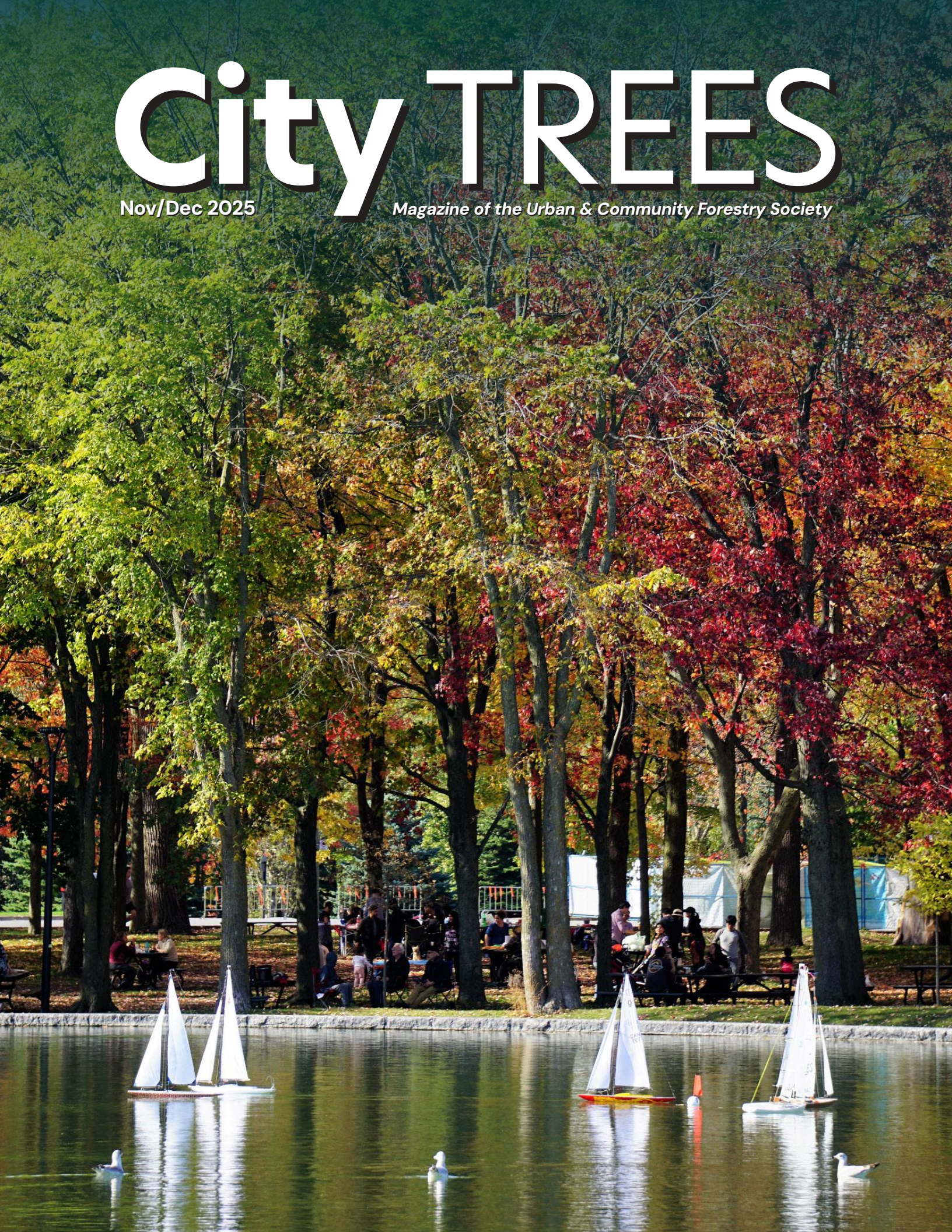


City TREES

Nov/Dec 2025

Magazine of the Urban & Community Forestry Society



A worker in a green safety vest and helmet is carrying a large tree branch. The vest has "ASPLUNDH" written on it. In the background, another worker is visible, also carrying a branch.

