



Gauging Public Opinion of Urban Trees and the Community Forest

To better understand what citizens or elected officials of a community think of trees in their city (the urban or community forest); it may be necessary to survey them either formally or informally. The purpose of this document is to provide some basic questions to include in a survey for the public and for elected officials. The questions are taken from various published or on-line sources and categorized according to their area of interest. Not all questions may apply to your community. It is hoped that a community desiring to put together a survey will choose those questions that pertain to their community's situation or design their own questions using these questions as examples.

Public Survey Questions

Urban Forest Benefits

How do the citizens see trees? Are they useful organisms that help us environmentally, socially, and/or medically, or are they just fixtures placed around town to make things look pretty? The answers to these questions will help you understand where your citizens are currently in how they view trees, and how much education is needed to improve support for your urban forest program.

In your opinion, how do your community's trees contribute to the following items. (none, somewhat, greatly, or not sure)

- the aesthetic beauty of your community
- the reduction of air and noise pollution in your community
- the improvement of your community's social climate
- the reduction of residents' energy costs
- the improvement of your community's image
- the improvement of your community's economic development
- the improvement of residents' quality of life
- the increase in residents' property values
- affecting stormwater and water quality
- air quality

How important do you believe each of the following is for having trees in your community? (not important, somewhat important, very important, don't know)

- Increased property values
- shade
- create a unique community character
- aesthetics/beauty
- enhancing community appeal to attract new businesses
- enhancing community appeal to attract new residents
- enhance recreation areas
- buffer sound
- education
- places for community to meet socially
- provide food for inhabitants
- air quality improvement
- reduce wind speed
- prevent soil erosion
- provide wildlife habitat
- absorb stormwater runoff

What are the primary benefits of trees in your city? Check up to three items.

- Air quality improvement
- Increased property values
- Stormwater runoff control
- Shade
- Community pride, attractiveness, image
- Enhancing community appeal to new residents, businesses, or shoppers
- Stormwater runoff or water quality
- Traffic calming
- Enhance recreation areas
- Other _____

Public Services

How do the citizens view the importance of public tree maintenance compared to other city services? These questions will show you how important spending local taxes on tree maintenance and management are for community residence in comparison to other services and the current condition of those services in the public's viewpoint. You may want to include other less high profile services in the list.

Rate the importance to you of the following items (not important, somewhat important, very important):

- road maintenance (such as upkeep and drive-ability)
- police and fire services
- commercial and residential development
- sewage services
- city trees and their establishment, maintenance, replacement
- water services
- garbage services
- parks and green spaces

Rate the condition of the following items in your community (poor, fair, good):

- road maintenance
- police and fire services
- sewage services
- city trees and tree maintenance
- water services
- garbage services
- parks and green spaces

To gauge the level of education that is needed to improve support for your urban forest program, the following questions may provide some insight.

What municipal department manages trees?

Does your community's annual budget allocate funds for urban forest management?

Does your community celebrate Arbor Day and have you ever attended?

Do you live in a Tree City USA community?

Is there a citizens' group in your community that advocates for a healthy urban forest?

Does your community have a tree board that advocates and advises on the management of the city trees?

Have you noticed any tree board projects in your community in the last 3 years?

If yes, please name where one project was located?

Does your community have an ordinance that protects trees during new construction?

Does your community have an ordinance that requires trees to be planted after new residential construction?

Does your community have an ordinance that requires trees to be planted after new commercial construction?

City Landscape Issues

How do the citizens view their community's quality of life? These questions will help you to better understand how your citizens see their community and the role that trees play in it.

Rate the importance of the following items (not important, somewhat important, very important):

- trees in and around parking lots
- landscaping in parking lots and on city-owned property
- large trees in or around parking lots and on city-owned property
- preserving some trees on newly developed land

Rate the condition of the following items (inadequate, just right, excessive):

- the amount of trees in parking lots
- the amount of landscaping in parking lots and on city-owned property
- the number of large trees in or around parking lots
- the number of trees being preserved on newly developed land

Of the following tree related issues, which three are the most important concerns to you in your city?

