

# COLLABORATION

## THE KEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

### CHAPTER TWO



Photo by Gregg Hove

**Collaboration has led to successful tree preservation in Eagan, Minnesota.**

**W**hen Eagan, Minnesota's new community center was initially proposed, the plans called for the removal of 36 beautiful bur oak trees. However, the site for the building was purchased in part because of its unique woodland, so the city was reluctant to lose so many large trees. Existing conditions dictated where road access points must be located.

Working together, the city's forestry and engineering divisions found a way to shift the road alignment that allowed the retention of all but four of the trees. One of the four, a 150-

year-old specimen oak dubbed 'The Grandfather Tree,' was still too close to the road to escape serious impact. After extensive research, the Forestry Division determined that the tree could be successfully moved. In addition to the collaboration between city departments, the project enlisted a private arboricultural consultant, a company specializing in moving large trees, and a nonprofit community foundation that raised the necessary funding. Although technical knowledge was important to the success of this project, it was only through collaboration that it became a reality.

## What Does Collaboration Mean?

According to Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, the word "collaboration" comes from the ancient Greek word koll or kollo, meaning glue. In later Latin, collaborare gave us the meaning we still use, "to labor together," "to work jointly with others..." or "to cooperate..." This is the essence of collaboration. Today it is an essential part of urban forestry. It is truly the "glue" that binds people together and helps advance urban forestry to the higher level of *sustainable* urban forestry.

## What Can it Do for Your Community?

Collaboration is necessary for urban forestry to both serve the physical needs of the urban infrastructure and contribute to the community's social needs.

For example, in the past, decisions about planting street trees were often made by a single individual, usually someone working within city government. These unilateral decisions have come back to haunt us in many cases, such as when the trees that provide summer shade came into conflict with overhead utilities. The better approach is when urban foresters, in cooperation with tree boards or other volunteers, work cooperatively with utility foresters to plan for the planting of trees near utilities. If a utility employee had been involved in a team effort when early plantings were planned, lower-maturing species would have been selected or utilities may have been placed differently.

Similarly, a well-meaning developer may try to save trees when building houses in a wooded area. However, if an arborist is not part of the developer's team, trees sometimes die from lack of proper treatment during construction. In this case, the new homeowner pays twice – once for the higher value of a wooded lot and once again to have the dead or dying trees removed.



Lack of collaboration also has social consequences. When the glue of collaboration is missing, minority groups are often left out of the planning and implementation of urban forestry projects. Valuable insights, helping hands, and feelings of "ownership" in the project are lost through exclusion. By contrast,

through teamwork with and by under-represented ethnic groups, neighborhood miracles can happen as we will see in Chapter 5.

The involvement of all stakeholders is a win-win situation. It is worth the extra effort of identifying all interested groups and individuals, learning about their concerns and desires, and fully involving them in the planning and implementation of urban forestry. The results will be better in every way, including the building of cultural bridges so badly needed today.

## Who Is a Stakeholder?

Stakeholders are all those with an interest in some issue or geographic area. Even if they have no initial interest, but are affected by the issue or area, they are stakeholders.

*"The concept of stakeholder acts as a net to 'capture' both the articulate and the silent, the powerful and powerless, those within a territorial political community, and those beyond its boundaries."*

Patsy Healy  
*Collaborative Planning – Shaping Places  
in Fragmented Societies*

## The Key Players

Identifying stakeholders depends on the issue and the area. However, there are key players in urban forestry that can be found in most communities of any size. Here is a checklist that can serve as a starting point.

**Elected officials** – especially the mayor and city council. These are the key people for setting policy, creating or amending ordinances, and generally setting the tone or attitude toward urban forestry and determining its level of importance.

**City forester** – municipal arborist, or other title used to describe the professional responsible for tree care and ordinance enforcement within a community.

**Park and recreation officials** – Sometimes the parks superintendent doubles as a community's urban forester. In all cases, he or she is responsible for trees in parks.

**Public works officials** – In some cities, the urban forester or forestry department works under this branch

of government. An advantage is that this situation facilitates better communication with engineers and street maintenance personnel who often significantly affect trees.

**Planning and zoning commission** – This important body can have a significant impact on trees. Landscape ordinances for parking lots often stem from planning and zoning decisions, or requirements in new developments, including those that help make neighborhoods safe in fire-prone areas.

**Code compliance departments** – If trees are on the ‘radar scope’ of this department, ordinances are enforced more readily and taken more seriously.

### ***Volunteer Organizations***

**Tree boards** – Other names include: tree committees, tree commissions, shade tree commissions and beautification committees.

**Master Gardeners** – This organization is sponsored by the Cooperative Extension System and includes training in woody plants as well as flowers and garden produce. The volunteers who receive Master Gardener training are required to ‘pay back’ by doing at least 40 hours of community service. This often includes providing advice on tree care.

**Keep America Beautiful Affiliates** – Local affiliates in more than 500 communities have expertise on organizing volunteers and beautification programs.

**Other** – ranging from adult groups such as Tree People in Los Angeles or Tree Tenders in Philadelphia to youth organizations such as 4-H, Earth Angels, Tree Musketeers and others with an interest in planting and caring for trees.

### ***Other Organizations With an Interest in Trees***

**Tree care companies** – ranging from large businesses like Davey Tree Expert Company, Asplundh and Bartlett Tree Experts, to small firms of a few employees or even a single individual.

**Nurseries** – Virtually all sell trees, although their focus on trees varies considerably.

**Utilities** – There are two kinds: public utilities that are owned and operated by a municipality or other unit of government, and private, or investor-owned utilities. Both have the dual responsibility for providing safe, uninterrupted delivery of services but at the same time treating trees responsibly.



