

URBAN FORESTRY IN OHIO

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Using a portion of the three million Federal dollars in 50% matching funds to cooperating states, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry has established a comprehensive urban forestry program. Emphasis is to provide technical assistance to Ohio's urban residents. Since its beginning in March of 1979, the response by municipalities and individuals has been outstanding.

The objective of Ohio's program is to improve urban environments through the proper use of trees and shrubs. This will be accomplished by directing technical assistance toward units of local government, planning organizations, developers, and private individuals. Municipalities receive about 50% of the total assistance because their activities tend to benefit the most people. Cities, towns, and villages often make the most use of these services because of a lack of local expertise in this area.

Program operations are coordinated from five urban forestry project areas throughout the state. Each project area is assigned one urban forester. With an average of 18 counties per area each forester must delegate services where they will be most helpful.

To begin the program, a questionnaire was sent to 700 incorporated municipalities in the state. After one month, approximately one-third of the questionnaires had been returned, with most respondents requesting technical assistance.

As a follow-up, appointments were made with the respondents to describe program services and to become familiar with their municipalities. Technical urban forestry assistance is available to local governments in the following areas: municipal tree ordinances, street tree inventories, shade tree commissions, municipal tree nurseries, financing methods, tree planting programs, tree care programs, park use and establishment, beautification programs, and recycling of wood waste.

A tree ordinance provides the authority a

municipality has over its trees. We supply advice and guidance in improving existing ordinances as well as creating ordinances where they do not exist. This is the first step in a functioning street tree program.

Assistance is given in conducting street tree inventories. Once completed, the assets and liabilities identified justify a course of action. Tree maintenance and replacement programs follow.

To instill community interest and support for tree planting, we meet with and encourage creation of shade tree commissions. Such commissions may be solely advisory or, depending on location, have the power to enforce regulations and decisions. In either case commission members must be committed to improving their municipality by correctly using plant material.

Every municipality seeks ways of acquiring funds for tree work. Improved financing usually is linked to a public relations program. When citizens are made aware of the benefits of trees they accept the expense of a street tree program more willingly.

To prevent future maintenance problems, technical assistance is given to develop tree planting programs which are suitable to site and location. For example, tall trees would not be placed beneath power lines. Inferior tree species which break easily or produce messy fruits, flowers, and foliage would be avoided completely.

Where problems do exist, tree care programs may be developed. In municipalities where street crews perform tree work, pruning seminars have been given to display proper pruning techniques. Homeowners are also advised on caring for newly planted trees.

Urban foresters are requested to determine park land use and location which may involve determining what to remove for expansion and what to keep for beautification. Rapidly growing communities may seek advice on methods of acquiring park properties.

Local neighborhood and civic groups request

advice concerning tree beautification programs. Meeting with block or garden clubs to instill interest in tree planting gains support from these groups which can be instrumental in the well-being of a tree planting program. In some communities these groups already perform the role of a shade tree commission. Care must be taken not to exclude them from future plans. Also, the private sector composed of commercial arborists and consultants should be involved in planning and work programs.

Technical assistance is provided regarding the utilization of urban wood waste. By properly recycling wood refuse, expensive dumping is avoided and residents are provided a useful service. Recycled materials such as firewood or mulch are frequently available for citizen use.

Planning organizations occupy 20% of the urban forestry services. City, county, and regional planning organizations frequently overlook opportunities to promote tree planting. We help by supplying ideas to protect street trees already present and to provide locations for new plantings. Planning groups in cities often acquire unused open space. With proper design and tree selection eyesores are turned into attractive small parks.

Municipal planners are providing for street trees even before a residential development begins by requiring a specific tree lawn size and a provision for trees by developers. We provide advice which insures that such specifications are correct and suited to a particular group of tree species. Planners may then decide which streets will be colored with flowering trees and which will be enclosed by large trees.

An additional 20% of our assistance involves service to developers of housing or industrial sites. We are asked to determine when existing

trees can be saved and incorporated into developments. Property owners are thus relieved of frustration and high removal costs because trees that have been irreparably damaged are removed prior to home construction.

Educational programs to schools and civic groups account for 10% of our services. Such presentations not only include urban forestry but career days, field days, industry involvement, woodlands forestry, fire protection, and the goals of the department. Urban foresters are thus part of the Division's public relations team which not only informs citizens of existing programs but generates suggestions for improving them.

The remaining time is spent serving private landowners through telephone calls, leaflets, clinic meetings, and house calls. Since house calls are potentially demanding, they are serviced during trips to municipalities. A request is never refused but is handled to benefit the most people.

With large areas assigned to each urban forester, it is apparent that any indepth involvement with one group is impossible. During the 1980's an additional six urban project areas are anticipated. Until then the urban forestry program will offer only technical assistance. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, has created its urban forestry program to better service its urban residents. The program is not intended to solve every municipality's tree problems. Instead, it seeks to promote an awareness and interest in urban forestry so that Ohio's urban areas will be improved for everyone.

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