

URBAN FORESTRY IN THE CHICAGO SUBURBS¹

by Harold L. Robson

Abstract. Urban forestry programs in the Chicago suburbs provide services through contracts, in-house methods, and a combination of the two. The main element that guarantees a successful urban forestry program is community support through media public relations. Offering professional consulting services as a public service also promotes the necessary community support. Many programs in the Chicago area started as a result of the spread of Dutch elm disease and it is imperative to maintain these programs after the crisis is over. Cooperation and an open forum among the various professionals working in the urban forest at different levels, is another factor that aids in the continuation of urban forestry programs.

Chicago and its suburbs are composed of a six county area with a total population during the last census of 7,102,328. Of that number, 4,097,256 persons reside outside the City of Chicago proper, and approximately one half of that number reside outside the County of Cook. There are 253 communities represented in the six county area.

With over 250 communities it would seem that a large percentage of communities would have professionally managed forestry programs. This is not the case. About a dozen communities have professionally trained full-time urban foresters in charge of arboricultural operations. Half of these programs have been in existence for more than 15 years. Several communities rely on professional urban forestry consultants, on a part-time basis, for advice on programs. With this background, let us look at the programs in more detail.

Program Variations

The small number of professionally managed programs provides a relatively easy data base for analysis of program variations. The programs are handled by several different methods: (1) contractual, (2) in-house, and (3) a combination of contractual and in-house.

All of the professionally managed urban forestry programs provide full-scale maintenance service consisting of trimming, tree and stump removal, in-

sect and disease control, planting, general maintenance, and wood disposal. The removal and planting services are normally contracted, while the remainder of the services are done either in-house or in combination with contractual services.

Urban forestry programs are normally a function of public works departments whether professionally managed or not. Because of the special district legislation in Illinois, very few are managed by Parks and Recreation Departments. Park Districts do not program forestry maintenance activities in municipalities. Data on the program variations for eight cities is included in Table 1. Two of the eight cities shown are managed through a Parks Department operation.

Table 1. Program variations in 8 cities in the Chicago suburbs.

<i>Service</i>	<i>Contract</i>	<i>In-house crew</i>	<i>Combination</i>
Trimming	1	3	4
Removal	2	2	4
Insect & disease	0	5	2
Planting	5	3	0
General maintenance	0	8	0
Wood disposal	3	2	3

Ingredients for Successful Programs

Without question, there is broad agreement that the public relations aspect of urban forestry programs is essential to a successful program. The media must be aware of the forestry programs on a continuing basis, and a relationship must be established with them so they will be willing to publish newsworthy items about programs. Arbor Day programs, brochures, and other publications are necessary to tell the urban forestry story in order to gain and maintain support for programs. A program to provide professional consulting services, as a public service without charge to local citizens, can be a tremendous asset in selling the

1. Presentation made at the Second Annual Forestry Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio.

program. Contact with residents is established and the personal touch of providing hands-on information gives an image of service and professionalism which will be passed along to neighbors and friends.

Contacts with garden clubs in the community are invaluable in establishing support for programs. They can also be a source of financial and maintenance support.

Other essentials for successful programs are adequate funding, a staff of well-trained personnel to implement the program, and the ability of the urban forestry manager to promote his programs to the administrators and elected officials. Funding is more easily achieved in communities where the citizens, the city administration and the elected representatives have shown active support for programs.

Learning Experience

Many forestry programs in the suburbs were a result of the Dutch elm disease problem. Large blocks of elms were planted on suburban streets and local officials were concerned about the devastation which would follow if professionally managed programs were not initiated. Those communities with strong aesthetic concerns employed professionals to manage the control programs. From these programs have sprung more comprehensive programs of tree maintenance than was contemplated at the time they were initiated. The experiences of those communities have provided some impetus for other communities to begin forestry programs.

On the negative side is the disproportionate share of funds that are spent on saving elms. Many of the programs have concentrated on the elm problem to the detriment of other species problems. As the elm populations dwindle, the professional has an opportunity to increase the service provided for other trees of more lasting value.

Tree planting programs are changing the streetscapes of many of our cities. Where once majestic elms stood, smaller trees are being used to replace them. Species of doubtful hardiness and cultural stamina are being introduced into the landscape. Our own experience was to use some species of questionable hardiness in our climatic

zone as an experimental program, rather than using trees with native hardiness. The result is the failure of survival of some species over a long-term period. For example, in our area the tuliptree does fairly well if in a sheltered area not too far from Lake Michigan, and the London planetree suffers from severe frost crack and anthracnose. The new clones of native species are being used, but as yet not proven is their long-range hardiness, susceptibility to disease and insect pests, or adaptability to streetscape conditions.

One of the major sources of support for the forestry program has been local garden clubs. We used them effectively to reestablish a Dutch elm disease spraying program several years ago. They used their funds to pay for the spray material when funds were not appropriated in the city budget. On the other hand, they can be the catalyst for change, too. Our most influential garden club was concerned about the size and spacing of trees replacing elms on the parkway. Our standard was 50 feet between trees for large trees, and a reduction for smaller trees with no fixed figure for the distance between trees. The garden club suggested four trees be planted each 100 feet. We drew up a proposal for their consideration which established spacing requirements for large, medium and small trees. These were considerably greater than the spacing suggested, but less than the 50 feet we had been following. Discussions followed, and a compromise spacing policy, which was adopted as ordinance, was established. A benefit of this ordinance, for new subdivisions, was the establishment of a tree preservation procedure. This procedure was initiated to save trees during the installation of public improvements and new homes. The point is that the manager must be willing to adjust his thinking toward compromise, and yet not destroy his professional integrity. This approach will gain the support and acknowledgement of the citizen groups who can influence the success of urban forestry programs in the community.

