

MUNICIPAL/UTILITY SYNERGY: OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIPS¹

by Andrew P. Todd

There has always been a good rapport between the State Urban Forestry Assistance Program and Ohio's public and municipal electric utilities. As stakeholders in the urban environment, we have mutually attainable objectives that afford us the opportunity to develop sustained partnerships in which to facilitate the proper management of the urban forest resources.

State Program

Ohio's state urban forestry program started in 1979 with a mission to provide organizational and technical assistance to community leaders and allied agencies. A statewide network of five regional urban foresters help communities manage their urban forest resources to meet local needs.

The objective is to improve the quality of urban life by creating, supporting and/or strengthening local organizations that integrate urban forest management with other municipal services. By providing direct one-on-one assistance, state urban foresters encourage or enhance comprehensive tree care programs within participating communities, to ensure the efficient and sustained delivery of urban forest benefits.

Utility Objective

Although I don't speak for the utility industry, I assume their objective is to deliver electricity in a safe, reliable and profitable manner. Trees, other than those used for utility poles, probably don't facilitate this objective. On the contrary, in many cases they become a cost that the utility would rather not incur. A goal of the utility arborist therefore must be to minimize this expense.

In urban areas one way to accomplish this is to insure that new trees are not planted in areas that may cause future problems with above or below ground wires, and that ready access is available to

existing tree/wire conflicts. It is much more efficient for a utility company to address these concerns with a community that has an established comprehensive tree care program, rather than deal with a community lacking any type of organizational management.

This is where the objective of our two professions overlap, and where a cooperative approach to managing the urban forest resource can begin.

Examples

Examples of this cooperation come from all areas of Ohio. Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company has been a leading proponent of urban forest management since the 1950's. As a regular service, they provided master street tree plans to communities in their service area. Today they sponsor many elementary school Arbor Day programs and an annual urban forestry conference with the City of Cleveland.

Columbus Southern Power Company and the City of Columbus recently undertook a trial tree replacement project in which they identified a city street with typical tree/wire conflicts. The utility agreed to remove the offending trees and purchase suitable ones for the site, while city forestry crews provided the installation and contact with the affected neighborhood.

In Prospect, Ohio, a village owned electric utility presents the opportunity for a different approach. Community officials use the interest generated from a self-insurance fund to finance their urban forestry program.

Future Outlook

Our objective is to strengthen and formalize the relationship between the utilities and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, so that even greater assistance can be provided at the local

1. Presented at the annual conference of the International Society of Arboriculture in Philadelphia in August of 1991.

level. One recently approved idea is to cosponsor regional urban forestry conferences for shade tree commissions, the critical element of a comprehensive tree care program. These annual meetings would offer a forum that not only addresses common community concerns, but also disseminates information and receives feedback on state and national urban forestry initiatives.

Additionally, a few public utilities are interested in a Joint Tree Replacement Grant Program. In this scenario, grant applications would be accepted from communities within the funding utility's distribution area for removal and replacement of trees in conflict with utility wires. The utility would supply the funding while the state urban forestry program administered the grant. Monies would only be awarded to those communities that could demon-

strate a capacity for adequately managing their resource.

The synergistic relationship between our professions stems from the common belief that proper management of the urban forest is a local issue best addressed through a comprehensive tree care program. Therefore, anything that can be done individually or cooperatively to establish or enhance such programs will directly address our objectives as well as those of the community.

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