

# The Pittsburgh Urban Forest Master Plan: Three Collaborator Perspectives



Photo by Joey Kennedy

**Since its release in 2012**, “Pittsburgh’s Urban Forest Master Plan: A Road Map for the Effective Management of Our Urban Forest” (<http://treepittsburgh.org/urban-forest-master-plan>) has been circulating widely among city foresters. The Plan is receiving high marks for its ambition, comprehensiveness, thoughtfulness, and motivational power.

Here, we get three perspectives on the Pittsburgh Plan. First, Tree Pittsburgh’s Director of Urban Forestry Matthew Erb outlines the stakeholders, goals, and components of the planning process. Next, Pittsburgh City Forester Lisa Ceoffe speaks to what the Plan will mean for her City’s program. Finally, Davey Resource Group Consultant Andy Hillman elaborates on progressive benefits of the Plan in two key areas: research and environmental justice.

## **The Process—Matthew Erb, Tree Pittsburgh**

In the Summer of 2010, Tree Pittsburgh hosted an Urban Forest Master Planning Symposium, convening over 50 key stakeholders from Pittsburgh, the region, and nationally, to begin the work of creating a master plan for Pittsburgh’s urban forest. This initiative will align the community around a shared vision for protecting, growing, and maintaining our urban forest for future

generations, creating substantial returns from a singular investment.

Stakeholders came up with the following needs of an Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP):

- *To proactively address growing environmental challenges*
- *To create a coordinated vision*
- *To practice and model efficiency and cooperation*
- *To create baseline metrics and clear goals for Pittsburgh’s urban forest*
- *To develop long-term advocates and increase civic participation*

At the end of the planning symposium, goals were outlined for the planning process which included fundraising and project partners. Tree Pittsburgh began fundraising immediately for development of the Plan and for data collection to create the baseline metrics needed. By early 2011, funding was secured from local foundations, the Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission, and the US Forest Service.

The University of Vermont Spatial Analysis Lab was

selected to begin the UTC (Urban Tree Canopy) analysis. Davey Resource Group and local interns were hired to complete the i-Tree ECO analysis for the entire City of Pittsburgh. Jackson Clark Partners, a local consultant, was hired to complete a master plan benchmark report and to lead the public process. Davey Resource Group was retained to draft the report and provide technical assistance.

During this process the Urban FMP Steering Committee was brought together. This group consisted of many of the stakeholders that participated in the 2010 symposium. Representatives from the City, local non-profits, universities, and state and federal agencies were brought together to guide the planning process. A survey was conducted to assess the citizenry's perceptions of urban trees, including their opinions about funding of the urban forest. After 1,700 surveys were completed, a survey benchmark report was created to analyze the data.

Public meetings were held in all four corners of the City to better reach as many citizens as possible. Meeting announcements were made through local community development corporations, non-profits, listserves, Council offices, etc. A campaign was started called "Every Tree Has a Story." Citizens were asked to tell us their tree story, good or bad, via whatever choice of

media they preferred. The Mayor made a video telling his tree story of playing with his brother under a tree as a child.

Public meetings consisted of a presentation on the state of the urban forest, which included many of the new findings from the UTC and the i-Tree ECO. Jackson Clark Partners worked as facilitators of the meetings. After presentations and question/answer sessions were complete, participants were asked for feedback on the presentation and for their perceptions: What did they perceive as the assets of the urban forest? And, what are the threats to the urban forest?

