Massachusetts Urban Forestry Program

The Citizen Forester

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People Have to Know Each Other

- Sherri Brokopp, Urban Ecology Institute

"That's the thing - people have to know each other. They can't be strangers. That way when something comes up, we know what to do. We can deal with it together." With these words, an Urban Ecology Institute (UEI) volunteer reminds us that our work goes far beyond tree planting. Community plantings are an incredibly powerful tool for community building. As urban forestry professionals, we have the opportunity to use the urban environment as a catalyst to improve the ecological health and functioning of our cities, and simultaneously strengthen social ties as a way of addressing a whole host of related urban challenges.

In 2005, UEI's community planting and stewardship program, CityRoots, partnered with nine neighborhood groups and over 140 residents in Dorchester, Roxbury, Chelsea, East Boston, and Lynn to transform overgrown vacant lots, underutilized parks, and barren streetscapes into beautiful, cared-for community spaces. The stories that emerge from these community efforts are inspirational.

As residents of Boston's most underserved communities, many of our partners are constantly facing the overwhelming pressures of living in the urban environment. They sometimes face random violence. They worry about their children, that they will become victims of violence, or join a gang and participate in it themselves. They're surrounded by drug dealers, and are woken up at all hours of the night by the sound of police sirens. It's too loud. It's too hot in the summer. The buses never come when they're supposed to. Just living, can be a challenge.

And yet, in the face of all these trials, residents are coming together to work toward their vision for the community. Our community partners see trees and open space as critical components of the safer, stronger, more beautiful neighborhoods they want to build for their families and neighbors. Through their work with CityRoots, which works with each group over the course of the summer to design and implement a planting project, they improve the look, feel and condition of their physical environment. By working with their neighbors, residents also build the social ties and personal connections that create true community, and through this, they are better able to work collaboratively for positive change. Here are a few of their stories.

The Boston's Hope neighborhood in Dorchester worked diligently all season to transform a vacant lot into a beautiful community garden and park space. Last October they harvested tomatoes, corn, and greens from their garden for a fall festival at their site. Sharing food that was grow by their own labor, binds neighbors to one another.

Teens from the BOLD program developed an outreach campaign to encourage residents of Dorchester's Spencer-Whitfield neighborhood to plant trees in their front yards. There are a number of older residents in the neighborhood, and some reacted to the teens with hostility and suspicion at first. But the teens persisted. In the end, they planted with five residents. As the season wore on, the teens developed strong relationships with their older neighbors. One afternoon everyone was talking together on the front porch of a house at which they had planted a tree. As the conversation was drawing to a close, one of the teens said "We need to spend more time together talking about all these good things, instead of just complaining all the time."

The Jeffries Point Crew in East Boston planted six trees in a waterside park. Several of the women in this group had been in East Boston all their lives, and shared stories about how they used to play in that park as children, and how their children had done the same. As they grew up, they watched the park decline. At one point, a trash barge was permanently stationed just off the park, close enough that children could easily swim to it. Replanting this park with trees – restoring it to the way they remembered it – was an exercise in healing for these women. And by telling their stories, they were able to link the other participants to the history of their neighborhood.

During one of our planting days, someone walked by a group of high school students who were planting a tree and said, "Who cares about all these stupid trees. When are we going to start taking care of people?" In a city facing as many challenges as Boston, this is certainly an understandable sentiment. But we know that healthy trees and strong communities go hand in hand. Just ask any CityRoots participant. Speaking to her Forester, one young woman said, "It's funny. I walk by these houses all the time and I never knew who lived in them. You know Bill who was here working last week? I walk by his house everyday on my way to school. Now, when I see him and his wife out in the yard, I know who they are."

Picks and Shovels

Sustainable Stormwater Program

The Portland, Oregon Bureau of Environmental Services offers a Sustainable Stormwater Management Program that provides outreach, financial and technical assistance, and education for new and redeveloping properties that incorporate innovative urban forestry stormwater management techniques. Resources discussed on this website include: green roofs, landscaping for stormwater, green streets, educational materials, demonstration projects, and monitoring. Read more at http://www.portlandonline.com/bes/index.cfm?c=34598

News story: Loss of Tree Canopy Could Be Hazardous to Your Health: This article from Newhouse News Service highlights some of the social and health benefits of community trees. Read it at www.newhousenews.com/archive/seeman032906.html.

Feedback Loop

In response to last month's article on "Preserving Special Trees," reader Eric Weber offered the following additional comments (edited):
Thanks for the article on 'Preserving Special Trees' and to the work of the Friends of Newburyport Trees. I wanted to add a couple of notes of caution, though, based on my experiences. Taking legal action to enforce any easement costs money, and no one else is likely to be as motivated to make such enforcement possible as the original donor of the easement. So any group that seeks an easement to protect a special tree might also consider seeking a cash endowment from the donor of the easement that is adequate to provide for its enforcement. I would also point out that an unsympathetic new landowner could, in five minutes with a chain saw, make the whole thing academic. Although a suit for damages might be a possible remedy, such an action would take resources, and even a large damage award can't buy anything that's equivalent to a 200-year-old shade tree in a prominent location. Finally, there is also the question of whether the easement holder will still exist when it comes time to enforce or re-record the easement. Although I understand that the group in the article is organized for broader purposes, given the time and energy involved in forming and sustaining an organization, I would strongly discourage anyone from going to the trouble of forming a tree-protection trust unless their stated mission encompasses far more than a single tree or group of trees.

Update: The Newburyport Tree Easement article, FAQ document and the easement document on the community website www.Newburyport-trees.com.

