

# A COMMON CAUSE

## CREATING ATTAINABLE GOALS

### CHAPTER THREE



Lewiston, Idaho, envisions a sustainable community forest and has set goals to achieve its vision.

**I**n Lewiston, Idaho, like elsewhere, urban forestry is a program that looks to the future. To guide its program, a visionary perspective has been adopted and set down on paper. It includes this statement:

At the end of the next 50 years, the City of Lewiston will be maintaining a healthy, productive community forest. To accomplish this vision, the following agenda should be achieved...

- The urban forestry program will be financially self-supporting
- The community forest will be composed of a wide variety of species and age classes that insulate the forest from devastating insect and disease outbreaks
- All trees on public rights-of-way and in parks will be maintained according to



Photos by R. Michael Bowman

currently accepted professional standards and on an established schedule

- The urban forest will be an economic asset and source of community pride
- All management decisions concerning the urban forest will be made with full knowledge of the impact on the entire urban ecosystem; e.g. major parking lots will not be permitted without tree shading.

Every community is at a different mile marker along the road toward sustainable urban forestry. If you are reading this book, you are obviously interested in helping to upgrade the urban forest and its care where you live. But what, specifically, is your goal? Some readers face the challenge of getting basic tree care started; others want to move to a higher level of activity and sophistication; and some are at a very advanced level and may want to make sure their programs simply continue into the future.

This chapter is primarily a guide for those who are trying to start a tree program or improve one that needs growth and invigoration to meet today's needs. The process is a four step method that begins by gathering facts about the current condition of your urban forest, envisioning what you and your partners believe can be accomplished, then setting up a systematic approach to closing the gap between the two. The recommended steps will enable you to forge a common cause, set attainable goals, and succeed in moving your community down the road toward sustainable urban forestry.

### Step 1: Identify Needs by Conducting an Inventory

An inventory of street and/or park trees is still the best foundation for an active, productive community forestry program. An inventory can make three important contributions.

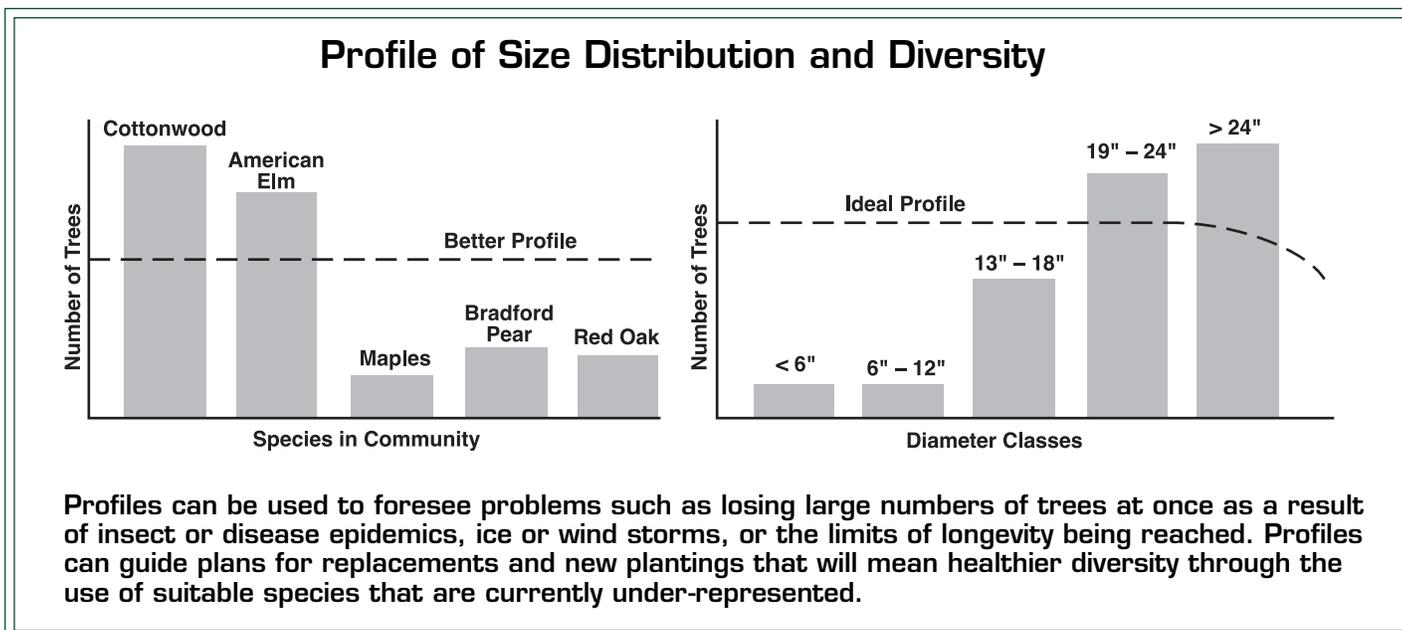
First, it gives volunteers and professionals an opportunity to work together. People of diverse backgrounds and ages can be trained to identify trees and make the measurements and judgments that go

