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# Tree Management in Minnesota Communities

## A guide for developing a community forestry program

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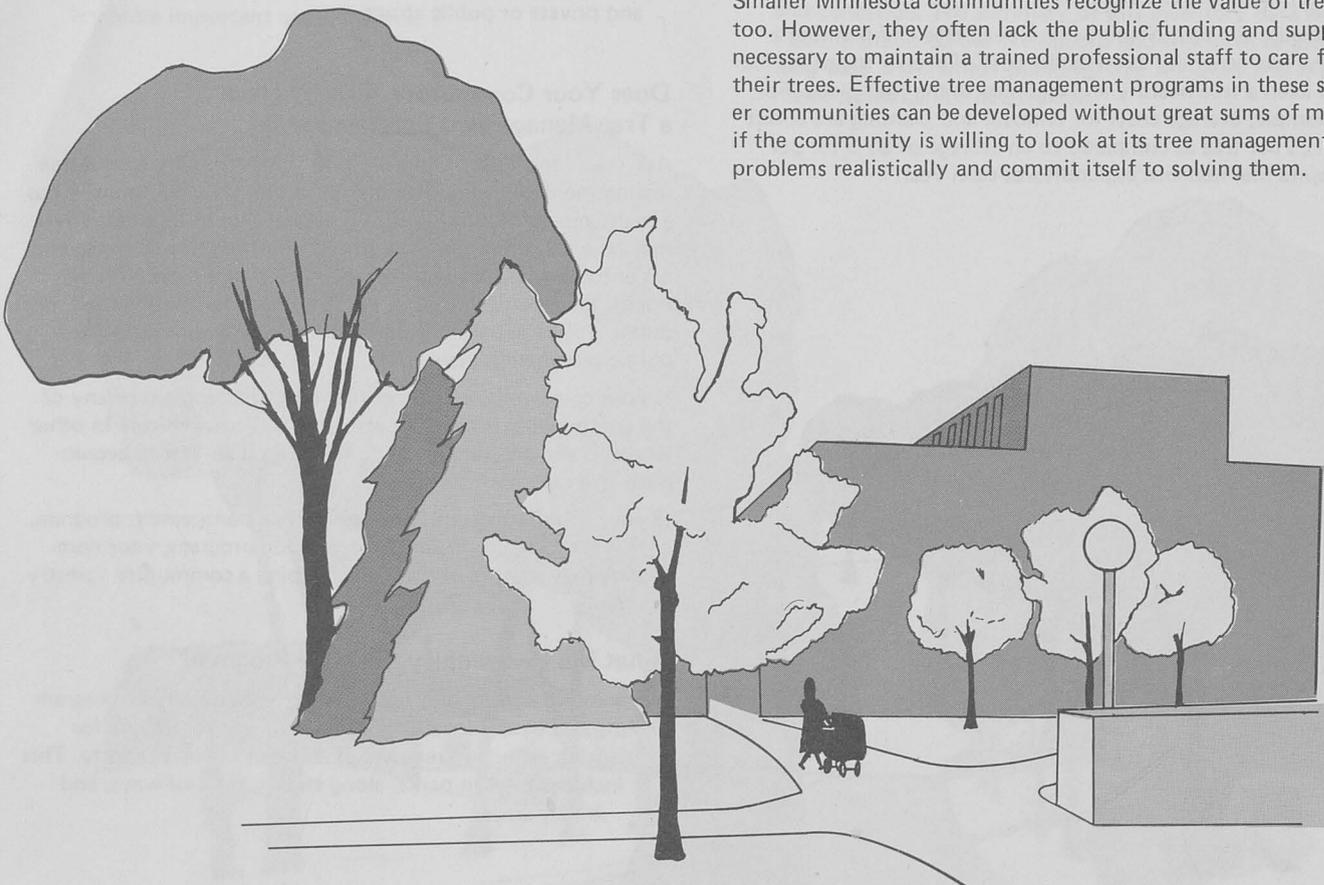


Trees are important to Minnesota communities. When properly selected, located, planted, and maintained, trees are civic assets of great value. Their presence gives a community a personality and character of its own, making life more pleasant for its residents and providing visitors with a lasting, favorable impression.

