

Grants

Town Community Forestry Programs *Why Have One? Who Can Help?*

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Maintaining a town's green infrastructure is every bit as important as taking care of the grey infrastructure. The most obvious green infrastructure in a town is the community forest; the public trees. Sure, trees can be beautiful, but they are more important for the benefits they provide, known as ecosystem services. Trees improve air and water quality, reduce flooding, reduce energy needs for heating and cooling, increase property values and improve the quality of life for residents of our towns in many ways.

All of the trees within a town, village or city make up the community forest. The community forest can include street, road and yard trees, parks, town properties, cemeteries, school grounds and undeveloped green spaces. *Urban and community forestry* is the management of community forests to establish and maintain healthy trees for air and water quality benefits, energy savings and environmental health. The urban and community forest also contains wildlife, built roads and structures, waterways and people. This is where most people in New York State live and work.

We cannot manage a town's resource unless we identify that resource. For the community forest, this is accomplished by conducting a tree inventory. Perhaps the most important outcome of a professional tree inventory is enhanced public safety. A tree risk assessment can be performed for every tree in the inventory and a risk rating assigned. With this information, a town can prioritize maintenance activities and develop a reasonable, prudent and defensible tree risk reduction plan.

A town cannot budget effectively if it does not know the value (replacement and annual ecosystem services) of the resource. The USDA Forest Service – with partners such as the Davey Institute, Society of Municipal Arborists and Casey Trees – has developed research-based methods to measure the

value of a town's community forest.

Trees do some heavy lifting for us year after year, and what they do can be quantified. I used the *National Tree Benefits Calculator*, found at <http://www.treebenefits.com/calculator/> to calculate the benefits from one of the 36-inch diameter sugar maples along the county road I live on in the town of Ulysses. According to the calculator, this sugar maple is providing overall benefits of \$299 every year. It will intercept 5,603 gallons of stormwater runoff this year. It will raise my property value by \$113 this year. The tree will conserve 179 kilowatt/hours of electricity for cooling and reduce my consumption of propane by 64 therms. Air quality is improved in many ways: absorbing pollutants through the leaves, intercepting particulate matter, releasing oxygen and lowering air temperature. This year, that 36-inch diameter sugar maple will reduce atmospheric carbon by 993 pounds.

The *National Tree Benefits Calculator* was conceived

[See: Funding on Page 21](#)



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From Page 20: Grant Funding Available for your Town's Urban Forestry Plan

and developed by Casey Trees <http://caseytrees.org/> and The Davey Tree Expert Company. It is based on USDA Forest Service research, much of which was coordinated by the Forest Service Northeastern Research Station at the Environmental Science and Forestry School in Syracuse. This research has led to the development of a free, public access software suite known as i-Tree. While the *National Tree Benefits Calculator* is i-Tree-driven, it is a simple instrument compared to the actual i-Tree utilities and applications that can be found at www.itreetools.org. Among other things, it is possible to quantify the annual benefits from a town's entire community forest. Maintaining this resource has been shown to be a good investment for towns, often returning \$2 to \$4 for every \$1 spent.

Who Can Help

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Urban and Community Forestry Program and the New York State Urban and Community Forestry Council both administer grant programs specifically for urban and community forestry purposes. According to the NYSDEC Web site, New York State is committed to providing support and assistance to communities in comprehensive planning, management and education to create healthy urban and community forests and enhance the quality of life for New York residents through its Cost Share Grant Program.

Last year, New York State awarded more than \$2 million in urban and community forestry grants to municipalities and non-profit organizations. Towns across the state received funding for community forestry projects. For the first time, towns with populations of 65,000 or more were eligible for grants up to \$50,000 per eligible project. Smaller towns could receive up to \$25,000 per project.

As an example, the town of DeWitt was awarded three community forestry grants last year. The town received a \$25,000 grant for a tree inventory, a \$5,000 grant for a community forestry management plan and \$12,500 for tree planting. For all of this funding, the town had to match just the \$12,500 for tree planting.

