

NEIGHBORHOOD TREE ADVOCACY

Goal: Focus on neighborhood-based initiatives and solutions to urban forestry issues

Pittsburgh is home to 90 unique neighborhoods, ranging from the old historic areas to newer developments. Pittsburgh is truly a city of neighborhoods, and the residents celebrate these geographic and cultural enclaves. This sense of place and source of pride strongly motivates many residents to be actively engaged in maintaining or improving the character of their neighborhoods.

Our urban forest is just as unique as our neighborhoods. Citywide, the canopy cover is 42%. On a neighborhood basis, there are vast disparities between the composition and condition of the urban forest when comparing neighborhoods, ranging from 5% to 85% canopy cover. [6]

Engaging and supporting individual and neighborhood tree advocacy is a highly effective means of promoting a healthy, safe, and sustainable urban forest, and creating equitable access to urban forest resources. Community members have the greatest stake in and commitment to transforming neighborhoods. As residents and business owners, they have a vested interest in their neighborhoods' quality and success; they have a deeper understanding of their community and which issues to focus on that make sense.

The effectiveness of neighborhood tree advocates to affect change comes from these characteristics of the advocates themselves:

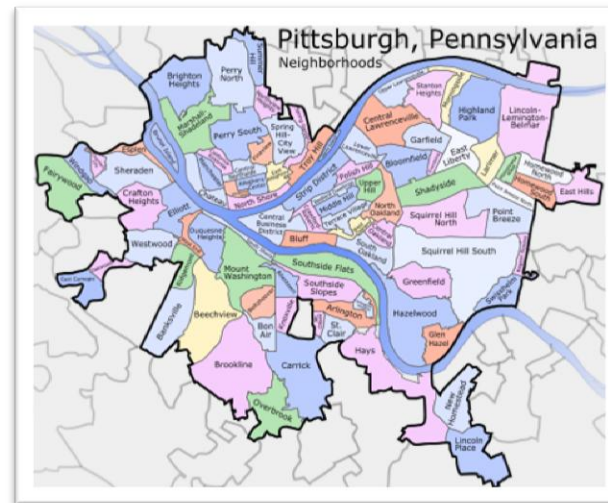
Ability to Voice Specific Needs and Wants of their Neighborhood—Tree advocates are in regular contact with neighborhood leaders, residents, and businesses.

Ability to Reach People—Tree advocates can distribute information effectively.

Credibility with Decision Leaders—Many tree advocates have earned the respect of other community members and have established relationships with these stakeholders, including the media, public policy makers, city and county staff, local allied nonprofits, potential funding organizations, and elected and appointed community leaders.

Trust of Neighbors (Ability to Educate and Influence)—Neighborhood tree advocates are viewed as trusted sources of urban forest information.

Ability to Empower and Mobilize People—Because of their relationships and ability to communicate quickly and effectively with neighbors, tree advocates can assist in mobilizing them to participate in urban forestry events and to take action on urban forestry issues.



Map of Pittsburgh's 90 neighborhoods.

Understanding the Neighborhood—Because they are integrated into the community where they live and serve, tree advocates can make sure that the efforts and projects of Tree Pittsburgh and the City are pertinent and useful to the community.

Issues

- To work effectively with neighborhood tree advocates, it is important to recognize the challenges they face and the likely implications for their ability and/or willingness to become an advocate for the urban forest. A common challenge for tree advocates is that they have time constraints.
- Individuals and established community groups are likely working with a limited budget and do not have their own resources to spare for urban forestry initiatives. Some level of funding/support should accompany any request for advocacy work.
- While the goal may be to increase individual participation and community-based activism, Tree Pittsburgh may be approaching potential advocates who may not know what the concept of a sustainable urban forest is, or how increasing tree canopy benefits the neighborhood, or what kind of maintenance trees require to be safe and healthy.
- Based on public outreach campaign results, residents are willing to support new legislation or rules regarding tree planting and tree protection.

Recommendations

- Solicit feedback and input directly from neighborhood tree advocates about how to increase activism and interest in the urban forest.
- Educate and inform the neighborhood tree advocates on larger citywide issues, such as changes and improvements to urban forestry legislation and funding, and engage them to collectively support these important issues as appropriate.
- Engage citizen groups and local organizations to identify neighborhood issues that trees and their benefits can help address. Use trees and urban forestry projects as tools to make positive change at the neighborhood level.
- Tree Pittsburgh should continue to be the primary agency that facilitates neighborhood urban forestry needs and opportunities.
- Tree Pittsburgh should strengthen the relationship with community development entities to help develop neighborhood-focused, urban forestry projects.