The importance of trees in Minnesota communities has been more fully appreciated and emphasized in recent years because of the loss of trees to disease. Dutch elm disease and oak wilt have made people aware of the need for more effective tree management programs to maintain, improve, and expand existing tree resources.

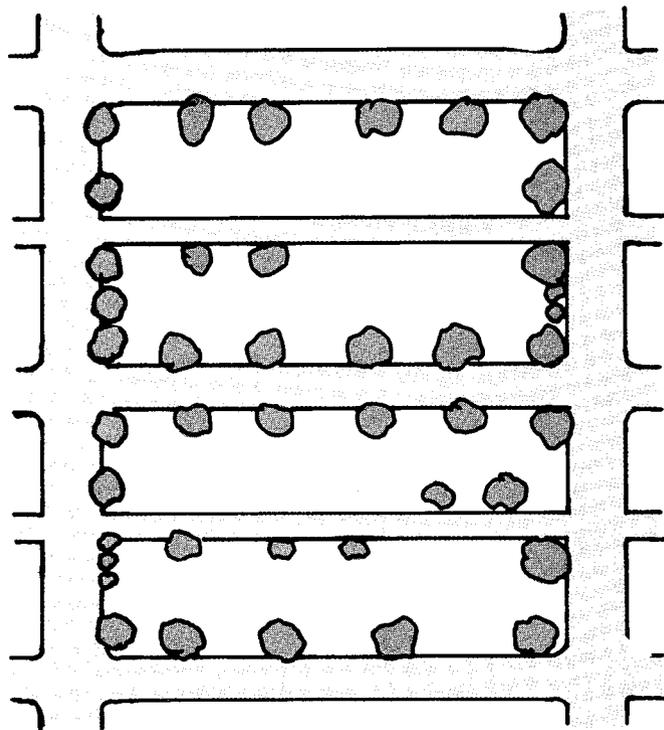
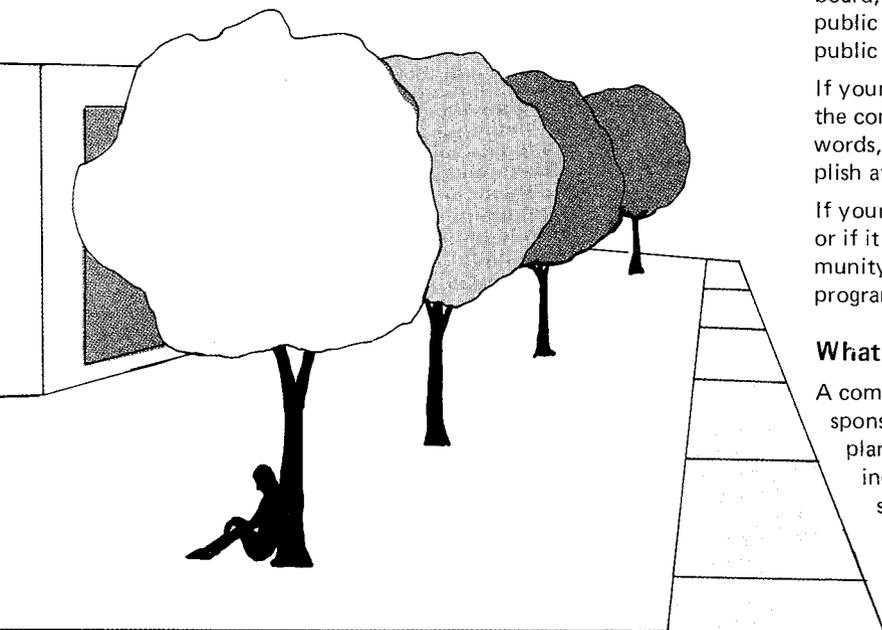
Many larger cities in Minnesota have responded to this need for more effective tree management programs. They have assigned the responsibility for handling tree management activities—planting, trimming, maintenance, removal, and public educational programs—to specific officials, boards, or departments. These cities recognize that trees and tree management are important, and that effective tree management programs pay dividends far beyond the time and modest budget expended.