into data collection. They get to know each other better, actually get into the outdoors to do something important, have a positive experience related to trees and their community, and learn new skills.

Secondly, an inventory is a good way to receive publicity about the local tree resource, its management needs, and its importance. This, in turn, can help garner public support and influence elected officials to provide the budget to conduct a sustainable urban forestry program.

Finally, an inventory provides facts about the current status of the community forest. This information is necessary to develop efficient plans for planting, pruning, reducing hazards and bringing the forest into a safe, healthy condition. Most inventories collect data about:

- ✓ What species are present? Is there healthy diversity with no single species making up more than about 15 percent of all the trees, or is the profile lopsided? This can guide decisions about what species to plant or not plant in the future.
- ✓ What sizes are present? Measuring diameters (for standardization, at 4.5 feet above the ground, or 'diameter breast high') provides a profile of size distribution. Again, diversity is important for sustainability in that there will be young trees growing as older trees decline and must be removed. This is illustrated in the chart below.
- ✓ Where and how many empty planting sites exist? By noting empty sites as well as nearby features such as overhead wires and the width between



curb and sidewalk, a record can emerge that is helpful in growing or ordering trees that mature at different sizes:

- small (30' or less) such as flowering plums, redbud or hornbeam
  - medium (30 – 70') such as post oak, lindens or green ash
  - large (70' or taller) such as planetrees or many of the pines
- ✓ Are there hazard trees? These can be located and scheduled for prompt corrective pruning or removal.
  - ✓ What maintenance is needed? Do lower limbs need to be pruned for safe passage of traffic (14') or pedestrians (8')? Are other pruning needs evident?
  - ✓ Do stakes need to be removed from recently planted trees? Again, their location can be noted and plans made to do the work.
  - ✓ Are there heritage trees that should be given special care? These are trees of unusual size, form or age, a species rare in the community, or a tree with historical or other significance.

The actual inventory will be designed based on the size and needs of your community.

The 'how-to' of organizing and conducting the survey is beyond the scope of this book, but a good starting point is to ask your state urban and community forestry coordinator for assistance. You might also want to read a general overview about inventory methods by ordering Tree City USA Bulletin No. 23, 'How to Conduct a Street Tree Inventory,' from The National Arbor Day Foundation.

A recent development that has made data collection much easier are programs designed for use on ordinary Personal Digital Assistants, commonly known by the brand name Palm Pilot or others. Information about free software for both collecting



## Pleasantville's Community Forestry Vision Statement

By the year 2015, Pleasantville's community forest will be multi-aged, fully stocked in planting spaces where adjoining residents or businesses prefer to have a tree, healthy and safe. It will contain a wide variety of species and cultivars suited to Pleasantville's climate and soils and it will be maintained on a low cost but regularly scheduled basis. It will contribute to the general welfare of our residents by reducing energy costs, increasing property values, beautifying all neighborhoods and making business districts more attractive, providing homes for watchable wildlife, and projecting an image of quality to visitors and prospective businesses. Care of public trees will be used as means to educate and inspire residents to care for trees on private property. Pleasantville will be an annual recipient of the Tree City USA Award.

data in the field and then managing it in useful ways in a desktop computer may be obtained at the Web site: [www.umass.edu/urbantree/mcti](http://www.umass.edu/urbantree/mcti).

