



Becoming a Tree City: Benefits and Responsibilities



What is a Tree City? Tree City is a nationwide movement that provides the necessary framework for communities to manage and expand their public trees. More than 3,400 communities have made their commitment to becoming a **Tree City USA**.

Tree City, USA is a program of the Arbor Day Foundation, which offers the designation to communities that have satisfied certain requirements.

Benefits of Being a Tree City

One benefit of the program is to educate citizens on the value of trees to our community. Through the process of becoming a Tree City, residents learn more about the value of trees, and the community dedicates resources to planting, maintaining and preserving trees.

According to the Arbor Day Foundation, trees yield 3–5 X their cost in overall benefits to the community. Trees:

- **Reduce costs for energy, stormwater management, and erosion control.**
- **Cut energy consumption by up to 25%.** Studies indicate that as few as three additional trees planted around each building in the United States could save \$2 billion annually in energy costs.
- **Increase property values across your community** by 7–20%.
- **Build stronger ties to your neighborhood and community.** Trees and green spaces directly correlate to greater connections to neighbors.
- **Improve community pride.** Participation in the Tree City USA program helps residents feel good about the place they live and work. Annual recognition shows visitors and prospective residents that trees, conservation, and the environment are important to our community.

Tree City status will give the town **measurable, dollars-and-cents benefits** by improving its chances of receiving grant support, including grants to buy, plant and care for additional trees on public land.

Responsibilities of Being a Tree City: The community must meet four standards.

Standard 1: A Tree Board or Department

This group of about 7 people can include tree professionals and interested residents. Often the head of the department which performs the town's necessary tree work will serve as Director.

Standard 2: A Tree Care Ordinance

A tree care ordinance forms the foundation of a city's tree care program and provides an opportunity to set good policy. A key section of the ordinance establishes the Tree Board and gives it responsibility for public tree care.

Standard 3: A Community Forestry Program With an Annual Budget of at Least \$2 Per Capita

Arbor Day's "Guide to the Tree City USA Designation" says "most communities probably already spend at least \$2 per capita." The Tree City program allows the following types of expenditures to be included in the budget: tree purchases, watering, pruning, dead tree removal, and leaf and brush pick-up. In the early years of a program, a town might not need much "new money" in the budget, just a greater awareness and care of trees. Arbor Day's "Guide to the Tree City USA Designation" says that "community trees—when cared for—can actually save money. A managed program can ensure benefits that surely outweigh costs."

Standard 4: An Arbor Day Observance and Proclamation

Rush already does this with its Town Clean-up Day.

Tree Plan and a Tree Inventory

Though not listed as requirements, the program also requires the town to have a **Tree Plan** and a **Tree Inventory**. The Inventory can make use of existing records, updated and supplemented as necessary.

There is no downside to becoming a Tree City!

Interested residents such as Rush RPA members can help the Town to apply each year. The Tree Board will meet according to its own schedule, and the town will update its Tree Plan and Tree Inventory as needed.

The Tree City program has no enforcement mechanism. The town is not required to continue. It just benefits the town, and residents of the town, if the town continues to stay in the program.♦