

TREE CITY USA¹

by John Rosenow

A few years ago, the only concession to plants and trees most cities made was silver tinsel Christmas tree street decorations. Today, thanks to many organizations, some cities and towns have added the green of trees to their color scheme.

One of those organizations, the National Arbor Day Foundation, began a campaign to promote tree planting and care in the nation's cities. The Foundation calls that program, becoming more popular yearly, the TREE CITY USA program, and every community in the country is eligible to become a TREE CITY.

The Arbor Day Foundation figures show that over half of the trees in most towns are on public property. Someone has to care for them, and often, the job takes low or no priority. Trees are planted haphazardly. Dead trees are not removed and new trees are not planted. It is important that an organized program be developed to care for a community's trees, the Foundation says, and the TREE CITY USA program is designed to help cities with the task.

The Foundation cites a number of reasons townfolk should be concerned about city trees. Among them are: development of a character and personality; improvement of air quality; a psychological counterpoint to the urban setting; property value increase; insulating effects and resulting energy savings in heating and cooling; and reduced noise levels.

The Foundation's motto: "Trees . . . a joy forever," tells of another very important reason for concern.

TREE CITY USA standards have been developed through the professional leadership of the National Association of State Foresters and the Forest Service — a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. One division of the Forest Service is only concerned with urban and community forestry programs. The urban and com-

munity forestry program was authorized by the Cooperative Forestry Management Act of 1950, amended in 1972.

The urban and community forestry program provides technical assistance in planning, insect and disease control, planting, maintenance and care, development of forest land and wood use, according to Bob Nobles, the program chief.

Nobles explains that this program is administered at the state level through state foresters or other state officials. Appropriately, TREE CITY USA designation must be approved by the state forester.

Other expertise in urban forestry is available in some communities through the U.S. Extension Service, an educational arm of land grant universities. An extension agent in urban forestry is usually funded on a cost-sharing basis between county and state.

In addition to a state forester or extension forester, a community may employ its own arborist, or tree specialist. This person may run his own department, or may be another official with tree care added onto a list of other duties. Many communities have no persons with formal tree care duties. In those communities trees are usually maintained by private citizens or organizations . . . or nothing is done at all.

In recent years some communities have realized the important part trees play in the overall quality of life. These communities have begun aggressive and successful tree care and awareness campaigns. Those communities can benefit from the TREE CITY USA program in a number of ways.

First, the program provides a reward for work that could otherwise go without formal recognition, particularly on a national scale. Second, TREE CITY USA keeps communities current on new ideas and innovations in tree programs begun in other cities. And third, the program can provide the year-to-year continuity necessary in maintain-

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ing a program.

For communities without an active tree program, TREE CITY USA benefits are obvious. The Foundation stresses that ANYONE can make the initial effort to see that their community qualifies as a Tree City. Often mayors and city managers, and garden and conservation clubs have provided the impetus . . . but anyone on any level can do it. TREE CITY USA can be incorporated into an existing conservation, beautification or improvement organization.

However, Arbor Day Foundation officials stress that TREE CITY USA is not just an award given for pretty trees — but more importantly, it is reserved for programs which make trees pretty and help keep them healthy and attractive.

Tree City USA Standards

—A legally constituted municipal tree body. This is the administering group in a municipal forestry program. It can be a department, board, commission or other authority. In communities with over 10,000 population, city forestry departments with paid employees are usually possible. In smaller towns, tree boards are usually recommended. Tree bodies must have the legal status and carry responsibility for development, and administration of the tree program. Many times, members of the board in a small town also must do the physical work involved in a tree program. Often, a successful tree program may be completed by civic and service clubs. However, these organizations can lack the year-to-year continuity of a tree board.

—Adoption of a city tree ordinance. An ordinance allows for formation of the tree board. The ordinance should specify the number and qualifications of the members, their terms of office and their duties and responsibilities. The ordinance should include sections on the operation of the board, list street tree species to be planted, note spacing and planting requirements, consider planting as it effects utilities, and finally, should determine public tree care policies. (Note: A sam-

ple city tree ordinance is included in the TREE CITY USA application brochure.)

—A comprehensive community forestry program. Before a program is begun the community should take an inventory of all trees growing on public property and their condition should be noted. The inventory will provide a basis for tree work records for tree trimming, tree planting, tree removal and maintenance, and provide information for quick answers to citizens' and utility questions. After the inventory is complete, a report combining the present situation and including plans and recommendations should be written and submitted to the city governing body. The three general activities in a municipal forestry program — planting, maintenance, and tree removal — should be given priorities. For example, a community hit with tree disease should place emphasis on dead tree removal. The tree board should serve in a planning and advisory capacity with city employees physically carrying out the work. However, as mentioned earlier, in many small communities, the tree board will also do the work.

—Arbor Day observance. To create public appreciation of trees, an Arbor Day proclamation is made annually and a commemorative tree planting takes place. This can be done on the date designated for the observance of Arbor Day in your state or on an alternate date convenient to your local tree planting season.

The four TREE CITY USA standards must be met by each community, and an application completed and submitted to the state forester for his approval before a city can become a TREE CITY, and join the greening of America.

To obtain more information about TREE CITY USA, people can write to me at the following address:

*Executive Director
Arbor Day Foundation,
Arbor Lodge 100
Nebraska City, Nebraska*