Neighborhood Tree Advocacy Case Study

Successful Advocacy in Pittsburgh Neighborhoods

Project Description

Polish Hill—Polish Hill is a small neighborhood situated within Pittsburgh’s famous hillsides. It has 35% canopy cover and is one of the more active and successful community-based urban forestry initiatives. Interest and action for tree care and planting in Polish Hill began with a community garden project that showed residents how to interact with nature in an urban environment, collectively creating small but significant changes in their neighborhood. With help from Tree Pittsburgh, the Polish Hill Civic Association built on the success of the community garden to create a neighborhood green team and Tree Tenders group. Polish Hill is considering posting QR Code® tags on trees, holding urban edibles walking tours, and planning events designed specifically to inspire their neighbors to interact with their trees and each other. [53]

Lessons Learned

- Electronic communication and personal interaction with residents are the best communication methods to inform and engage citizens. The messaging efforts need to come from neighborhood leaders who are out in the community every day.
- Partnering with other neighborhood councils and groups is very successful but currently limited. These collaborative efforts should be expanded and conducted on an informal basis.
- Identify the “social butterflies” in the community to be advocates for neighborhood tree projects; they can learn more about trees, but their keen, innate people skills are highly valuable for generating interest and support.
- When organizing a tree event, it is important to learn from both success and failure.
- Be respectful of other people’s time. Understand people have time constraints to volunteer and may be equally committed to other groups and causes, and that meetings and events need to be scheduled in the evenings or weekends to accommodate most people’s schedules.

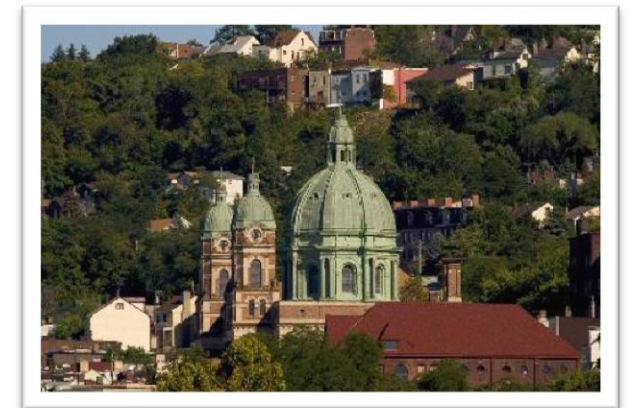
Highland Park—Highland Park is a small, historic neighborhood situated adjacent to the Allegheny River, the 500-acre Highland Park, and the Pittsburgh Zoo. It has nearly 50% canopy cover and is another of the more active and successful community-based urban forestry programs. Interest and action for tree care and planting in Highland Park began with a single request for a replacement tree denied by the City due to lack of funds. TreeVitalize® and Tree Pittsburgh had just begun operating, and the resident went to Tree Pittsburgh for assistance; that resident became the community’s first Tree Tender, and is now a Director of the Highland Park Community Council and is still a champion for neighborhood trees. There are now 35 Tree Tenders who care for the neighborhood trees and organize over a dozen tree-related events each year. [54]

Lessons Learned

- Electronic communication (via the Council’s website and listserv) and personal interaction with residents are the best communication methods to inform and engage citizens.
- Partnering with adjacent neighborhood councils and groups is very successful. Highland Park’s first tree planting was done in cooperation with East Liberty. Additional planting events have since been held with East Liberty, and the Council is trying to assist Morningside to establish a tree program and to organize a joint planting project.
- Dispelling misconceptions continues to be a challenge. People are reluctant to plant more trees or care for them since they perceive trees as messy, disruptive to pipes and sidewalks, or dangerous. It is important to educate and enlighten residents about their concerns, in terms they can understand.
- Volunteer management is also a challenge but must be dealt with, understanding that fellow residents have limited time and shifting family and work priorities. Offering food and drinks at every tree-related event tends to draw more people since it then becomes a social event as well.
- When starting and sustaining a tree program, willing partners and excited volunteers are necessary to get the word out and to recruit others to the cause.
- Interacting with other community groups, even if they are not doing tree-related work, will help neighborhood advocates learn from observing the organizational, partnering, and leadership skills of others.
- Scheduling a season’s events well in advance is needed to ensure a place on people’s calendars.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead
1901-1978



Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in the Polish Hill neighborhood.

“My vision is that I play a direct part in making Pittsburgh’s urban forest grow and caring for it, as well as involving much of my community in this endeavor too!”