Towns with more than 65,000 people received grants up to \$50,000. The town of Tonawanda was awarded two grants last year; \$37,770 for a tree planting project and a second grant of \$50,000

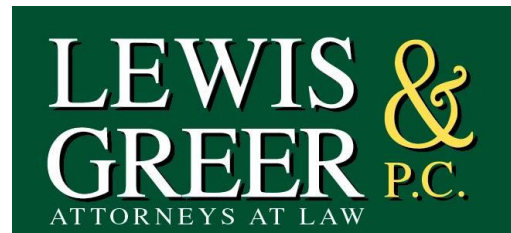
for a tree management plan. The tree planting grant required a local match.

There are five types of NYSDEC Urban Forestry grants:

1. Tree Inventory grants (no local match required)
2. Urban Forest Management Plans (no local match required)
3. Invasive Pest Surveys (matching grant)

See: Funding on Page 22

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From Page 21: Grant Funding Available for your Town's Urban Forestry Plan

4. Tree Maintenance (matching grant)
5. Tree Planting (matching grant)

These five urban and community forestry grants are reimbursements following project completion. After a grant is awarded, a town must enter into a contract with the state prior to any reimbursable work on the project. Upon successful completion of the community forestry project, the town will be reimbursed in accordance with the contract.

In the past, three priority points were added during grant application evaluations if the project was shown to be in alignment with the Regional Economic Development Plan. This could be done in two ways:

1. A recommendation from the regional economic council stating that the proposed project aligns with the priorities of the economic development plan.
2. A supplemental narrative describing the economic benefits of the proposed project and how it aligns with the strategies of the economic development plan.

Recently, an additional priority point has been awarded to towns having Tree City USA status.

Assisting the NYSDEC with its urban and community forestry program is the New York State Urban and Community Forestry Council www.nysurbanforestrycouncil.com, the largest urban forestry advocacy organization in the state. The council's vision is that every community in New York State will recognize the value of trees and maximize the use of trees to help improve the community's quality of life. The NYSUFC administers small Arbor Day grants for communities that lack the four requirements for Tree City USA status.

These requirements are the following: an Arbor Day Observance and Proclamation, a tree board or department, a community forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita, and a tree ordinance. The number of new Tree City USA designations is a metric the state and federal governments use to measure the success of a state's urban and community forestry program. The Arbor Day grants are meant to aid a community in working toward Tree City USA status. The Arbor Day grants administered by the New York State Urban Forestry Council (www.nysurbanforestrycouncil.com) are up to \$1,000 and require no match. Half of the award is provided up front, with the remainder reimbursed

after completion. This year, Arbor Day tree plantings were funded for the towns of Lorraine, Warwick, Owasco, Minden and Chester.

According to NYSDEC, a well-managed community forestry program will have the four criteria listed above to qualify for Tree City USA as well as a tree inventory, community forest management plan and professional management through town staff or consultants. To help towns build a well-managed community forestry program, Round 13 of the New York State Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program could be announced as early as mid-August 2015. It is anticipated that the grants for tree inventories, invasive pest surveys and urban forest management plans will continue to require no local match. The grants for tree maintenance and tree planting will probably still require a match, but that local match could be reduced this year.

A great way to stay informed about urban and community forestry in New York State is a subscription to *Taking Root*, the monthly newsletter. *Taking Root* is free, and a subscription can be made at the NYSUFC Web site. □



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Davey Resource Group understands the value of trees and how vital they are to your town's livability and sustainability. We are here to bring you expert advice and funding assistance for your community forest management goals. Davey's arborists and municipal consultants can:

- Help you apply for New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Urban and Community Forestry grants
- Perform inventories and tree risk assessments
- Create community forest plans
- Develop emerald ash borer response strategies

Contact your partners at DRG today!

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