Growing Greener

The City of Pittsfield (population 45,800) with the assistance of the newly formed **Pittsfield Tree Watch** citizen advocacy group achieved a couple of growth rings this spring. Last fall, volunteers completed a "heritage tree survey" for the community which led to a successful Heritage Tree Care Grant project. And on April 13, 2006, the city was recognized, along with **Blackstone, Boxford, Fall River, Lanesborough, and Northampton,** as a brand new **Tree City USA!**

Growing on Trees

DCR and National Grid establish the National Grid Partnership Grant Program!
With a donation of $250,000 to the Mass ReLeaf Trust Fund, National Grid and DCR have created a new grant offering for targeted communities involved with the National Grid ACT reliability enhancement program. These grants, modeled after DCR's Urban and Community Forestry Grants provide matching funds to target communities to engage in strategic tree community tree plantings, and to building and strengthen their local urban forestry programs. For more information see http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/forestry/urban/urbanGrants.htm.

The CHT Foundation (http://www.hembar.com/selectsrv/cht/index.html, (617) 619-8244) was established in 2005 by the family of William O. Taylor of Boston, former

publisher of The Boston Globe, and his wife, Sally P. Coxe, a native of Philadelphia. The Foundation has three main areas of interest (education, the environment, and historic preservation) and grants are confined to Massachusetts projects and organizations. The particular focus of environmental grants is on protecting the Commonwealth's waterways and the quality of its water generally, with special emphasis on Boston Harbor, the Charles River, the South Coast, Buzzards Bay, and the Elizabeth Islands. CHT Foundation grants will range from $3,000 - $25,000. Multiple-year requests will be considered up to a maximum of three years. Grant application deadline is end of business on Monday, July 3, 2006.

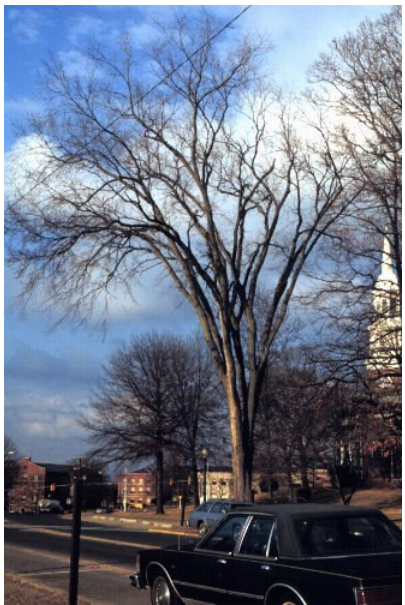
On The Horizon

Views of the Urban Forest, Lecture Series: The Lexington Tree Committee is sponsoring a series of lectures on urban and community forest issues. All events are free, made possible through a grant from DCR and will be at the Lexington Cary Library at 7:30 p.m. Contact John Frey at jwfrey2@aol.com. Series includes:

- May 10, 2006: William Cullina, Director of the Wildflower Nurseries will speak on *In Homage to Wood – Native Trees for the Urban Forest and Garden*.
- September 13, 2006: Jad Daley Campaign Director for the Northern Forest Alliance will speak on *Forests on the Edge – Linking Northeastern Wildlands and the Urban Forest* – September 13, 2006.
- October 18, 2006: David Pinsonneault Lexington's Superintendent of Public Grounds and Tree Warden will speak on *Implementing a Tree Management Program in Lexington*.

Risk Tree Assessment, Train the Trainer Workshop, June 6-7, 2006, Fairlee, Vermont. Contact John Parry at jparry@fs.fed.us for details.

Empire State Green Industry Show November 14-16, 2006, Rochester Riverside Convention Center, Rochester, NY. This is a combined education conference and trade show of the New York State Arborists, ISA Chapter Inc.; New York State Turfgrass Association; New York State Nursery/Landscape Association; and New York State Flower Industries. For details, contact Jill Cyr at 518-783-1229, 800-873-8873, jill@nysta.org, or www.nysta.org.



Species Spotlight

***Ulmus americana,* American Elm**

Once the dominant feature of most New England communities, the American elm was nearly wiped from our landscape during the middle of this century and Dutch Elm Disease (DED) continues to take many of those few remaining elms each year. But maybe it is time to think about cautiously re-integrating disease resistant cultivars back into our community landscapes.

Advantages and Limitations: The American elm's greatest advantages are its tolerance to street side and urbanized conditions, and its graceful arching form. However, in addition to the problems posed by DED, elms area also susceptible to "elm yellows" and various insects. American elms do become very large and arching and should not be planted in areas with limited above ground or below ground growing space.

Cultivars: If you are going to consider planting American elms, you should only select those with demonstrated resistance to DED and should avoid monoculture plantings. The following cultivars are currently recommended:

- **'New Harmony'** - Considered one of the better forms, though its DED tolerance is far inferior to 'Valley Forge'. With age the tree is nevertheless attractive, as it forms a broadly-upright grown with arching branches to 70' tall and wide.
- **'Princeton'** - This vase-shaped selection, which bears handsome foliage with good substance, has shown good resistance to DED. It grows quickly and is becoming more common in commerce. It forms the traditional vase shape, to 70' tall and 50' wide with yellow fall color. It is actually an older clone developed before the advent of DED in the United States.
- **'Valley Forge'** - A U.S. National Arboretum introduction, this plant is probably the best choice for installation in modern landscapes due to its high DED resistance. The growth form is highly reminiscent of the "classic American elm" -- upright-arching and vase-shaped to 70' tall and 60' wide. The green foliage turns yellow in autumn.

For more information visit http://www.hort.uconn.edu/Plants/u/ulmame/ulmame1.html.

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If you have questions about Urban and Community Forestry, contact:

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Urban and Community Forestry Web Site:
http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/forestry/urban/index.htm

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