Anonymous, 2011
Tree Pittsburgh Public Opinion Survey

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Goal: Implement a coordinated and comprehensive outreach and education campaign

Prior to 1995, public awareness and education levels about proper tree care and planting and the importance of trees in neighborhoods and in the city-at-large were lacking in Pittsburgh. The Carnegie Mellon University report documented that the urban forest was in severe decline as an indirect result of this lack of awareness and public engagement. As a result of this report, the City re-established the Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission (PSTC) in 1998 in order to preserve and maintain as many trees within the City as possible by increasing public education and support for urban forestry. To promote education, the PSTC created the Tree Stewards program—trained volunteers who assist the Public Works Department with tree planting and maintenance and act as “ambassadors” for the PSTC and the public forest. [13]

Tree Pittsburgh (originally known as Friends of the Urban Forest) was founded in 2006 by the Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission, and has grown to be the primary agent in providing public education, outreach, and engagement in the care and protection of our urban forest. Public outreach is key to Tree Pittsburgh’s vision of being the local leader in growing a sustainable urban forest.

Current Conditions

The City, PSTC, and Tree Pittsburgh use very similar techniques and outlets for conducting public education and increasing awareness: websites, community newsletters, social media, neighborhood meetings, volunteer training, special events, and tree planting and maintenance projects that engage the public. Currently, Tree Pittsburgh is actively seeking to improve and expand its education and outreach efforts by launching the “Tell Us Your Tree Story” campaign, and further engaging the services of professional public relations and graphic arts firms. Successful partnerships have been established with TreeVitalize®, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Nine-Mile-Run Watershed Council, and numerous neighborhood development groups.

Public outreach and education could be considered part of almost every urban forest management action, so it is difficult to define the financial and staff resources of the primary agencies dedicated toward this effort. The City and the PSTC spend time maintaining websites and educating citizens during daily activities as well as at special events, but this is not quantified. Tree Pittsburgh has a defined budget and currently almost \$170,000 is expended for outreach and education. In 2008, Tree Pittsburgh created an Outreach Coordinator position dedicated to this effort, but the position is responsible for other tasks as well.

Issues

Tree Pittsburgh and the City currently do not have a coordinated communications plan and messaging to guide them, or current and potential partners, in efficiently and effectively delivering information on important urban forest issues.



Students from the Montessori Public School identify trees on Arbor Day.

- No stable funding currently exists for broader urban forestry outreach efforts from the City.
- No clear procedures or policies exist for communication to improve coordination and gain greater awareness among city agencies that impact the urban forest.
- There is a lack of a coordinated communication efforts by the City and Tree Pittsburgh with the utility company and other large stakeholders.
- Current communication efforts are not specifically tailored to the diverse cultural and socioeconomic groups that work and live within the City. It is important to build on a community’s existing communications infrastructure and to ensure equity in communication efforts by considering language barriers, educational level, and cultural values.
- There is a need to reach out to and connect with people who are indifferent to, or care little about, the value of trees.
- Most communication efforts to date have been to promote Tree Pittsburgh events and activities. There is a lack of outreach to the general public on proper tree care and planting.
- The public outreach campaign results indicated a need for education related to particular tree issues the public perceives negatively: infrastructure conflicts, leaf and fruit litter, and utility conflicts.

Recommendations

- Create and sustain a comprehensive communications plan that addresses effective ways to engage all stakeholders.
- Expand the neighborhood communications network by identifying advocate groups or representatives in every neighborhood.
- Hire staff who are dedicated solely to public outreach and education.
- Consider direct advertising of Pittsburgh’s urban forest “brand” to reach more citizens and decision-makers.
- Identify the most effective means of communication for residents in each neighborhood.
- Create an education program for orienting newly elected public officials to Tree Pittsburgh’s and the City’s urban forestry program, efforts, and goals, and to promote interdepartmental education opportunities.
- Explore potential funding opportunities for public outreach efforts and projects with foundations, private firms, and government grants.
- Align communications actions with the Vibrant Cities & Urban Forests 2012 Recommendation #1, *Create a national education and awareness campaign.* [47]



Example of media from the Tell Your Tree Story campaign.

Case Study: Public Outreach and Education

The “Fit Forest Campaign”; City of Elgin, Illinois

Project Description

Just recently, the City of Elgin’s urban forest was at risk from multiple threats, and their urban forestry program was not focused on sustainability. The City and key stakeholders knew that action was required to protect this resource and that the public has the greatest influence on it. As most of the trees that comprise Elgin’s urban forest are on privately owned property, city residents, property owners, and business owners influence this resource by how well they care for the trees on their respective properties.