- Hazard trees
- Tree preservation or protection
- Heritage or Historic trees
- Timber harvesting
- Topped trees
- Vandalism
- Root conflicts or problems
- Insects and disease problems
- Stormwater/Water quality
- Lack of tree cover

What are the primary negative aspects of trees to you in your city? Check up to three items.

- Debris removal after storms
- Tree disposal
- Financial cost of maintaining trees (e.g. infrastructure damage, repairing vandalism)
- Tree/sign conflicts
- Tree/sidewalk conflicts
- Solar access problems
- Hazardous trees
- Tree/utility conflicts
- Other _____

Regarding the public trees in your city, how important is it to you for your city to: ("rating" question, on a scale of 1-6, from not important to important)

- Increase Community Infrastructure Value
- Decrease Hazards from Trees
- Improve Community Appearance
- Decrease Broken Curbs and Sidewalks
- Provide Shade
- Promote Business Development
- Create Habitat for Wildlife
- Control Soil Erosion

Overall, how would you rate the quality of the trees and vegetation in your community? (poor, fair, good)

Rate the following in terms of how the urban forest is important to you (not, somewhat, or very important):

- Pleasant / attractive streets
- Amount of shade along streets / sidewalks
- Appearance of the trees (condition)
- Diversity of species / characteristics
- Number of trees in parks
- Number of trees along streets
- Safety

Rate the current condition of the following in your community (not, somewhat, or very important):

- Pleasant / attractive streets
- Amount of shade along streets / sidewalks
- Appearance of the trees (condition)
- Diversity of species / characteristics
- Number of trees in parks
- Number of trees along streets
- Safety

How would you rate the level of economic development in your community?

(its not enough, its just right, its too much)

Would you support increasing land development in your community even if it meant removing a large portion of trees to do it? (yes, no, not sure)

Would you support preserving trees in your community even if it meant suppressing land development to do it? (yes, no, not sure)

Would you support city-regulated land development in your community while conserving trees at the same time? (yes, no, not sure)

Please state whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or are uncertain about the following statements:

The community needs to do more to enhance/improve our urban forest

Trees in our community are a nuisance

Trees in our community are in poor condition (unattractive)

I worry about my safety (personal or property damage from trees) when storms approach

The public should be more involved in decisions affecting the management of our community's urban forest.

Education

What is the best way to get educational information to your citizens? How best do they learn or receive their information? If educational information is not packaged in a way that people can use or understand, then it doesn't matter how good the message is, it still will not be received. Ask your citizens how they best gain knowledge, and develop educational materials so that they will be more inclined to receive it and use it. These questions may help you better understand how to get information to your citizens.

Which of the following sources of information about trees and tree care is most important to you (choose only one).

- internet
- talking with family or friends
- local extension office
- local workshops
- tree trimming company
- other (please specify)

Which of the following items is the most preferred method for you to understand about trees and tree care (choose only one).

- written words (such as books, brochures, periodicals)
- video (such as video cassette, television programs, DVDs, internet)
- hands-on exercises (such as workshops or volunteer activity)
- a combination of written text, video, and hands-on exercises
- other (please specify)

What is the primary motivational factor for you in obtaining information about trees and tree care (please choose one)?

- because you desire a prettier space
- because you have environmental concerns
- because you want to lower utility bills
- because your neighbors are planting trees
- because you desire a shady property
- Other, please specify

What is the primary factor preventing you from gaining information about trees and tree care (please choose one).

- You are not that interested in the subject
- You do not have the time
- You do not have the money
- You do not know where to find the information
- You have no way to get the information
- other (please specify)

Elected Officials and Municipal Department Director's Survey Questions

Community Tree Values

How do your elected officials and department directors see trees? Are they useful infrastructure for the city, fixtures placed around town to make things look pretty, or are they a nuisance to maintain? The answers to these questions will help you understand where your city officials are currently in how they view trees in your city, and how much education is needed to improve support for your urban forest program.

Public shade and street trees properly planted and cared for improve the appearance of a community (strongly agree to strongly disagree)

Public shade and street trees are important for maintaining a healthy community environment (strongly agree to strongly disagree)

Trees properly planted and maintained in business districts help to attract customers to the area (strongly agree to strongly disagree)

Public shade and street trees properly planted and cared for enhance the quality of life in a community (strongly agree to strongly disagree)

What are the primary benefits of trees in your city? Check up to three items.

