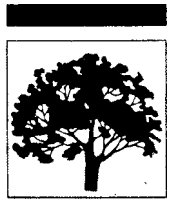

Developing a Community Forestry Program

Trees are an asset to Kansas communities. They make a community a more attractive, pleasant place to live and visit. A community forestry program, endorsed by the city government, can pay dividends far in excess of the time and modest budget expended.

This publication outlines a series of steps in the development of a community forestry program. It is directed to city council members, city managers, and others concerned-with public trees.

What Is a Community Forestry Program?

A community forestry program is sponsored by city government to provide for planting, care, and removal of trees on public property — trees in parks, along streets, right-of-ways, and similar areas.

Citizen Action Needed

The program works through a board of interested citizens. The tree board identifies goals, sets priorities, develops plans, and sees that they are carried out.

What Steps Are Necessary?

1. Appoint a city tree board. Someone must be responsible for the program, and there must be a provision for continuity from year to year. A city tree board should be appointed by the mayor or other appropriate official, and charged with the responsibility for the development and administration of a comprehensive community forestry program.

Tree board members must be capable community leaders, able to make decisions and carry out plans. Board membership requires a commitment beyond that of normal committee work. The sample ordinance covers many of the points that should be considered.

2. Conduct a community tree inventory. To define future needs, you need to have an accurate assessment of the present situation. Take an inventory of all public trees by species, number, age, diameter, and condition class. Such data will help the board to determine the following:

- Number of trees to be planted.
- Species that should and should not be planted.
- Number, species and size of dead trees in need of removal.
- Pruning and maintenance needs.

3. Define priorities and determine long-range goals. Based on the inventory information and other factors, the board can then define priorities. For example, in many eastern and central Kansas communities, removal of dead elm trees is an obvious first priority. In other communities, planting might be the most pressing need.

The determination of long-range goals (perhaps 5 to 10 years) should depend on the present situation and the anticipated growth and change in the community. Approach such planning from the standpoint, "If the community's tree environment is to be adequately provided for, then so many trees will need to be planted, so many dead trees will need to be removed, so much pruning and other care will be needed during the next 5 or 10 years."

4. Recommend legislative and policy changes. In many towns legislative and policy changes are needed to carry out a community forestry program. Some towns have ordinances that provide for proper planting of trees on street parkways. Others have policies concerning pruning and dead tree removal. The city tree board should carefully study all legislation and policies pertaining to public trees and make specific recommendations to the governing body.

5. Prepare annual work plans. Carefully prepare annual work plans to accomplish long-range goals. Plans should specify what is to be done, how it is to be done, and who shall do it. For example, a work plan for a tree planting project in a park should provide for:

- Planting design;
- Procurement of the trees;
- labor and facilities for planting; and
- Maintenance after planting. Work plans should be the basis for budget requests.

6. See that plans are carried out. In larger towns with park and forestry departments, tree boards serve in a planning and advisory capacity. In smaller communities, tree boards not only make plans but also carry them out, by ordering trees, staking planting spots, marking dead trees for removal, and other activities.

What Will It Cost?

Obviously, program costs vary according to what is done. Many annual projects can be accomplished without public monies. These can be developed and coordinated by the tree board. Other projects, particularly dead tree removal and major pruning, may require a city budget.

Sample city tree ordinance providing for the creation of a city tree board

Be It Ordained by the City Commission of the City of _____, Kansas:

Section 1. Creation of Establishment

There is hereby created and established, a City Tree Board for the City of _____, Kansas, which shall consist of five members, citizens and residents of this city, who shall be appointed by the mayor with the approval of this commission.

Section 2. Term of Office

The term of the five persons to be appointed by the mayor shall be three years except that the term of two of the members appointed to the first board shall be for only one year and the term of two members of the first board shall be for two years. In the event that a vacancy shall occur during the term of any member, the successor shall be appointed for the unexpired portion of the term.

Section 3. Compensation

Members of the Board shall serve without compensation

Section 4. Duties and Responsibilities

It shall be the responsibility of the Board to study, investigate, counsel and develop and/or update annually, and administer a written plan for the care, including planting, culture, and removal or disposition, of trees and shrubs in parks, streets, alleys, and other lands owned or managed by the city. Such plan will be presented annually to the City Commission and upon their acceptance and approval, shall constitute the official comprehensive city tree plan for the City of _____, Kansas.
The board, when requested by the City Commission, shall consider, investigate, make findings, report and recommend upon any special matter of question coming within the scope of its work.

Section 5. Operation

The board shall choose its own officers, make its own rules and regulations and keep a journal of its proceedings. A majority of the members shall be a quorum for the transaction of business.

A carefully developed program is necessary in determining budgets and in spending funds efficiently. Perhaps more important, though, is the prevention of future problems that can occur from trees planted too close to curbs, sidewalks, street corners, under utility wires, and over underground utilities.

Where Can You Get Help?

Assistance with all stages of the program, from development to implementation, is available from State and Extension Foresters of Kansas State University. They provide:

- Speakers for clubs or organizations to explain the program.
- Sample ordinances.
- Assistance with city tree inventories.
- Technical information on planting and care.
- Training for board members, city employees and others.
- Planting plan consultation.

Your County Extension office can refer you to the forester for your area, or write to State and Extension Forestry, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66502. Telephone 913-537-7050.

Many towns in Kansas have active, successful programs. Ask your forester about them. You may want to visit them and see how their programs work.

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