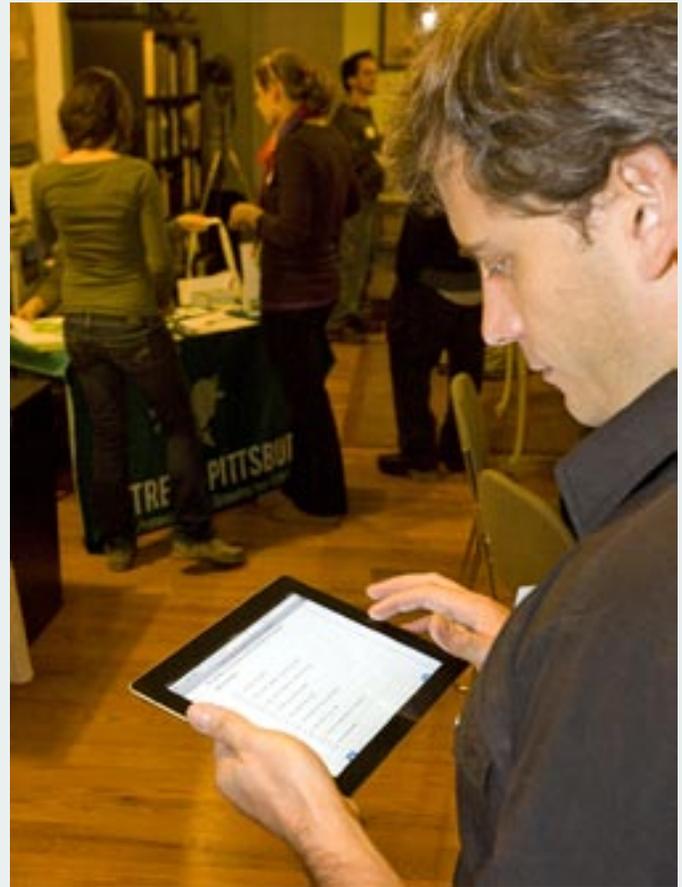
Pittsburgh has many non-profit stakeholders. Tree Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy are a few with programming directly related to urban forestry. There are many other non-profits that deal with issues such as trails, water quality, and community development that are also involved with urban forestry. Bringing these groups together to work on the UFMP began to address some of the needs recognized by all these stakeholders.

## Implementation

The Pittsburgh UFMP outlines many important goals and recommendations moving forward over the next 20



A Tree Pittsburgh intern leads children at Faison Elementary to point and shout "Grow Tree, Grow!" to a newly planted *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* on Arbor Day. Photo Courtesy of Tree Pittsburgh



To inform the drafting of the Pittsburgh Urban Forest Master Plan, seventeen hundred residents participated in a survey about their perceptions of urban trees and the urban forest.

years. The Plan was created and designed to be inclusive of and useful to as many stakeholders as possible. Many of the recommendations are already in progress in one form or another by many of the stakeholders. For example, Tree Pittsburgh already has a volunteer citizen program, Arbor Day programming, advocacy, and tree care and maintenance programs. After the UFMP was completed, Tree Pittsburgh created a three-year strategic plan for its programs to better align with the recommendations of the Plan.

Broad stakeholder involvement is critical to the implementation success of all facets of the Plan. Urban for-

est working groups of stakeholders have been created around each of the five keystones described in the UFMP: Connect, Engage, Manage, Plan, and Protect.

To monitor progress of the Plan's recommendations, an annual report will be released. It will include metrics for the past year as well as articles on projects led by stakeholders and volunteers. We hope to reach a broad audience with the report; several thousand copies will be printed and distributed via mailing lists, libraries, City Council offices, etc. Recommendations of the plan that are not currently active will be featured as priority work for the coming year.

Moving forward we intend to use the annual report to inform any updates to the Master Plan. We are looking to update the State of the Urban Forest every few years with updated UTC, i-Tree and/or future urban forest assessment tools. Currently the Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission is engaged in revising the City's tree ordinance and intends to codify the UFMP as part of the process. To raise awareness, a campaign called "Trees Change Everything" is being launched in 2013 to educate the public on the importance and value of trees.

### **The City Forester's Perspective—Lisa Ceoffe**

Tree Pittsburgh's convening of the Urban Forest Master Planning Symposium in 2010 could not have come at a better time. The City of Pittsburgh and the Department of City Planning had just begun to create Pittsburgh's first-ever comprehensive city plan, PlanPGH, which includes both traditional and non-traditional components. The concept of PlanPGH is "common threads" among people and the places they care about. The Open Space Component of PlanPGH is a guide to optimizing green space throughout the City. Adding the UFMP to the Open Space Component demonstrates Pittsburgh's commitment to ensure that the plan is carried out effectively.

The key stakeholders in attendance at the 2010 symposium all share a "common thread" of wanting to protect and manage Pittsburgh's trees. The result of this initiative is the City's first ever UFMP, which defines a clear vision for protecting, growing, and maintaining the City's forest. As city forester, I believe this plan provides the framework needed to address managing the future of Pittsburgh's trees.