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Cover: Mount Royal Park in Montreal, Quebec by Owen Croy.



President's Message

Jamie King



Somehow, I fell into the perfect industry for me—one where it's equally important to recognize the challenge we face while steadfastly pushing forward. I think it's called "optimistic nihilism." It's when I feel that we're all stardust riding solar photons

through the emptiness of space—yet finding beauty in that insignificance, because we try earnestly to make this random collision of particles into something special. Something special for everyone.

I wrap up my year as your Society's president having witnessed a huge blow to our industry— withdrawal of Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) grant dollars for many in the U.S.—AND having witnessed all your direct response to that challenge. We have all come together across communities, professions, and organizational silos and are now better connected than ever before. We are positioned to navigate this challenge together, and I am so proud of us all for staying motivated, despite the grief many of us feel.

Indeed, this Society lost an opportunity to grow—both in size and in impact—from withdrawal of IRA grant dollars. But, we have continued our mission to support your competence, confidence, camaraderie, and capacity in new and exciting ways. We have prepared to support you in pursuing and maintaining your ISA Urban Forest Professional credential. We have modernized our Accreditation program to recognize the communities and leaders that lead the industry in best practice. And we are growing into our role of monitoring, assessing, and informing you all about the policy landscape that impacts our work.

All of this happened while we delivered excellence in our regular operations and flagship programs. Thank you to our amazing UCFS Executive Director Leslie Berckes and all of the volunteers working on committees. And an extra special thank you to the UCFS Board of Directors for supporting us all through these daily logistics and decisions. I am so happy to stand beside my friend David Lefcourt as he assumes the role of UCFS President in 2026. All great things to come. There's so much more I want to say, but for now—I thank you all for giving me the opportunity to serve.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JK'.

Executive Director's Message

Leslie Berckes



Some of you may know that I have a Master's degree in Public Policy with an emphasis in Environmental Policy. Truth be told, it was not my core intention to get a policy degree—I was actually just trying to reorient my career towards the environmental field and

away from business. Since obtaining this degree, I've realized just how impactful studying and knowing policy is. So many of you are dealing with policy each and every day—helping guide changes to code, updating ordinances, and more—I bet it's something you didn't anticipate needing to know, but also understand its impact.

I bring this up because this Society—through the UCFS Board of Directors, the Industry Trends Committee, myself, and with members like you—is growing into its role of monitoring and watching policies that affect you in the urban forestry profession. For example, members told us that they were seeing insurance companies issuing notices to homeowners about how trees should be pruned or removed around homes. These types of notices are concerning on many fronts. They cause confusion for the public, tree removals impact our urban forests, they can fly in the face of tree protection ordinances, and they do not consider the professionals like you who know proper tree care.

So, we took this issue to Industry Trends, and they have picked it up as a crucial issue to monitor—first starting with a survey to understand the breadth of the problem and then finding allies in the industry like the Tree Care Industry Association, who is also monitoring this issue. With a deeper understanding of the issue, we can then form position statements and look for the right places to advocate for the trees and people in your communities.

This is just one example of the power of association. This Society has many jobs and one of them is to lift your voices and represent them collectively. Together, we can work towards our policy goals and advance the profession of urban forestry.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Leslie Berckes'.

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City Trees is the online, bimonthly magazine produced by the Urban & Community Forestry Society. The UCFS is a Professional Affiliate of the International Society of Arboriculture.

