



ROUND TABLE

Building Bridges with City Departments, Part I

Roundtable participant and Milwaukee, Wisconsin Forestry Services Manager David Sivyer says, "Like trees in rural forests that are associates of various symbiotic plant communities, MAs exist in a community of municipal professionals that has symbiotic potential. To effectively manage urban forest resources, MAs must be equipped with skills and knowledge that extend well beyond forestry and other science-based curriculums to design and engineering, construction management, political science, and interpersonal relations."

In this issue, we hear about bridge-building relationships from Mark Mead of Seattle, Washington; Paul Dykema of Lansing, Michigan; and David Sivyer of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In the next issue of City Trees, we hear from Gene Hyde of Chattanooga, Tennessee; Gordon Mann of Redwood City, California; Nolan Rundquist of Seattle, Washington; and Melinda Adams of Fort Worth, Texas.

Seattle Parks has benefited from two outstanding partnerships with other agencies. Over ten years ago we helped create the Urban Forest Coalition (UFC), an interagency group of seven departments within the City that have some management oversight of trees. Three years ago we helped create the groundbreaking Green Seattle Partnership with a large nonprofit, our public utilities, and our mayor to address a benignly neglected portion of the urban forest, forest remnants/forested parklands.

Without our internal and external partners, we would not be able to even dream of achieving our goals of moving Seattle from 18% canopy cover to 30% in the next 30 years, or to restore over 2,500 acres of forested parkland to native condition in the next 20 years.

In 2006 we unveiled the Urban Forest Management Plan for Seattle, an ambitious plan that creates 30-year goals for all areas of the city. The UFC was the principal body for the development of this plan. The UFC is made up of Seattle's Department of Planning and Development, Department of Transportation, Parks Department, Office of Sustainable Environment, Public Utilities, City Light, Seattle Center, and Department of Neighborhoods.

While we have diverse agency objectives, we came together to create a plan that sets strategies for planting on private property, on public lands, and in rights-of-way. Our goals are part of the Mayor's Climate Action Plan, which is the genesis of the nationwide Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, an effort to address global warming and the creation of sustainable and livable cities by meeting the Kyoto Protocol. As part of this effort, the mayor recently signed an executive order requiring a 2:1 tree-replacement ratio for any tree removed by the city on streets or in our developed parks.

Serving the UFC's agenda is the Green Seattle Partnership, a volunteer-driven (75,000 volunteer hours per year) program that addresses the removal of invasive species and the planting of native trees and shrubs across Seattle's forested parklands. At the behest

of our mayor, we have developed a partnership with over 100 neighborhood "Friends of (Park Name)" groups, a regional land conservancy (Cascade Land Conservancy), the Office of Sustainable Environment, and Seattle Public Utilities. Our ambitious goal is the clearing of head-high blackberry and

tree-choking ivy from over 2,500 acres of land. More importantly, we are developing the funding and best management practices that will not only pay for the initial work but will also provide for the maintenance of these forests into the future.

Our highly experienced, professional, and motivated arborists and foresters work daily with citizens and all levels of planners, engineers, designers, builders, managers and executives to find creative ways to increase and improve the urban forest. In 2005 these efforts won Seattle the First-Place City Livability Award from the United States Conference of Mayors.

Mark C. Mead
Senior Urban Forester
Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation

I'm glad to say that our urban forestry program enjoys an unusual amount of support from professionals in other city departments. Lansing is located at the convergence of three rivers in a relatively flat area in south-central Michigan. As you might imagine, this area has always been heavily wooded. The City passed its first tree planting ordinance in 1873 and hired its first city forester in 1913. That person was eventually hired as the director of parks and recreation. Three subsequent city foresters have also become director. Needless to say, we have lots of trees. This all means that people being raised in Lansing are growing up in a forest. Many City employees are longtime residents of Lansing and have an ingrained appreciation of our forest and are glad to provide us with support.

Our history of having a city forester since 1913 affects the attitudes of other professional staff toward our department. The position of city forester is institutionalized in Lansing. Most professional staff hired by the City become aware during their employment that the forestry section exists and become acquainted with its responsibilities.

Support for the forestry program by other professional staff takes form in several ways in Lansing. Planners are well aware of the importance of being a livable city and actively seek input from our forestry staff on development issues. Building code compliance officers know that trees can be hazardous and seek forestry staff's assistance in determining the hazard status of private trees so that concerns can be addressed. All the streets in Lansing are tree-lined, and because of the density of our tree population, copies of construction permits are sent to the city forester in order to insure that damage to trees due to construction is minimized.