*Collaboration is necessary for urban forestry to serve both the physical and the social needs of the community.*

**Businesses** – can see trees either as a benefit (cooler parking spaces, happier shoppers) or a nuisance (tree litter, sign blockage).

**Schools** – Working with children is one of the most important things we can do in urban and community forestry. They are the future.

**Civic groups** – are eager to be involved in community improvement projects.

**Developers** – Like businesses in general, developers can see trees as a nuisance to be cleared from the land or as a benefit to sales to be included in construction plans.

## **Partnerships Take Many Forms**

The potential for collaboration is boundless. It may mean two small communities sharing the cost of hiring a professional urban forester. It may be recruiting the Kiwanis Club and local Scouts to help with an Arbor Day planting, or citizen groups and commercial interests coming together to raise funds or to work jointly on a project.

Almost invariably, partnerships are synergistic; that is, by working together, the total effect is greater than the sum of the individual efforts. To work best, both sides of a partnership should have something to gain, and something to share. The contribution may be tangible, such as expertise, funds, a mailing list, political connections, or equipment. It may also be intangible, such as prestige and the opportunity to improve the image of a project.

To help decide when a partnership will help or when to “go it alone,” The National Park Service’s Rivers & Trails Program offers this advice:

*Use a partnership if...*

- you are pursuing goals that will affect other people and organizations.
- you need more resources, whether financial, political or human to accomplish your goals.
- you want a strong coalition that shows how various interest groups are in agreement.
- you are aware of groups in opposition to your project.

*Go it alone if...*

- you are facing a small project and it involves land you own or control that is not used by others.
- you have all the resources you need to accomplish your goals.
- you really just want a stamp of approval rather than the opinions and recommendations of others.

**Tip:** Do not limit the list of potential partners to only those groups that have missions and goals similar to yours. The most creative and fruitful partnerships may bring together less obvious parties or even longstanding adversaries.

**Partnership Ideas**

*Partner with a civic organization, local school, youth group, or corporate or volunteer entity on a tree planting or care project.*

*Partner with your utility to encourage additional tree planting of appropriate species, improved pruning or other tree care.*

*Partner with nurseries or tree care companies to encourage improved planting stock, better tree care, improved landscaping methods, or recycling of wood materials.*

*Partner with another community to share a forester, jointly contract for tree care, computer or other services, purchase expensive equipment or pool tree orders.*

*Partner with corporations, foundations, civic organizations and individuals for project funding.*

*Partner with citizens on a cost sharing or other incentive program to encourage more tree planting on private property.*



Photo courtesy of Trees Forever

*Trees Forever facilitates the planting and care of trees and forests in Iowa through action-oriented programs that empower people, build community, and promote environmental stewardship.*



Many dreams have begun with one or two people in a community, and ended as just that – dreams. But when Shannon Ramsay and David Krotz of Marion, Iowa, founded Trees Forever in 1989, they used collaboration to build a statewide organization that is well on its way to living up to its name.

The mission of Trees Forever is to facilitate the planting and care of trees and forests through action-oriented programs that empower people, build community, and promote environmental stewardship.

*“We believe that the more people we involve, the greater the opportunity for success.”*  
 — Shannon Ramsay,  
 Founder Trees Forever

Initially, the fledgling organization turned to what may seem like an unlikely partner – the state’s utilities. The mutual benefit was that Trees Forever received funding and cooperation from a major industrial partner, and the utilities found an enthusiastic source of help for planting trees in Iowa’s communities that increase home energy efficiency and are compatible – rather than in conflict with – overhead lines.

As a next step, Ramsay and Krotz sought volunteers in communities of all sizes to help with tree planting and replacement projects. Trees Forever assisted (and still does) with matching grants and technical assistance including site and species selection, project planning, and community building.

This simple plan for collaboration worked! Nearly 2 million trees ranging from seedlings to specimens of large-caliper have been planted by some 103,000 volunteers in over 400 communities.

Today, the organization’s projects have expanded to planting buffer strips along waterways. With properly placed trees, nitrates and other farm chemical drainage can be reduced by up to 70 percent and sediments entering the water can be cut by up to 90 percent. Fifteen partners

are listed in this commendable effort to make Iowa’s lakes and rivers clean and healthy. Partners range from the Iowa Corn Promotion Board and the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation to Novartis Crop Protection, Inc. and the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

In another major project area – Iowa’s Living Roadways – Trees Forever has forged a ten-year partnership with the Living Roadway Trust Fund, the Iowa Department of Transportation, the Federal Highways Administration and Iowa State University. Accomplishments include:

- Training more than 1,000 local volunteers through annual volunteer conferences and field days.
- Leveraging Federal Highway Enhancement Funds for 164 local projects.
- Launching a Community Visioning Program, a national model for landscape design for communities with populations under 10,000.

In all, what began as the dream of two people just over a decade ago has now channeled more than \$10 million in funds and services to local volunteers. And it was all made possible through collaboration and the effective use of partnerships.

**Guiding Principles  
from Trees Forever**

- ✓ **Treat people with respect and dignity**
- ✓ **Be the change you expect – lead by example**
- ✓ **Leadership is everyone’s responsibility**
- ✓ **Communicate honestly and openly**
- ✓ **Strive for quality and simplicity**
- ✓ **Encourage synergy and creativity**
- ✓ **Be positive, flexible and solution oriented**
- ✓ **Be empathetic and understanding**
- ✓ **Listen actively**
- ✓ **Have humor**
- ✓ **Demonstrate environmental integrity and community responsibility**
- ✓ **Recognize that everything is a process being improved**