The public further influences their urban forest by participating in public processes regarding land development, program funding allocations, and urban forest legislation. The citizens of Elgin effectively own both the public and private urban forests, and the City knew that without greater political support and increased citizen understanding and commitment, the urban forest in Elgin would be at risk. With American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) funding support, a comprehensive public education campaign was created for the City—The Fit Forest. City staff and community partners work cooperatively to educate the public about the benefits of trees, the City’s urban forestry program, and what can be done to improve trees on private and public land [55].

Accomplishments

The Fit Forest is a multi-faceted, education campaign, created by the professional firm of C.E.L., meant to inspire Elgin residents and visitors to grow a healthy, safe, community forest by providing tools and education regarding tree maintenance, risk reduction, tree planting, maximizing tree benefits, controlling invasive pests and diseases, reusing and recycling wood waste, and improving native ecosystem habitats.

Key messages were announced at community events and on the City’s and partners’ websites. The marketing toolkit contained event banners, topical factsheets, magnets, bracelets, gift bags, sports bags, temporary tattoos, PSAs, and other media resources. As part of the Fit Forest’s “Go for the Green” theme, City officials were able to reward residents and businesses for their green efforts by presenting certificates of merit and Fit Forest gold medals to wear or display proudly at their homes, in their offices, and even on their trees.

Everyone was encouraged to be part of the greening of Elgin. The City makes all printed materials available in Spanish and leverages the resources of the Elgin Community Network to communicate urban forestry news, events, and messages at neighborhood meetings, community events, such as concerts in the park, and other special events such as Arbor Day, National Public Works Week, 4th of July Parade, Green Expo, and the Citywide Block Party.

Lessons Learned

- By developing and implementing the Fit Forest education campaign, the City’s urban forester learned that there is great benefit to having theme and concise, targeted messages ready to engage citizens in the care of the community forest and to help them understand the goals and responsibilities of the City’s urban forest management program. More specifically, the City learned:
 - Sharing the campaign messages and products with allied agencies maximized the effectiveness of the outreach. Collaborating with diverse groups (such as the Elgin Area Chamber of Commerce, Commonwealth Edison, public libraries, and the Elgin Community Network) leveraged the City’s campaign to reach more people in more ways.
 - Collaboration on the education campaign led to unexpected financial support by the controlling utility company. When presented with a professional, cohesive public outreach program that reflected their own values, the utility company pledged significant funds to support proper tree planting in the rights-of-way.
 - It is important that the City’s urban forester be a key participant in developing and disseminating the campaign messaging, but it is not a City Forester’s expertise. A communications professional or specialist should be charged with the details creating the campaign elements and implementing related and new initiatives.



VOLUNTEERISM

Goal: Encourage public and private participation in urban forest management through volunteerism

It is said that volunteers have time to give, not time to waste, and that they are unpaid not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.

Understanding what volunteers value about their role and what motivates them to give their time, skills, and energy is crucial to recruiting, retaining, and motivating them.

Motivation—keeping employment skills up-to-date; building a resume, making a difference in the environment, widening a social network, feeling like a part of something bigger, learning new things and having new experiences, requirements for school, and reacting to an issue.

Recruiting Methods—web, mailing, word of mouth, targeted, and public relation efforts.

Retention—rewards, recognition, and enjoyable events.

Results—stronger programs, cost savings, and community buy-in.

There is clearly an important role for volunteers in urban forestry; this is evidenced by the proliferation of similar volunteer organizations that provide citizen-based municipal tree care across North America. These organizations may have different names for the volunteers: Citizen Foresters (Washington, DC, and Newport, RI); Tree Stewards (Portland, OR; Fall River, MA; and Richmond, VA); Citizen Pruners (Binghamton, NY; New York, NY; and Thunder Bay, ON); and Tree Tenders (Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, PA). Volunteers are usually involved with tree planting, pruning, mulching, watering, and other activities related to tree establishment. Most often they are organized either through their respective state university cooperative extension or a local nonprofit. They are often the strongest advocates for urban forestry in their municipality.

They frequently work in harmony with municipal employees and public sector unions. In Ithaca, NY, the Cornell Cooperative Extension-organized Citizen Pruners works with public works employees represented by the Civil Service Employees Association. Rather than taking jobs away from professional arborists and city employees, these volunteers are seen to strengthen municipal programs through advocacy. They fill niches and accomplish tasks that would otherwise go undone.