Our tree population density leads to support from unanticipated quarters such as the police and fire departments. Because the police know that forestry is the organization contacted when they find limbs in the roadway, they also realize that the trees are the

responsibility of the forestry section. As a result of that knowledge, we have had several instances of police who, upon seeing people pruning or killing trees, stop and question those people about their tree cutting activities. The forestry section recently provided the fire department employees with a chainsaw safety course, which provided us with the opportunity to interact with most of the City's fire department personnel. Fire department staff has also watched our aerial rescue training and has provided forestry employees with CPR and First Aid training.

Finally, we come to the engineering staff. We are very fortunate that the main engineering school in Michigan is Michigan Tech. That university is located in the far reaches of our Upper Peninsula in the middle of a 50,000-square-mile forest and is where most of our city's engineering staff went to school. It is also the university I attended for forestry and is where I met my wife, the current assistant city engineer.

Paul Dykema
Forestry Manager
Lansing, Michigan

While the opportunities, challenges, and methods for building successful relationships with peer professionals vary among communities, my success from a streetscape management perspective (infrastructure design, construction, and maintenance operations) is rooted in three principles: establish authority; learn the language; and share the passion.

Establish authority.

The best way to establish authority at the municipal level is through ordinances that assign responsibilities for managing and protecting the urban forest resource to the city forester. Some communities elect to assign management authority and provide protection for urban trees through administrative directives. However, as administrative directives are not codified laws, they are only as strong as the administration in power and more easily circumvented by the "old guard" that exists in virtually every government agency or organization.

It is important when developing ordinances to include all the stakeholders who will be impacted by the ordinance. City Council members faced with a room full of disgruntled voters take a dim view of staff attempts to ramrod new ordinances and initiatives lacking public support. In Norfolk, Virginia where I served as its first city forester for 17 years, over twenty internal and external organizations—including municipal departments, the major utility company, contractors, and gardening and beautification groups—participated in the development of a comprehensive municipal tree ordinance that continues to serve the City well. The process, while arduous at times, resulted in a solid ordinance and marked the beginnings of a strong coalition for improved forest management and protection in Norfolk.

Effective tree ordinances include provisions that keep the municipal forester engaged in design, construction, and maintenance operations that impact publicly managed trees. Common provisions include a mandatory site plan review and forestry approval of infrastructure improvements or repairs, forestry permit requirements for incidental construction and maintenance activities within the critical rooting area of protected trees, value-loss-compensation for damaged or displaced trees, strong deterrents for noncom-

pliance, and clear enforcement authority. A strong tree protection ordinance consistently brings the municipal arborist (MA) to the table with peer professionals and creates opportunities to develop lasting relationships that can have a profound impact on the health and sustainability of the urban forest.

Learn the language.

MAs with responsibilities for managing and maintaining urban tree populations will interface with engineers, architects, municipal maintenance personnel, and contractors on a regular basis. It is important to develop a working knowledge of each respective profession—including common terms and applications sufficient to understand the implications of their work on the urban forest. It is equally important for MAs to understand and accept the fundamentals that limit design and engineering options for minimizing impact to existing trees—things like grade, gravity, and the demands of sanitary sewer systems. MAs should be aware of emergent technology, such as "pipe bursting" or "cured in place liners," that provides alternatives to open excavation for utility repairs within the critical root zone of trees. Equipped with this knowledge, MAs will be able to offer design and construction suggestions that lead to win-win solutions that support infrastructure improvements while minimizing tree impacts.

By learning the language of traffic, stormwater, utility engineers, and the construction trades, Milwaukee's urban forestry technicians routinely influence engineering and construction practices that favor street tree planting and preservation. While the tree ordinance ensures that the forestry staff remains engaged, it's the relationships and mutual respect shared by the engineers, contractors, and urban foresters that consistently result in win-win solutions for infrastructure improvements and repairs and forestry. The collaborative development of a curbing machine that reduces back-of-curb clearance requirements from six inches (15 cm) to one inch (2.5 cm) serves as just one example of how Milwaukee foresters and contractors are working synergistically to reduce construction damage to city trees.

Share the passion.

Most MAs would agree that urban forestry is more than just a profession—it's a passion. For whatever reason, most other municipal professionals seem to lack passion. Genuine passion consistently articulated with a clear vision is energizing and inviting. The energy that MAs bring to the table can be very helpful in building bridges with peer professionals.

People respect passion. Use it to your advantage. The tools available today for quantifying the structure, function, and value of the urban forest provide unparalleled opportunities for MAs to apply and communicate the science behind the passion in terms that engage peer professionals and "grow" the team.

MAs who establish authority for managing the urban forest, learn the language of peer professionals, and effectively communicate a passion for professional urban forest management will enjoy lasting synergistic benefits that serve to elevate the individual urban forestry program and the profession at large. 🌱

David Sivyer
Forestry Services Manager
Milwaukee, Wisconsin