## Step 2: Create a Vision of What Is Desirable and Possible

The inventory shows you what you have. Now it is time to decide what you want your tree resource and the sustainable program behind it to look like in the future.

There is no easy way to accomplish this step, but it is important and should not be skipped. In fact, it is essential that you include representatives of as many stakeholder groups as you can identify in your community. Whether these people constitute your tree board or volunteer organization, or are called to a special meeting, the more you include, the more 'ownership' and support you will have for making the dream a reality.

What result comes of this session goes by various names, but we will call it the vision statement. It is a search for the ideal – a goal for the state of community

trees 10 to 25 years in the future. It is an excellent group exercise and once developed it serves as a written commitment toward which the forestry program will be directed.

To write a vision statement, use a round-robin or brainstorming technique. List all suggestions on flip chart pages and tape them to a wall for all to see. The list can be discussed and boiled down until it meets everyone's satisfaction. Then have one or two members of your group refine the language of the listed items and fashion them into statement format. After final approval by all members of the planning team, representatives can present the vision to any stakeholder groups they may represent. Barring any major changes requested, your vision statement is then ready to be printed in planning documents, reports, proposals for financial assistance and educational literature. Most importantly, it should be posted and kept in mind during subsequent planning sessions.

### **Step 3: To Close the Gap – Plan, Plan, Plan, then Act**

If you fail to plan, plan to fail.

— Anonymous

If you know the status of your community forest, have involved key members of as many stakeholder groups as possible, and have a vision of what you want from your community forestry program (that is, actually attaining what is expressed in the vision statement) – then you are ready for more detailed planning. Here are the two key planning tools that should be used by tree boards or other groups responsible for action that will lead to a sustainable urban forest.

### **Long Range Plan**

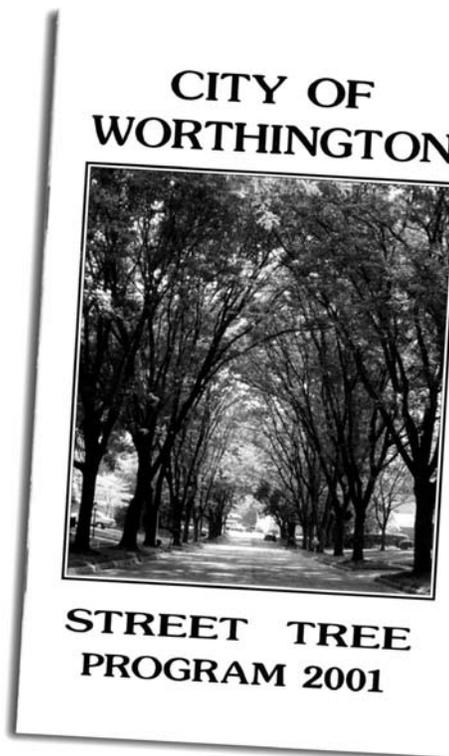
The “long range” time horizon can be several years or a decade, but five years is most commonly used and is a realistic timeframe for this planning effort. The goal is to change the forest as you know it from your inventory into the one described in your vision statement. The answers you arrive at in doing this plan provide the strategy for an action program. In fact, this is sometimes called a “strategic plan.” This plan also provides an opportunity to prioritize all the work that is needed so that the most important things (such as hazard reduction) get done first. The list of action items you develop can also be a tool for estimating the total

cost of creating the “ideal” urban forest. Of course, it is important to compare this cost with the cost of no action – especially in terms of liability! Some example of items in the long range plan could include:

- Implement a hazard tree action program (pruning or removal).
- Begin an annual pruning program on 3-year cycles (that is, each neighborhood will be visited every three years for pruning).
- Create an annual planting schedule to replace removals and fill vacant planting sites.
- Develop a public education program stressing the energy-saving benefits of the right tree planted in the right place.
- Conduct a campaign to create watchable wildlife habitat in backyards and parks.
- Develop a data management system for the continuous updating of the community's street and park tree inventory.