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Welcome New Members

Name	State/Province/Region	Country	Name	State/Province/Region	Country	Name	State/Province/Region	Country
Adrienne Cataxinos	UT	USA	Ellinor Ripman		SWE	Laurien de Feijter		USA
Allison Durning	MA	USA	Enrique Haaker	Lima	PER	Layla Bauder	CA	USA
Alyssa Myers	OH	USA	Enrique Lopez	PR	USA	Lukas van Paridon		NED
Andrew Pratt	OH	USA	Eric Limpens		NED	Lukas-Jan Greven		NED
Andrew Engel	NY	USA	Fêryan Roelofsen		NED	Luke Simpson	ON	CAN
Angela Eckton	MD	USA	Floris van Leeuwen		NED	Margaret Shane	OH	USA
Anna Högberg		SWE	Gabriel LaValle	WA	USA	Melker Tillhagen		SWE
Anthony Stanzi	OH	USA	George Schramm	UT	USA	Michelle Rau	WA	USA
Armin Bouwers		NED	Ginger Reitz	WA	USA	Miftah Rahman	MS	USA
Aron Hedqvist		SWE	Gustav Branting Paulsell		SWE	Mike Rutters		NED
Aster Sanders	DC	USA	Hakim Salifu		SWE	Nicholas Maletta	MD	USA
August Nelson	WI	USA	Hanna Willsch		SWE	Niek ten Cate		NED
Bas Heinkens		NED	Heather Van Dyke	WA	USA	Niklas Elgeryd		SWE
Bella Hardaway	VA	USA	Ida Hultberg		SWE	Rens van den Berg		NED
Bibiana Carrasco	CA	USA	Isabelle Bracewell	AL	USA	Renske Korevaar		NED
Bram Beswerda		NED	Jalib Young	CO	USA	Riley MacNeill	MA	USA
Bruce Dudley	ON	CAN	Jan Lamers		NED	Sam Janssens		NED
Caleb Edwards	NY	USA	Jason Wintersteen	WA	USA	Sarah Kirby	TN	USA
Cassie Tharinger	RI	USA	Jeb Barnard	VA	USA	Sean Smith	TX	USA
Catherine Cieminski	OR	USA	Joel Rune		SWE	Selena Leonard Carrick	CA	USA
Christine Iverson-Stinson	WA	USA	Johanna Ericsson		SWE	Sloane Palmer	WA	USA
Christopher McMaster	MN	USA	John Melius	CA	USA	Spencer Koch	OH	USA
Daniel Patton	OR	USA	Jordan Pereira	BC	CAN	Spencer Niess	WI	USA
Daniel Geersing		NED	Joshua Jenkins	CO	USA	Stephen Bybee	MO	USA
Darlene Harris	FL	USA	Julian van Lee		NED	Steven Pannekeet		NED
Demian Reed	OR	USA	Kacper Zarzeczny		SWE	Tamica Dennis	FL	USA
Diana Arellano	WA	USA	Kaylee Crockett	WA	USA	Tim van Kruijsbergen		NED
Drew Oldfield	CA	USA	Kellie Huston	AZ	USA	Tommy Huang	ON	CAN
Edric Tuinhout		NED	Kevin Sandin	WA	USA	Victor Salander		SWE
Elias Kallerfjord		SWE	Kira Kueppenbender	MA	USA	Victoria Parkes	VA	USA
Elizabeth Nunez	CA	USA	Kjersten Inskeep	KS	USA	Viktor Forslund		SWE
			Kristin Milewski	CA	USA			

Municipal Member

City of Circle Pines, Minnesota

In This Issue: Contributors



Leslie Berckes is the Executive Director of UCFS. She has over 12 years of urban forestry experience. Leslie holds an MS in Public Policy from the University of Northern Iowa and a BS in Marketing.



Alan Halter is a Certified GIS Professional and ISA Certified Arborist. As a Geospatial Analyst Senior working for the City of Austin, he provides GIS services and mapping support. Alan holds a Master of Science in Community & Regional Planning from The University of Texas at Austin.



Michelle Sutton is the editor of *City Trees*. She is a writer, horticulturist, and urban forestry subject matter specialist who earned her MS in the Cornell Urban Horticulture Institute.

Thank you to the contributors to “Inside the 2025 Mentoring Program”:

Carolina Arango, Andrew Billon, Sally Bentz-Dalton, Earl Eutsler, Darren Green, Dana Karcher, and Alex Senauke.

Thank you to the contributors to the USFS and Partners feature, “Expanding the Scope of Municipal Forest Management: Wood Utilization”:

Mike Galvin, Jennifer Judd, Morgan Grove, and Mike Carroll.