Smaller Minnesota communities recognize the value of trees, too. However, they often lack the public funding and support necessary to maintain a trained professional staff to care for their trees. Effective tree management programs in these smaller communities can be developed without great sums of money if the community is willing to look at its tree management problems realistically and commit itself to solving them.



## Why Should Your Community Be Concerned About Its Trees?

- Because trees perform many useful functions in the community. They provide environmental, social, architectural, engineering, and climatic benefits.
- Because trees are a dominant landscape feature in the community.
- Because a community rich in trees, parks, and green spaces has a character and personality its residents can be proud of. This produces a healthier business and residential climate.
- Because trees create wealth. They have an actual monetary value that is recognized by real estate experts, landscape professionals, foresters, arborists, nurserymen, and others. (See *Shade Tree Evaluation*, Extension Folder 445). In addition, studies have shown that property values of homes along tree-lined streets average 5 to 10 percent higher than those along streets without trees. Trees are an investment that should be protected.
- Because trees that are well cared for rarely cause property damage from falling limbs or uprooting. Thus, the risk of damage claims is reduced. The cost of a good tree maintenance program may be much less than a single damage or liability suit against the community.
- Because well managed trees are better able to withstand costly ice and storm damage, as well as insect, disease, and "people" damage. This reduces the need for emergency tree work, continual and costly clean-up efforts, and citizen complaints about public trees.
- Because the cost of removing a dead tree and planting a new one generally exceeds the cost of proper maintenance to keep a tree healthy and vigorous in the first place. For example, average costs for removal and planting are about \$125 per tree as compared to an average of \$1-3 for per capita maintenance expenditures each year.



- Because properly selected, located, and maintained trees will reduce or eliminate the risk of interference with street lights, utility wires, sidewalks, sewer lines, clear vision areas, and private or public structures.

## Does Your Community Already Have a Tree Management Program?

Ask your local community officials if they already have a tree management program. You may find that your community has a management plan or policy for taking care of its trees. There may be a tree ordinance which controls street tree planting and other tree management activities. Also, a particular official, board, or department, such as a city forester, park board, or public utility department, may already be responsible for public tree management.

If your community has a tree management program or any of the components above, is it effective and economical? In other words, is the program reaching the goals it set out to accomplish at a reasonable cost?

If your community does not have a tree management program, or if it is time to re-evaluate the existing program, your community may want to consider developing a community forestry program.

## What is a Community Forestry Program?

A community forestry program is a tree management program sponsored by the local unit of government to provide for planting, care, and removal of trees on public property. This includes trees in parks, along streets, right-of-ways, and similar areas.

The program works through a group of interested citizens known as the Community or City Tree Board. The Tree Board identifies goals, sets priorities, develops plans, and sees that these plans are carried out.

## What Steps are Necessary to Develop a Community Forestry Program?

### 1. Appoint a community tree board

Someone must be responsible for the community forestry program. An appropriate existing unit of local government, such as a forestry department, park board, shade tree commission, or other authority, could be asked to provide leadership prior to the appointment of the Community Tree Board.

A Tree Board, composed of from three to six informed and concerned citizens, should be appointed by the mayor or other appropriate official. This Board should be legally constituted and be charged with the responsibility for developing and administering a comprehensive community forestry program. Legal constitution is important since it defines responsibilities and provides continuity of the program from year to year.

Selection of the members is important to the effectiveness of the Board. Responsibilities must be assumed, and cooperation and interest must be developed within the community. For this reason, Tree Board members must be capable community leaders, able to make decisions and carry out plans. Knowledge of trees is desirable, but leadership and interest are more important qualifications.