### **Annual Work Plan**

This plan is where ‘the rubber hits the road.’ This



*Create a vision of what is desirable and possible, then plan and act to make it possible.*

# Tree City USA Provides a Framework for Goal-Oriented Planning



*Tree City USA has been a major impetus to help municipalities get started on the road to systematic tree care programs.*

**T**he Tree City USA program, sponsored by The National Arbor Day Foundation, implemented by State Foresters, and supported by the USDA Forest Service, can serve communities two ways. Tree City USA has been a major impetus to help municipalities (of all sizes), military bases and urban counties get started on the road to continuous, systematic tree care programs. The four basic requirements to become eligible for a Tree City USA award can provide the framework for getting started. These are:

1. A tree care ordinance must be in effect
2. There must be a forester, city department or tree board designated by ordinance to be responsible for community tree care
3. There must be an active community forestry program, evidenced by an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita
4. Arbor Day must be proclaimed and observed

## **Tree City USA Growth Award**

Communities earning Tree City USA designation can then become eligible for a Tree City USA Growth Award. This award is made after ten points are earned from a list of possible activities. The list provides an excellent source of ideas for planning projects that lead to a better and better urban forestry program. In fact, many community tree boards use

the list when preparing their annual work plan. The plan could even be organized around the four categories under which the ten points can be earned. Organized in this way, the plan would look something like this:

### Education and Public Relations (Category A)

Examples: Youth education projects, a new brochure, a special event or workshop

### Partnerships (Category B)

Examples: Agreements with utilities, cost-sharing or shared labor to plant trees on both public and private property, joint projects and partnerships with neighborhood associations

### Planning and Management (Category C)

Examples: Creating or updating a management plan and/or tree inventory, developing a wildlife area, initiating arborist licensing, writing a disaster plan

### Tree Planting and Maintenance (Category D)

Examples: Planting projects, pruning, hazard reduction, recycling leaves

is the “do list” of your group or organization, complete with who is responsible for leading the effort, when it should be done, and how much needs to be budgeted for each action item. This is the plan that actually achieves what has been identified in the strategic plan. In some cases, it is also required before funds can be requested for the next fiscal year.

Each organization has a different format for the annual work plan, and a different annual deadline for preparing the plan. For volunteer organizations, it is an excellent project for the end of the year or in early January. The format can be a simple list such as the one below.

Activity	Completion Date	Responsible	Cost
Select species & ask for bids for enough 1 1/2-inch caliper trees to plant one tenth of vacant sites	1/30	Sanchez Chapman	\$4,050
Contact Rotary about volunteers to help with planting	2/15	Sanchez	NA
Inspect street trees in Brighton Road neighborhoods and Frontier Park (Evaluate for hazards)	4/1	Jones Picado Washington	NA
Neighborhood planting parties	4/26	Picado	\$500

### Emergency Plan

An emergency plan is a good idea, especially for municipalities. This is created and set aside for the inevitable time when a storm or other natural disaster strikes. Then it can be retrieved and put into action almost automatically. An emergency plan should include:

- ✓ Phone and fax numbers of all who should be contacted, including local media.
- ✓ Agreements made in advance with surrounding communities for mutual aid.

- ✓ Agreements with contractors for line clearing and cleanup services.
- ✓ Pertinent policies about what to say or not say regarding deaths, damage or injuries.
- ✓ Information for use by phone operators and for distribution to the media (See Chapter 8).
- ✓ Maps and inventory data.

### Step 4: Check Progress Regularly

At the end of the year, a meeting should be devoted to an accomplishment review. With a good annual plan, this kind of evaluation is easy. It is largely a matter of reviewing the year’s list of activities and accounting for what did and did not get done. Your evaluation of progress should include statistics such as:

- ✓ Number of trees planted, by species
- ✓ Percent survival of all planted trees
- ✓ Number of trees pruned
- ✓ Number of hazard trees corrected or removed
- ✓ Expenditures and volunteer hours contributed
- ✓ Citizen requests received and serviced
- ✓ Educational events held
- ✓ Awards received

An annual evaluation not only helps justify expenditures, it is essential to track progress toward achieving the kind of sustainable urban forest spelled out in the vision statement. It can also serve as the basis for a Tree City USA Growth Award. Moreover, it makes sure that if any important component of the plan did not get done, it will be listed again in the next year’s planning cycle.



*An emergency plan is created and set aside for the inevitable time when a storm strikes.*