Thank you to the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition for “Crafting Your Message.”

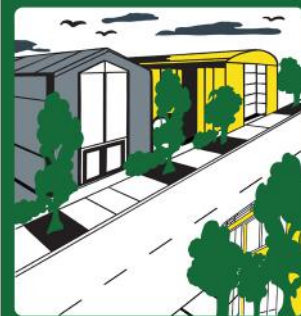


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UCFS News



- UCFS Accreditation
- Welcome Margaret Birmingham

By Leslie Berckes, UCFS Executive Director

UCFS Accreditation Coming Soon!

Is your city's urban forestry program ready to be recognized as one of the best of the best?

The Urban and Community Forestry Society (UCFS) will soon officially unveil its revamped Accreditation program. UCFS Accreditation will offer municipalities the opportunity to showcase their commitment to sustainable urban forest management by meeting rigorous industry standards.

To achieve UCFS Accreditation, your community will have to meet multiple criteria under four standards: Urban Forestry Leadership/Staffing, Urban Forest Governance and Planning, Urban Forest Management, and Community Engagement. Each community will be evaluated by a jury of peers who will determine if the urban forestry work achieved meets a Steward or Champion level of accreditation.

Earning UCFS Accreditation not only affirms your city's leadership in urban forestry—it also boosts civic pride, supports public relations efforts, and honors the dedicated professionals who care for your community's trees. Through UCFS Accreditation, your city will stand out. See infographic on the facing page for details.



Scene from Portland, Oregon, which has a UCFS-Accredited urban forestry program. By David Mark, Pixabay.



Welcome Margaret Birmingham UCFS Member Services Manager

UCFS welcomes Margaret Birmingham as our new Member Services Manager. Margaret worked for many years at Trees Forever, a Midwest-based non-profit, where she was instrumental in monitoring the organization's finances, supporting staff, and—like many non-profit professionals—jumping in wherever she was needed!

Margaret is here to help UCFS Members with questions around renewing their membership, accessing UCFS programs, or other general membership questions. Need help joining the Society? Margaret is here for that, too! You can reach out to her at memberservices@ucfsociety.org.

Please join us in welcoming Margaret to the UCFS community!

The UCFS Accreditation Program celebrates and recognizes urban forestry programs that demonstrate leadership, innovation, and a commitment to the highest standards in the field.

In response to evolving challenges and opportunities, UCFS is enhancing its Accreditation Program to reflect the latest industry standards essential for building sustainable, resilient urban and community forests.

Get ready—the next generation of UCFS Accreditation is coming in late 2025!

ACCREDITATION

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START

PRE-QUALIFICATION

To meet pre-qualifications for Accreditation, all urban forestry programs must:

- Have an urban forest management or tree care plan
- Have a full or partial tree inventory
- Demonstrate adherence to ANSI A300 and Z133 standards

STANDARD ONE

URBAN FORESTRY LEADERSHIP

Standard One demonstrates that tree stewardship decisions are made by credentialed urban forestry professionals with significant experience in program management.



1

STANDARD TWO

URBAN FOREST GOVERNANCE

Standard Two demonstrates that policies, plans, and funding for sustainable and equitable management and protection of trees are in place, as well as regulations for planting, maintenance, preservation, and recycling of removed trees.

2

STANDARD THREE

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT

Standard Three demonstrates that tree stewardship decisions are based in sound arboriculture practice; accurate, up-to-date data is maintained; and ongoing monitoring of the urban forest is in place.

3

STANDARD FOUR

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Standard Four demonstrates active involvement of community members and decision-makers in urban forestry initiatives and equitable access to urban forest benefits.