The goals of the UFMP are straightforward which is very important when it comes to funding; having the ability to articulate departmental needs is crucial. Day-to-day forestry operations can become driven by an emphasis on risk management. The UMFP allows decision makers to better understand the big picture, to grasp the quantifiable benefits of urban trees, and to have data in hand to help them be advocates for the urban forest. It not only demonstrates a pathway to proactive management of the City's tree canopy, it includes prescriptions for an increase in environmental, economic, and social benefits, factors that otherwise might not be considered when dis-

cutting a forestry budget.

Like many cities, Pittsburgh does not have adequate staffing or resources to completely manage every aspect needed to implement such a plan. Having a non-profit partner such as Tree Pittsburgh is imperative to a successful program. Tree Pittsburgh is truly dedicated to the health and welfare of the City's forest. This advocacy is good for sound tree-related policy and educating the public on the benefits of trees. Whether the issue is storm water management practices or proactively addressing pests and diseases, a non-profit partner provides an open forum for sometimes difficult discussions. Maintaining open communication and working towards a common goal is the story of our success.

### **Research and Access—Consultant's Perspective from Andy Hillman**

The Pittsburgh Urban Forest Master Planning process involved many stakeholders whose input will be continuously integrated as the Plan is implemented. The inclusiveness that has been built into the plan augments its depth. Of the five keystones—Connect, Engage, Manage, Plan, and Protect—the breadth of this comprehensive Plan is perhaps best illustrated under the keystone of Connect.

Among the goals under the keystone of Connect are two that have not traditionally been incorporated into UFMPs:



London plane trees (*Platanus x acerifolia*) in Pittsburgh's Allegheny Riverfront Park near the iconic South Tenth Street Bridge. Photo Courtesy of Trees Pittsburgh

- ☞ Utilize urban forestry research in conjunction with on-the-ground operations

With few exceptions, municipalities rarely include a formal research component in their UFMPs. Although researchers might not typically consider partnering with municipalities, and elected officials may not be used to the idea of a local taxpayer-funded research mission, the City of Pittsburgh plans to identify or even propose research that would provide tangible benefits to the urban forestry operation and to the City in general. Specific recommendations include partnering with the new USDA Forest Service Research Station in Pennsylvania and featuring pertinent urban forestry research in local media.

- ☞ Increase access to trees so all can enjoy and benefit

This goal evolved during the planning process. The focus started out with the concept of social inclusion within the field of urban forestry. This led to a broader look at environmental justice issues as they relate to urban forestry. Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, sex, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Efforts to address environmental justice have historically focused on remediating environmental burdens such as the clean-up of urban brownfields and industrial wastes. Fewer efforts have been made to increase environmental amenities such as ecosystem services or urban forest benefits.

In cities throughout the world, the density and health of the urban forest in residential areas often coincides with the economic status of the people who live there. In the poorer neighborhoods, there are frequently fewer trees and private gardens and less public open space.

Consensus was reached that urban forestry can counteract environmental injustice in the following ways:

- Well designed and maintained parks can deter crime.
- Greenery has a calming effect.
- Green spaces are places where residents can gather and build community.
- Well maintained trees give neighborhoods the appearance of being cared for and increase property values.
- Trees can reduce energy costs and air pollution.

It was found that equitable access to urban forest benefits must overcome these hurdles:

- Tree planting programs can be biased toward owner-occupied homes.
- High vacancy rates can lead to inequities of urban forest benefits if local policies deter planting trees adjacent to vacant houses and lots.
- Policies that require property owner permission can reduce renter's participation in tree planting efforts.

Urban tree canopy at the neighborhood level was examined in relation to poverty and race demographics. This led to many recommendations, the first of which is to give priority for urban forestry and outreach efforts to disadvantaged communities that are currently gaining the least benefit from the urban forest. A second is to prioritize neighborhoods and watersheds for future tree planting and protection efforts to increase deficient tree canopy figures and allow for more equitable canopy cover across the city.

Urban tree canopy studies are important tools for many aspects of ecosystem services management. This is especially true when striving for equity in urban forest benefits, since one can layer canopy and readily available demographics in a geographic information system in order to map out future plantings. 🌿

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