



Elgin Fit Forest Campaign

Kane and Cook Counties

The problem

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, nearly 80 percent of the nation’s population lives in urban areas and depends on the essential ecological, economic, and social benefits provided by urban trees and forests. As urban areas expand, the challenges to their conservation and maintenance will increase.

Trees contend with road salt, confined roots, trunk damage, compacted or poor quality soils, and other problems that can result from lack of knowledge or actions that could prevent or alleviate them. Other threats such as air pollution, storm damage, diseases, and infestations, which may be more well-known, involve more complex, long range solutions or remediation.

Damage to trees is not the only problem. One of the City of Elgin’s concerns is public safety. While almost 95 percent of the public trees are in good to fair condition, there are large trees that are dead or have defects that threaten the safety of streets, sidewalks, parks, homes, and businesses.

The solution

The City of Elgin developed a community forestry program, called the Fit Forest Campaign, to better understand the condition and location of the public urban forest and natural resources so that they can be managed in a more efficient and sustainable manner. To achieve this goal, an Urban Forestry Master Plan will be created to address and accomplish the following:

1. Community Outreach and Education
2. Tree Risk Reduction
3. Invasive Species Readiness
4. Street and Park Tree Planting
5. Urban Wood Waste Utilization (recycling of urban trees)
6. Ecosystem Analysis and Restoration

The process

During the process of developing a sustainability plan, the City of Elgin applied for a grant from the US Forest Service and received \$1.8 million funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) for planning, tree planting and maintenance, and natural resource improvement projects. The project will accomplish ARRA goals of maintaining jobs, reinstating jobs, or stimulating the creation of jobs by hiring and retaining staff to conduct forest health management activities on the City’s lands. The key project partners are the U.S. Forest Service, the City of Elgin, and the Davey Tree Expert Company.

Elgin developed the Fit Forest Campaign for citizens and businesses to learn about and actively participate in the program. According to Park Superintendent Jim Bell, their goal is to inspire the community to work together and give them tools they need to plant and care for trees. The campaign provides education and tools not only related to tree maintenance and planting, but to reducing risk of invasive pests and diseases, reusing and recycling wood waste, and improving the ecosystem. The City’s website includes links to [maps, resources, fact sheets, and information on tree care.](#)

As part of the campaign, Davey Tree Experts conducted a series of land cover analyses included an inventory that cataloged trees on public property and recommended appropriate management. **Areas for planting additional trees were identified and the City will plant or provide a new street tree to residents or businesses at no cost.**

Overview

Concern for the impacts of the emerald ash borer and other threats to their forest resources led the City of Elgin to launch their Fit Forest Campaign. The first step was an inventory that identified location, species, condition, monetary value, and maintenance needs for the city’s trees.

CMAP Resource

- [Urban Forestry Strategy Paper](#)

GO TO 2040

Recommendation:
Livable Communities -
Implement urban and community forestry programs.

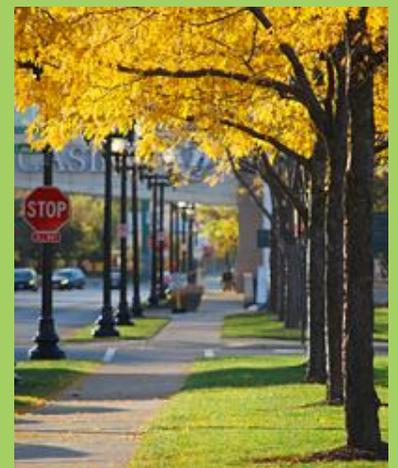


Photo courtesy of James Jordan

For more information

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 Fit Forest Campaign
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The City of Elgin will continue the work started by the ARRA project under the direction of their Forestry Master Plan. The amount of tree maintenance and the number of trees planted will depend on the City's budget from year to year. The City will use available public funds, seek other grants, and build on the partnerships created to keep the forestry program moving forward. They expect further successes to come from the cooperation and participation of neighborhood groups, other local non-profit groups, local businesses, and citizens.

Community considerations

Residents were concerned about the maintenance and removal of trees in front of their homes. They wanted to know who was making the decision, on what basis, and whether the trees that were removed would be replaced. The appearance of the neighborhood, the environment, and property values could all be adversely impacted, they maintained.

To address these concerns, the City held several meetings with residents. Staff explained that if the inventory report recommended that a tree should be removed, certified arborists from both the City and Davey Tree Experts would conduct an additional inspection before making a final decision.

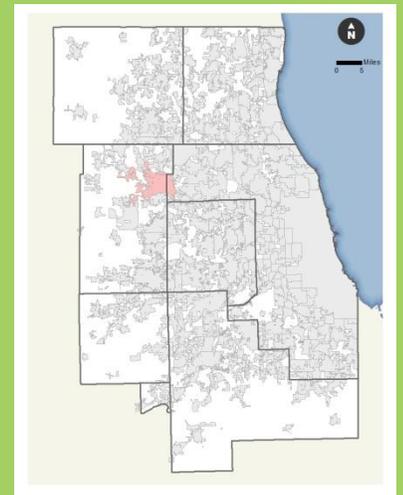
Outcomes

The assessment showed that City-owned trees had a value in excess of \$72,000,000. Citing statistics from the USDA Forest Service and other resources, Elgin's website notes that over a 50-year lifetime, a tree generates \$31,250 worth of oxygen, provides \$62,000 worth of air pollution control, recycles \$37,500 worth of water, and controls \$31,250 worth of soil erosion. In addition, healthy, mature trees add an average of 10 percent to a property's value, and on average, trees return \$3 to \$7 in annual benefits for every dollar invested in their care.

Lessons learned

Mr. Bell notes that there is not a one-time funding solution that results in a healthy community forest, and that partnerships are key to extending and expanding a program. The Fit Forest Campaign started with a partnership between the citizens and City of Elgin, the U.S. Forest Service, and Davey Tree Experts. With the ARRA funding as catalyst, other opportunities were pursued. Valent Professional Products, a firm specializing in pest management, will be providing five years of tree injections to assist in controlling emerald ash borer infestations through their Legacy Tree Project. ComEd has taken the opportunity to promote their Right Tree in the Right Place Program by providing resources to remove high liability trees under power lines and plant appropriately-sized new ones.

Location Map:



Additional Resources

- [Illinois Department of Natural Resources Urban and Community Forestry Program.](#)
- [USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry](#)
- [Openlands Urban Forestry - TreeKeepers](#)



Contact Lindsay Banks (lbanks@cmap.illinois.gov) to submit a case study.