

# WHAT SHOULD BE THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN MUNICIPAL ARBORICULTURE? <sup>1</sup>

by Robert W. Skiera

As local budgets are being trimmed, the role of government in municipal forestry is becoming more important each budget year.

a. Federal grants should be available to supplement tree removal programs in municipalities with epidemic outbreaks; this would enable the municipalities to maintain a good sanitation program.

b. The government should supplement reforestation programs as a result of Dutch elm disease removals, as the communities apparently are unable to increase funds normally allocated for this program.

c. Monies should also be made available to small communities to hire a consultant or a forester to set up a short- and long-range program for vegetation control including tree inventory, removal program, maintenance program, and planting program, in addition to a city tree ordinance, and master shade tree program.

If the community desires to hire a consultant, the consultant must understand the urban forester's problems, such as politics, environmental constraints imposed on city vegetation, an understanding of the available hybrid sterile trees which are to be grown under city conditions, trees which will complement the architectural structure of the street, as well as an understanding of the various ordinances within the community, such as lighting and traffic ordinances. The consultant must understand the different soil types within the city, drainage patterns, compaction problems, and conditions imposed by the use of salt and herbicides commonly used in the community. These factors should be a major concern as the government foresters are not trained, nor do they generally relate to the harsh constraints of the municipal forest.

The government should not grant monies to the

cities unless there is a commitment on the part of the city fathers to maintain the vegetation after it has been planted. As too often happens, trees are planted at great costs and are not properly maintained after planting. In many of the small communities, the people that maintain the trees are the same people which are picking up garbage, plowing streets, and doing other labor activities within the community. Therefore, a commitment on the part of the municipality for continual maintenance should be a prime concern of the government.

There appears to be a reluctance of the small communities to participate in federal programs as they have small arborist crews, modest equipment, and they feel they will be unable to maintain the added vegetation under their present appropriations. As a rule, from my experience, monies for forestry projects do not rate a very high priority on the local level.

It would appear that federal monies are available for needed local projects that would normally never be funded on a local level due to a lack of funds and priorities. To cite an example, in the City of Milwaukee, the government turned over a 170-acre parcel of land which we call Havenwoods. It has been designed to be a natural green space within the city limits, with further plans to make it into an environmental awareness center. To date, the city's appropriation has been extremely minimal but has been funded almost entirely through federal grants. It was granted under a Community Development Block (CDA) grant of \$100,000 for clean-up purposes and \$25,000 that same year under the Economic Development Act (EDA). In 1976, the Bureau of Forestry was granted another \$100,000 from CDA to hire a consultant to determine an overall site development plan and implement a buffer strip planting around the

---

<sup>1</sup> Presented at the ISA convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in August of 1977.

perimeter. At this point in time, the city has yet to appropriate funds for the maintenance of this buffer strip planting. The city also has received in the 1977 CDB Program another grant of another \$100,000 for site development which would include planting, prairie contouring, etc.

Forestry projects in the City of Milwaukee rank a relatively low priority due to a number of reasons, with most engineering projects ranking the highest priority such as: sewers, street paving, lighting, and bridges; things which would appear to be a monument. Some of the reasons that I can see for this priority rating is that the larger communities have a large staff of engineers that are able to work up long-range plans. An example in the City of Milwaukee, on street paving there is a current, a six-year, and a 20-year paving program. With this large staff of technical people they are able to write the applications, fill out all necessary data required, perform the environment preview, and write an *environmental impact statement* as is necessary. It also enables them to be able to plug in projects to fit grants on a very short notice as plans are developed.

The Bureau of Forestry in the City of Milwaukee made use of federal grants for tree planting prior to 1975. In the spring of 1975, the Bureau of Forestry was given funds under the Model Cities grant to plant 2½ to 3" trees in an area where establishment of 1½" trees was almost impossible, with the government paying the difference between the normal 1¼ to 1½" trees and larger. A total of 418 trees were planted under this program, at a cost of \$120.94 per tree. This successful planting in an area where it was extremely difficult to establish the small caliper tree resulted in the city fathers passing a resolution that the Bureau of Forestry would limit their planting to 2 to 3" caliper trees.

The following fall, the Bureau was granted \$265,560 under the CDA grant to plant 2½ to 3" caliper trees. This planting was limited to a fall

planting in 1975, and resulted in planting 2,183 trees at a unit cost of \$121.40. The following year, the City of Milwaukee was granted \$340,000 to plant trees. The Bureau of Forestry asked to reduce the size of these trees to 2 to 2½" caliper. This request was granted and the Bureau planted 3,522 trees in the fall of 1976 for a unit cost of \$96.52. We have attempted to do our federally funded plantings in the fall planting season so as not to interfere with our normal spring planting program.

At this time, the city fathers have been gracious to us and have not cut the funds for the city's planting program, therefore, enabling us to maintain a healthy reforestation program without backsliding due to the large losses from Dutch elm disease. The third-year CDA grant for tree planting will amount to \$375,000. We have purchased 36,018 trees, with a projected unit cost of approximately \$103.00. The use of the federal grant in the City of Milwaukee, Bureau of Forestry, appears to be a healthy program as far as reforestation of the city is concerned. Our major concern is the future maintenance of the newer trees during the present fiscal crunch. The tree maintenance budget appears to the city fathers as a likely place to trim expenditures. Government subsidies have historically been granted in the form of seed monies to accomplish a specific objective without regard to the ongoing maintenance needs. In the area of urban forestry it has to be recognized that trees are not inanimate objects and are in need of continual maintenance in the critical first three to four years following planting.

*City Forester  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*