### 2. Prepare a community tree ordinance

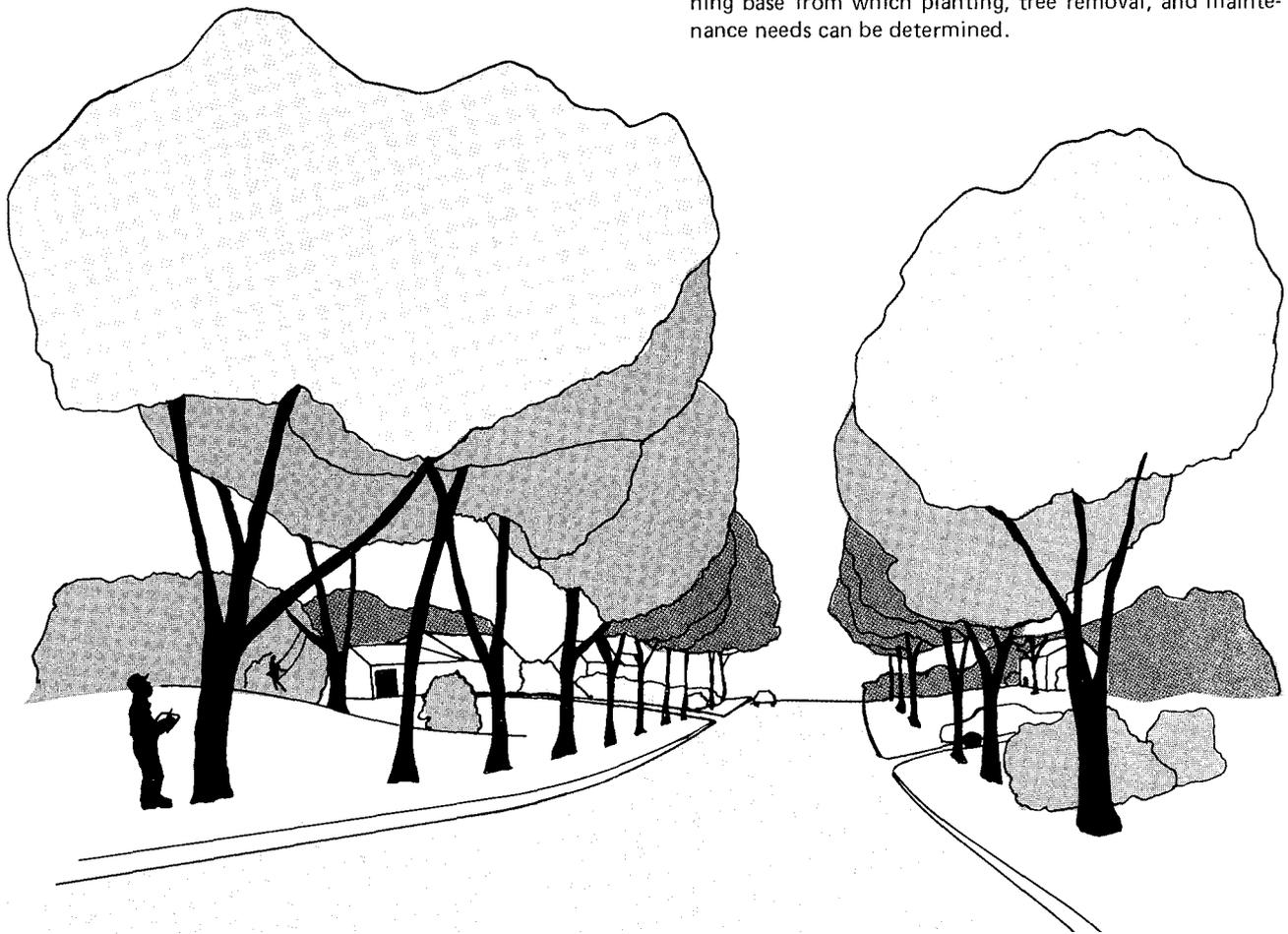
A community tree management and control ordinance should be prepared to provide for the formation of the Tree Board and give the Board authority to carry out the program. The ordinance should specify the number, qualifications, term of office, duties, and responsibilities of members of the Board.

The ordinance should also specify the operational policies and procedures for the comprehensive community forestry program. For example, it might list street trees suitable for planting, note spacing and planting location requirements, consider planting as it affects utilities, and determine public tree care policies.