Current Conditions

Tree Tenders is a training program that empowers concerned residents to make dramatic strides towards restoring and caring for their local tree canopy. The Tree Tenders training course was developed by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) in collaboration with Penn State Extension. It is based on PHS's Tree Tenders program, which since 1993 has trained over 3,200 volunteers in 150 neighborhoods across Pennsylvania. The course is designed for lay people and experts alike. The 8-hour training covers simple tree physiology, urban stresses on trees, basic pruning and tree pit care, and tree identification. Since 2004, the program has been supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resource's TreeVitalize® initiative and continues in support of their mission to increase Pennsylvania's tree canopy.

Tree Tenders, led by Tree Pittsburgh, is making a difference in Pittsburgh, planting, performing tree maintenance, and organizing their community. To date, there are over 1,000 Tree Tenders in the Pittsburgh area. "Tree Tenders are the National Guard of the arborist world, a civilian group taking care of what the pros can't quite get to." *Pittsburgh City Paper, Best Way to Get Your Hands Dirty*, 2011. [56]

Issues

- Volunteer and public employee interaction can lead to successful partnerships through a fair and open negotiation process between management and labor.
- Liability and risk exposure are issues that can be addressed through means such as contracts, agreements, insurance, and background checks.
- The scope of work allowed through volunteerism must be clearly defined to reduce the unintended and inappropriate actions by "rogue volunteers".
- Volunteer burnout can be avoided and reliability improved by proper reward and recognition.
- Coordination of volunteers with objectives of the professional program is a function that is essential for city managers and officials to review and modify as necessary in order to achieve positive results.
- Safety issues and safe work habits like the proper use of personal protective equipment should be routinely communicated to volunteers as a program requirement.
- Projecting an appropriate and identifiable public image must be understood and practiced by volunteers.



Tree Tenders planting trees on South Side Trail.

Recommendations

- Concentrate volunteer efforts in disadvantaged neighborhoods where tree canopy is lowest.
- Examine similar programs in the US and Canada and adopt innovative practices for use in Pittsburgh.
- Formalize the relationship between the Tree Tenders program and the City of Pittsburgh with a Memorandum of Agreement or other contractual understanding.
- Create an advanced Tree Tenders course aimed at arborist certification for veteran Tree Tenders.
- Create synergy by increasing collaboration with other organizations involved in environmental efforts such as the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy Urban Ecosteward Program and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy's extensive volunteer program.
- Foster corporate and university volunteer programs by engaging the principles of civic stewardship.

Case Study: Volunteerism

CommuniTree Stewards, Syracuse, New York

Project Description

Necessity is the mother of invention: such was the case with the CommuniTree Steward program in Syracuse, NY, run by Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Onondaga County. Syracuse's urban tree canopy had been on the decline since the spread of Dutch elm disease of the 1950s and was further reduced by the 1998 Labor Day Storm. These events drove home two salient lessons: diversify tree species and prune weak branch unions while trees are still young. [58, 59]

Funded by the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County, the CommuniTree Steward Program started in 2002 as a way to cost-effectively plant and maintain trees by exchanging tree maintenance classes for volunteer work on public trees.

Students enroll in the winter and begin the required CCE courses in April. Course work includes tree biology, soils, basic pruning, structural pruning, proper mulching, watering, tree identification, matching tree species to the site, and tree planting (bare-root and container). Students are closely monitored and instructed during urban forestry projects; by the end of the summer, most are doing excellent work and need little supervision. When fall comes along, CommuniTree Stewards participate in large-scale, bare-root planting events. Veteran Tree Stewards, who return yearly to work on tree projects and plantings, will often pair up with new Tree Stewards and will serve as instructors.

Accomplishments

This program developed a highly skilled, motivated volunteer workforce who planted and maintained thousands of trees in the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County villages. Volunteers are also able to serve on specialty projects such as tree inventories and invasive species mapping.

Veteran CommuniTree Stewards have gone on to organize their own neighborhood and park tree projects, so the program has had an impact beyond its own projects.

Tree Stewards make very good ambassadors for the cause of increasing the urban tree canopy. They are knowledgeable and can effectively respond to objections and dispel misconceptions regarding tree-related issues.

Lessons Learned

Program success largely hinges on effective recruitment, management, and retention of volunteers:

- Make it fun and sociable: they are volunteers, not employees. Make time for visiting after training and project work.
- Be organized: start on time, end on time, and do not overwork them. Celebrate what was accomplished, do not complain about what was not completed.
- Keep them safe: emphasize tool safety and utility wire safety, provide high-visibility safety vests.
- Keep it interesting: provide more advanced workshops for veteran stewards.
- Tact and diplomacy: keep a level head if a difficult situation arises.



CommuniTree Stewards remove suckers from the base of a street tree.



During training, volunteers learn correct pruning techniques from a certified arborist.



Volunteers and public works crews often work side by side in urban forestry.