

Key Issue #4: Making Urban Forestry a Central Element of Community Planning at the Regional Scale

For the full range of human and environmental benefits of urban forests to be realized, cities need to be planned with trees and urban forests as a core feature of community infrastructure, instead of as an afterthought. Thought leaders suggested that a shift is needed in how trees are understood – from thinking about individual trees to managing urban forests at a regional scale. There is a need to find new ways to manage trees and urban forests as central infrastructure both within municipalities and at the regional level. For example, the urban forestry department in the city of Milwaukee is located within the public works department, and trees are considered any time a decision affects the city's infrastructure. Lastly, to maximize urban forest health and function as well as the ecological and psycho-social benefits of community forests, forests needs to be approached and managed across political boundaries on a larger scale, at the bioregional or watershed scale.

IDEAS FOR ACTION - Gaps, Needs, Opportunities

- Encourage and train foresters to become part of the decision-making process at the local level. Foresters need to be at the table with the planners, municipal utilities, landscape architects, and developers from the beginning, so that soils and trees are part of the planning process from the beginning.
- Support the development of master plans at the regional scale for urban forests, which include planning for resilience and biodiversity.
- Support inclusion of urban and community forestry as central elements of all community comprehensive or master planning efforts.
- Develop template goals for urban forests and parks to be accessible to all community members.
- Develop metrics and standards for urban forest access, such as a metric that everyone should be able to access an urban forest within a five minute walk or one-quarter mile.
- Consider encouraging bioregional or watershed level planning for urban forests through Planning District Commissions, or at a Federal agency planning level, to ensure that urban forests are managed for optimal health.
- Support development of adequate funding for regional planning and urban forest installation and maintenance.
- Develop metrics for measuring how well urban forests are being managed for resilience, sustainability, health and safety.
- Through an effective public awareness and education campaign, increase the value placed on trees and urban forests as an integral piece to sustainable infrastructure. Increase UCF visibility in public space planning, infrastructure and private development. Develop design standards for UCF to have a higher priority over development, and focus on no net loss of existing urban and community forested areas.
- Create measurable means for both urban trees and site preparation (maintenance, preparation, watering and pruning needs) to be an integral part of a city's planning process. Urban and community planning, as well as architect and landscape architect-driven designs need to pay particular attention to designing for urban trees and forests as it is not possible to put them in as afterthoughts.

- In the development process, foster the expectation that architects should specify urban forests at the outset of a development process so they are not eliminated if budgets are cut. Also, encourage reduction or elimination of impervious surfaces that fragment and threaten urban forests.
- Expand opportunities for urban foresters to be part of the decision making process at the locality level. There is a strong need for foresters to be at the table with the planners, municipal utilities, landscape architects, and developers at the beginning of decisions affecting community infrastructure, development, and urban trees and forests.
- Highlight the benefits of contiguous urban forests for wildlife, habitat, feeding grounds, active and passive recreation, and psycho-social benefits of urban forests, especially with regionally-adapted native trees and plants.
- Encourage use of urban conservation easements as a means to preserve remaining forested lands in urban areas. Casey Trees in Washington D.C. has just started this program.