Sample tree ordinances are available from other communities. However, the effectiveness of the ordinance that your community ultimately develops will depend on how well it fits the specific needs of the community.

### 3. Conduct a community tree inventory

After the Tree Board is appointed and a tree ordinance enacted, an accurate assessment of the community's tree resource should be made. This assessment can be facilitated by conducting a community tree inventory. Technical assistance for conducting community tree inventories is available from State Department of Natural Resources or Extension foresters. This assistance will generally include help in collecting the following information from all trees on public property: the number of trees by species, age, diameter, and condition. The summary of this inventory data will be made available to the Tree Board and will serve as the planning base from which planting, tree removal, and maintenance needs can be determined.





#### 4. Prepare a community forestry plan

Based upon the inventory data and other information, a comprehensive community forestry plan should be prepared. The plan should specify short and long-range objectives, needs, and priorities in the areas of tree removal, maintenance, and planting. For example, the plan might list the species and number of trees to be planted in the next 5 to 10 years. Available funds and time can then be directed more effectively toward the highest priorities or greatest needs.

The community forestry plan should also include objectives for developing cooperation and interest within the community. Every effort should be made to secure citizen involvement and input at all levels in the program. The plan, however, should focus on objectives for the program as it relates to public property since planting and maintaining trees on private property are responsibilities of each owner. But, a good community forestry plan supported by cooperation and assistance from citizen leaders and civic organizations will also stimulate activities on private property.

#### 5. Prepare annual work plans

Annual work plans necessary to accomplish the long-range objectives of the program should be carefully prepared. These plans should be specific as to *what* is to be done, *how* it is to be done, and *who* shall do it. For example, an annual work plan may list the tree work standards and specifications for tree management work to be done in the community by tree service contractors. The annual work plans will cover planting, maintenance, and removal of public trees and will serve as the basis for budget requests. They should be presented annually to the unit of local government for approval.

#### 6. See that plans are carried out

In communities that have a population of about 10,000 and more, the Tree Board may serve in a planning and advisory capacity to the park board or forestry department. In smaller communities, tree boards not only make plans, but physically carry them out, by ordering trees, staking planting sites, marking dead and diseased trees for removal, and other activities. It is their responsibility to see that plans are carried out.

### What Does a Community Forestry Program Cost?

Obviously, program costs vary according to what is done. There are many annual projects that 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 public funding.

The question of financing your community forestry program must be dealt with early and realistically. Every community has a wealth of organizations and individuals that will support a good civic program with manpower, money, equipment, or information. This is especially true of tree planting programs. Community members can accomplish a great deal if they are coordinated and supervised.

However, community action cannot be expected to support the entire program. Most municipalities will have to commit some public funds to the program. Every potential source of funding should be explored including general revenue funds, capital improvement funds, municipal front-foot assessments, special block or street assessments, and permit fees.

### Where Can You Get Additional Assistance and Information?

- The Agricultural Extension Service, University of Minnesota, can provide tree and tree management information and educational assistance to communities in Minnesota. Local offices can be found in every Minnesota county. Call your County Extension Director for access to the state specialists at the University of Minnesota.
- The Division of Forestry of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) can provide technical assistance to communities interested in developing comprehensive community forestry programs. Call your local DNR forester for access to the DNR Urban Forestry Coordinator.
- Several consulting foresters and consulting arborists offer tree management help to communities on a fee basis. They can be contacted directly or through other sources listed here.
- Professional tree service companies are vital in helping communities, plant, trim, maintain, and remove trees. They are usually available on a local basis.
- Landscape nurserymen, tree growers, landscape contractors, landscape architects and horticulturalists are available to help communities with planting and landscaping programs.
- City foresters in Minnesota's larger communities may be willing to discuss tree management problems with smaller communities. Remember, however, that these professionals have a primary responsibility to the city that employs them. You may have to visit them at their offices.
- Nearby communities may have tree management problems similar to yours. Perhaps you might help each other in developing solutions to these problems.

Contact these people for help in developing your community tree management program.