

City of Pittsburgh Develops Urban Forest Master Plan

The Challenge

For more than a century, the city of Pittsburgh has recognized the value of its trees. Public trees shade Pittsburgh's numerous city parks, line city streets, and provide benefits to its residents. Budget concerns and shifting city priorities, however, took their toll on the health and number of trees over the years. Recent tree inventories in Pittsburgh revealed the need to prioritize tree planting throughout the city and identify maintenance schedules to reduce tree risk and damage and make trees healthier.

The Solution

In 2006, the city's Shade Tree Commission founded Tree Pittsburgh. This independent nonprofit organization works to enhance the city's vitality by restoring and protecting the urban forest through tree maintenance, tree planting, educational efforts, and advocacy.

To sustain and enhance Pittsburgh's urban forest, Tree Pittsburgh launched a Master Planning Initiative in 2010 to accomplish these goals:

- Address environmental challenges
- Coordinate a vision for the urban forest
- Develop baseline metrics and clear goals for urban forest managers
- Cultivate lasting advocacy for the urban forest and increase civic participation
- Facilitate efficiency and cooperation with all urban forest partners

The initiative gathered over 50 key stakeholders from Pittsburgh, the region, and the Nation.

“When people think ‘great outdoors,’ they think of places like Yosemite. They need to start thinking about places like Pittsburgh, too. Eighty percent of our country’s population is in urban areas, and we know the importance trees have on the psyches of humans.”

*—USDA Deputy Undersecretary
“Butch” Blazer*



A Tree Pittsburgh tour highlighted several urban forestry projects, including the South Side Riverfront Trail.

Tree Pittsburgh successfully applied for a competitive grant from the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry to develop an Urban Forest Master Plan. Collaborative partners, including the Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission and the RK Mellon Foundation, provided additional funding. In addition, Tree Pittsburgh established a steering committee of public and private partners, including a Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry Urban Forester, to help guide the overall effort.

Resulting Benefits

- Establishes an objective of increasing Pittsburgh's canopy cover by 20 percent by 2032.
- Promotes a volunteer program that teaches residents about tree planting and the proper care and pruning of trees.
- Pittsburgh's tree nursery provides a diversity of tree species for local tree planting efforts.

Sharing Success

- On June 28, 2012, the Urban Forest Master Plan was unveiled at a special ceremony with Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl and USDA Deputy Under Secretary “Butch” Blazer in attendance.
- Tree Pittsburgh's success provides a model for other metropolitan areas to use when developing similar urban forest master plans.



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