- Air quality improvement
- Increased property values
- Stormwater runoff control
- Shade
- Community pride, attractiveness, image
- Enhancing community appeal to new residents, businesses, or shoppers
- Stormwater runoff or water quality
- Traffic calming
- Enhance recreation areas
- Other _____

What are the primary negative aspects of trees in your city? Check up to three items.

- Debris removal after storms
- Tree disposal
- Financial cost of maintaining trees (e.g. infrastructure damage, repairing vandalism)
- Tree/sign conflicts
- Tree/sidewalk conflicts
- Solar access problems
- Hazardous trees
- Tree/utility conflicts
- Other _____

Of the following tree related issues, which three are the most important concerns to your city?

- Hazard trees
- Tree preservation or protection
- Heritage or Historic trees
- Timber harvesting
- Topped trees
- Vandalism
- Root conflicts or problems
- Insects and disease problems
- Stormwater/Water quality
- Lack of tree cover

Regarding the public trees in your city, how important is it for your city to: ("rating" question, on a scale of 1-6, from not important to important)

- Increase Community Infrastructure Value
- Decrease Hazards from Trees
- Improve Community Appearance
- Improve Efficiency of Staff Effort
- Decrease Broken Curbs and Sidewalks
- Provide Shade
- Promote Business Development
- Create Habitat for Wildlife
- Control Soil Erosion

Municipal Funding For Community Tree Programs

How much funding is designated for urban tree maintenance in your community, and on what is it spent? How willing are your officials to invest in the urban forest in the future and what are the roadblocks to funding? These questions can help you understand how much can get done currently and what is needed in the future to improve the community forest program.

Municipal government should provide funding for the removal of hazardous trees to protect the public from harm (strongly agree to strongly disagree)

Municipal government should provide funding for tree planting and maintenance to beautify the community (strongly agree to strongly disagree)

Municipal government should provide funding for tree planting and maintenance to increase environmental health (strongly agree to strongly disagree)

Municipal government should provide funding for tree planting and maintenance for economic enhancement (strongly agree to strongly disagree)

Does your community keep a record of annual expenditures related to public tree planting and care?

Please estimate what percentage of the total municipal budget was spent in each of the following tree related categories last year

- Planting
- "Maintenance (Pruning, fertilization, staking, etc)"
- Pest Control
- Removal
- Education
- Administration

Are you aware of the state and federal grant funding opportunities available for local community tree programs? (yes or no)

Within the next two years, how likely or unlikely is it that your city will: (6 point scale of unlikely to likely)

- Start or expand a tree planting and care program
- Maintain an existing program at the same level
- Reduce the size or budget of the program

How much will each of the following factors impact the creation, implementation, or expansion of a tree planting or care program in your city within the next two years: (6 point scale of negative to positive)

- Budget constraints
- Availability of technical assistance
- Availability of grant funds
- Citizen demand
- Community participation
- Local elected official's interest
- Having qualified staff to manage program
- Having adequate staff to manage program
- Local political climate
- Public safety/risk from hazard trees

Shade or Street Tree Ordinances

The answers to these questions can be researched by yourself, but it may be a good idea to see how much your elected officials and department directors know about any landscape ordinances. The responses may help you to determine if development of an education program is needed.

Does your community have a shade or street tree ordinance? (yes or no).

If your community has a shade or street tree ordinance, does the ordinance include the following provisions? (yes, no, don't know)

- List of recommended tree species
- Regulates which tree species may or may not be planted as street trees
- Site requirements for planting public trees
- Requirement for citizens to obtain a permit or permission to plant trees on municipal property
- Section protecting public trees from construction damage
- Section prohibiting the topping of public trees
- Regulates removal of dead or diseased trees
- Regulates tree removal on private residential property
- Section giving community the authority to require removal of infectious diseased trees on private property
- Section giving community the authority to require removal of trees located on private property which are determined to be hazardous to the public
- Regulates tree removal on private land being developed
- Defines who is responsible for public tree maintenance
- Establishes a heritage tree program
- Recognizes established standards for proper tree care

Information on Numbers of Public Trees

To avoid duplication of effort, it is necessary to find out if recent tree inventory data and/or a management plan exist among various departments.