Evolvement of Programs due to Changing Budget Demands

Most communities with strong citizen commitment to aesthetics are having very little trouble securing funding for urban forestry programs.

What is occurring now is a reevaluation of existing programs to determine their need and how programs can remain effective, but be more effectively managed. The reassessment is forcing urban forestry managers in our area to look at contractual versus in-house methods for getting programs accomplished.

Is it more cost effective to contract trimming, removal, and planting work? This is the heart of most urban forestry programs. The urban forestry manager is being called on more frequently to evaluate forestry programs on the basis of cost effectiveness, even though budget cuts may not be imminent. Those who are able to be innovative in their approaches, and show positive results in cost cutting, will continue to have support for their programs as long as the support of the community continues.

Cost cutting measures can be introduced by the utilization of personnel from other city departments, divisions or sections during the off-season for forestry maintenance work. Normally street departments are not as busy during the winter months. By using these personnel, it enables cities to maintain levels of productivity with less personnel. The implementation of cross training programs for city maintenance employees will improve the skills of personnel, therefore providing services to citizens utilizing fewer city employees. Vehicle and equipment fleets can be reduced by using vehicles and equipment across department and division lines. If a vehicle is used on a limited basis in one department, it can be used by another department when idle.

Insect and disease programs will become less dependent on expensive toxic chemicals and more dependent on an integrated pest management approach. Chemicals will only be used as a last resort after biological alternatives have been explored and tested.

New approaches to wood disposal will be implemented to assist in solving regional problems of disposal. Recycling centers will be developed either at government expense or by private enterprise to reuse the wood wastes rather than disposing of it in landfills. It is conceivable that in the near future there will be several regional wood recycling areas in the Chicago suburbs supported by several municipalities.

The cost of disposal, lack of response by private enterprise, and travel distance for disposal due to lack of close-in space, will force municipalities, counties and the state to explore a solution on a collective basis. Garbage-waste disposal is currently being studied by several Northwest Chicago suburbs. Solutions for wood waste disposal will not be far behind.

Maintaining Programs that Evolved from Budget Restraints

There are no easy solutions to maintaining urban forestry programs. Those communities where citizens have a firm commitment to the maintenance of the aesthetic character of their environments will continue to have little difficulty maintaining programs. This does not mean programs will be sustained without continual refinement to insure that efficiency and quality levels are maintained.

Those communities having a low sense of aesthetic importance will not maintain programs in the face of budget cuts. Services for the maintenance of the public safety and welfare of citizens will be first priority. If funds are left over, urban forestry programs will have to compete with parks, recreation, and other services considered to be nonessential in times of severe funding shortfalls. The urban forestry manager must be equipped to provide strong supporting evidence of value in order to receive a share of funds available. Only programs such as tree removal may have a chance for funding because of potential liability if dead trees are not removed.

Summary

In summary, the programs in the Chicago suburbs are not that much different than those in other major metropolitan areas. Suburban programs are similar in design, with some variations in how they are administered and accomplished. In our area, we have a group of professional urban forestry managers and people in allied fields who meet on a once-a-month basis to discuss mutual problems and concerns. The group learns from one another and has established itself as the foremost urban forestry group in the state. We have been asked to provide expertise or training for urban foresters at the state level. There is still

room for the growth of urban forestry programs in communities in the Chicago suburban area. Limited budgets and citizen disinterest in community aesthetics will be limiting factors. The urban forestry program on the state level, can assist in increasing an awareness of the need for well-managed urban forestry programs in communities.

So far in the State of Illinois, a program to satisfy the statewide community urban forestry needs has not been established. Currently the conservation department is reevaluating its programs. Many of us hope a change in emphasis will occur, establishing urban forestry as a high priority. Only through leadership at this level will there be a

substantial chance for communities to begin new programs and sustain them. It does not have to be just financial support, for strong advisory assistance is also needed.

Finally, I am pleased to be a part of the new federal and professional group emphasis on urban forestry. I believe if all these groups are combined, it can make a difference.

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ABSTRACT

PAGEL, A.A. 1983. **Urban releaf: a million trees for Los Angeles.** *Am. Forests* 89(3): 22-25, 56-58.

With the Olympics' opening day—July 28, 1984—as its deadline, Los Angeles is beginning a massive county-wide tree-planting campaign. This time the goal is not a mere 40,000 trees planted by 500 hired workers; it is *one million* trees, planted by individuals and communities. The energy and force behind this impossible dream is neither the city nor the county of Los Angeles, but the 1,700 members of the Tree People, led by Andy Lipkis. Why the goal of one million trees? "I wanted to pick a number that everyone related to as big, if not impossible, because L.A.'s big," said Lipkis. "Also, we wanted to do something so large that in order for it to succeed the whole community will have to participate. We can't do it on our own—it's deliberately set up that way." The million-tree campaign is the culmination of 10 years of volunteer forestry both in the mountains and in the streets of Los Angeles. During that 10 years, Tree People has grown leaner, smarter, and stronger, but not less idealistic or less sure of that idealism. Two months ago in January, when the main thrust of the urban-forest campaign began, Tree People had only 1½ years left to plant a staggering 980,000 trees. When confronted with the urgency of the situation, Ellie Rosenthal, Tree People staffer, expressed confidence: "I've seen miracles done here in the past, and we can do it."