The ‘give-away’ may be literature about trees (See page 8), free trees, tickets for a drawing, or promotional products like sun visors, fans, tote bags and other useful items.



Garth Davis



James R. Fazio

Educational displays benefit the community and can keep board members active throughout the year planning and serving as exhibit staff. In Spokane, Washington (left), the Urban Forestry Tree Committee and Urban Forestry Citizen’s Advisory Committee are joined by over a dozen other organizations at the Fall Leaf Festival in Finch Arboretum. The Moscow, Idaho Tree Commission (right) displays at the county fair and the summer/fall farmer’s market. A popular feature at the fair is a raffle for several potted trees that are also on display.

Publications and PSA’s

Many tree boards produce publications such as heritage tree maps, planting guides, and leaflets used to explain a tree ordinance, planting and pruning correctly, and similar information. In Lewiston, Idaho the board went even further and created public service announcements for TV on the benefits and care of trees – including playing acting roles in the productions.

Hands-on Projects

Tiny LeVeta, Colorado with a population of 834, has a model of a tree board “that gets things done.” Members not only plant trees, they have: restored greenways and added flower beds; supervised contract pruning; helped the maintenance crew chip tree branches; sprayed a dormancy oil to control elm scale; and shouldered the manual labor for other

tree-related needs. Other communities sometimes propagate nursery stock, prune young trees, spread mulch, and place informative door knob hangers in neighborhoods.

Unlimited Opportunities

Year-round projects are limited only by the imagination and interests of the tree board members. An annual ‘brainstorming’ session can produce a list of potential projects. Sometimes projects come in the form of emergencies. When a tornado destroyed large numbers of trees in Windsor, Colorado, the tree board took the leadership for raising money to restore the city’s tree canopy. The board then marshaled volunteers for planting in parks and along the streets, and even helped make planting on private property easier for victims of the storm.

Building Capacity

‘Capacity’ is a term heard often these days in organizations of all kinds. In its social context, building capacity means ‘maximizing possible output.’ It begins with providing the knowledge needed to develop competence. When competence is combined with enthusiasm it can lead to the kind of leadership that makes great tree board members.

The Arbor Day Foundation has long recognized the importance of developing the skills of tree board members. In 1997, under the authorship of pioneering urban forester Gene W. Grey, *A Handbook for Tree Board Members* was published. In 2010, this popular publication was supplemented with a new online educational opportunity – Tree Board University. This interactive course was funded by the USDA Forest

Service and developed in cooperation with the Oregon Department of Forestry and Texas Agri-Life Extension.

Tree Board University is an excellent way to provide high quality training for both new and experienced tree board members. The course is free and can be taken at one’s own pace and with all learning materials – including helpful visual aids – provided via internet. To enroll, go to www.treeboardu.org.

Tree Board University—Overview of Online Course Content

- Module 1:** Tree Board 101. A discussion of the basics of what effective tree boards do and how to attain greatness through better organization and understanding of group dynamics.
- Module 2:** Partnerships and Collaboration. This section of the course emphasizes the importance of partnerships, recommends those that have proven successful, and provides insights on how to make them work.
- Module 3:** Engaging in the Political Process. The basics about local government, the role of urban forestry in the broader context of state and national roles, and ‘how-to’ information for promoting trees in the community.
- Module 4:** Community Forestry Planning. From visioning to written plans and final evaluations, what every tree board needs to know in order to bring improvement to the community and stay on track.
- Module 5:** Communication and Marketing. How to effectively advocate for trees, work with the mass media, and educate citizens about the important benefits provided by trees.
- Module 6:** Financing, Budgeting, Grants, Fundraising. Great suggestions for providing the money necessary to support urban forestry.
- Module 7:** Getting Things Done: This section ties much of the course content together to assure a stronger tree board, better events and successful projects.
- Module 8:** Moving Forward: The concluding module provides helpful resources and direction for ‘where to go from here.’



TREE CITY USA®

The Tree City USA program is sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the USDA 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: An Annual Community Forestry Program
- 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 information is available from your state forester or the Arbor Day Foundation.

Tree City USA Growth Award

Initiating training for volunteers and/or city staff through participation in Tree Board University can help qualify for a Tree City USA Growth Award.