Do you have an estimate of the number of public trees there are in your community? (yes or no)

If your community has a public tree inventory, is it kept updated? (yes or no)

Has your city conducted an inventory of any of the following? Check all that apply.

- Forested lands within the city limits
- Park trees
- Street trees
- Trees on private land
- Significant or Historic Trees

Does your city have a Community Forest Management Plan? Yes No

Personnel Responsible For Public Trees

It is necessary to find out which departments have interactions with or direct responsibilities for trees. The responses to these questions may help you coordinate and implement tree care standard operating procedures.

Do you have a municipal department or employee assigned responsibility for public trees for at least a portion of their job duties? (yes or no).

What municipal departments have responsibility for public trees?

Who is the individual with principal responsibility for public tree management and care? (Please check all that apply.)

- Public Works Director
- Street Superintendent
- Parks Director
- City/Community Forester or Arborist
- City Administrator / Manager
- City Planner
- Community Development Coordinator
- City / Village Clerk
- Elected Public Official (please give title)
- Other (please specify)

What portion of his/her job is devoted to working with trees? (Please check appropriate answer.)

- > 50%
- Between 25% and 50%
- Between 5% and 25%
- < 5%

What is the level of training for the municipal employee with principal responsibility for public tree management and care? (Please check all that apply.)

- College degree in forestry, horticulture, biology, park management or related field
- Two-year technical degree
- ISA Certified Arborist
- IAA Certified Tree Worker
- Training through commercial tree service
- Attendance at tree care workshops
- No structured training in tree care
- Other

How are the following public tree care services provided to your community? (Please check all that apply.)

<u>Providers</u>	Municipal employees	Private contractor	Utility company	Community volunteers	Not Provided
<u>Tree Services</u>					
Tree planting					
Watering & Mulching					
Pruning on request					
Pruning on cyclic basis					
Pest control					
Tree removal					
Storm cleanup					
Community education					
Recycling landscape waste					

Opportunities, Problems, and Assistance Needs

Do you have any annual community festivals or events where trees would be considered of value?

- Arbor Day tree planting ceremony
- Spring flowering tree festival or event
- Shade for a summer community festival or event
- Fall tree color festival or event
- Public Christmas tree decorations
- Other (please specify)

Are you aware of any particular problem your community is experiencing with its trees? (yes or no)

- Lack of citizens' support for tree planting
- Lack of community officials' support for tree planting
- Poor survival of newly planted trees
- Loss of mature trees to construction/development
- Insect or disease problems
- Hazardous trees
- Trees growing into utility lines
- Other

Are there any citizens' or youth organizations in your community or county which promote tree planting and care? (yes or no)

Are you aware of the Tree City USA program? Yes No

What do you think are the main benefits of the Tree City Program? Check the top three benefits.

- Positive Community Image or Pride
- Recognition for hard work
- Makes city more attractive for new residents or businesses
- Flag, street signs, Arbor Day observance
- It's a sign the city cares about the environment
- Encourages planning for tree management
- Other _____

What are the barriers to your city becoming a Tree City? Check all that apply.

Don't know about the program

Can't see the benefits of it

Can't meet the \$2 per capita requirement

No support for program among city leaders

No support for program among city residents

Don't have the time to complete the paperwork

Lack knowledgeable city staff or volunteers to care for trees

Other _____

Acknowledgement

The survey questions found in this document were taken directly from City of Pineville Urban Forestry [Kennedy, V.R. (2007)], Illinois small community tree programs: Attitudes, status, and needs [Green, T.L., T.J. Howe, and H.W. Schroeder (1998)], and Urban and Community Forestry in Oregon: Results of the 2004 City Survey [Ries, P.D. (2006)]. Kim Davis (University of Tennessee) and Bonnie Lewis (Southeastern Louisiana University) were helpful in providing insight and direction for this document.

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