4

ACHIEVEMENT

The UCFS Accreditation Program is structured upon a tier system to provide communities motivation to advance urban forestry stewardship. A scoring system – backed by peer review – ensures each tier is earned by demonstrated practices—not just size or tree budget. Earn points to achieve the status of:



Steward



Champion



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Expanding the Scope of Municipal Forest Management:



Baltimore's Camp Small urban wood utilization facility. Photo by Morgan Grove

Wood Utilization

By [Mike Galvin](#), [Jennifer Judd](#), [Morgan Grove](#), and [Jeff Carroll](#)



While past models of a sustainable urban forest have seen it as one [that primarily provides services rather than goods](#), that perception is changing.

The potential annual value from U.S. urban tree wood waste ranges between [\\$89 and \\$786 million](#), primarily based on lumber and furniture value. With the inclusion of biochar, carbon credits, and additional products, the number is an X factor greater, depending upon the goods created. Yet a survey of municipal tree care operations found that most of the wood waste generated is [turned to mulch or firewood, or dumped at landfills](#). Current urban and community forest management plans typically include tree planting, tree maintenance, and partnerships, but miss the opportunity for full-cycle urban forest management by upcycling wood waste into highest and best uses that in turn support tree planting and care operations.

Currently, wood—logs, branches, and chips—is treated as a negative externality or byproduct of municipal tree management. Expanding municipal tree management to include urban wood waste utilization shifts wood from a negative externality or byproduct to an internal, positive feature of municipal forest management. This can also be incredibly helpful when large pulses of wood waste are generated due to storms, pests, fire, or drought.

Depending on local markets, makers, and supply chains, these operations can generate everything from green, dried, and thermally modified lumber and slabs to firewood, chips, mulch, compost, and biochar.

Urban wood waste utilization provides us an opportunity to apply a [circular economy model rather than a linear “take, make, waste”](#) >>



Memphis Urban Wood mill in operation, Memphis, Tennessee.
Photo by Jennifer Judd, Unified Wood Economy

[model](#) and to [“think like nature” by using wastes in one part of a system as a feedstock or resource for another part of the system](#). Trees in a forest are recycled back into the system. We can do the same thing, indirectly, in the urban and community forest.

Objectives of revenue, profit, avoided costs, and community benefit may have various degrees of scale and overlap in a municipal urban wood utilization operation. An urban wood utilization effort, if scaled, can subsidize or replace general funds for a municipal operation. It can avoid landfill use by in-house crews and landfill costs to contract crews, reducing overall tree care contract costs. It can also avoid some public agency procurement costs if the materials generated are used in lieu of purchasing the same items from an external vendor. Strategic investment in urban wood utilization can create job opportunities for arborists, carpenters, equipment operators, and foremen, among

others. It can also spur economic development through local, regional, and national supply chains by generating materials, having them assembled into products, and then marketed and sold.

The network of entities working in the urban wood utilization space is expanding with the involvement of NGOs like [Urban Wood Network](#) and [Unified Wood Economy](#), and companies like [Cambium](#), [West Coast Arborists](#), [Room & Board](#), and [Taylor Guitars](#). There is an ever-growing collaborative network of urban wood industry professionals: arborists, sawmill operators, suppliers, manufacturers, makers, design professionals, consultants, municipalities, students, and beyond. Supply chains of those that generate urban wood waste, those that salvage and sort it, those that process it through milling and drying, those that manufacture goods from it, and those that sell goods at retail and wholesale are all needed to make an urban wood utilization



Aerial shot of Memphis Urban Wood Upcycling Campus.
Photo by Jennifer Judd, Unified Wood Economy

program work. It can be complicated to put all of the pieces together. Where should you start?

Resources available include [The Urban Wood Workbook](#) and [Urban Wood Network Resources, including municipal case studies](#). Currently under development is an urban wood utilization plan guide and template. It is being created for municipalities to develop a wood utilization component for their urban and community forest management plan, or to create a standalone urban wood utilization plan. While we often think of an urban wood utilization program as part of an urban and community forest management plan, it can also be part of a net zero waste plan, a sustainability plan, a workforce development plan, or a variety of other municipal plans or initiatives.

The guide will start with pre-planning a wood waste utilization plan— including the who, what, when, where, why, and how—as well as the motivations

and lenses related to plan development. The urban wood utilization plan element will look at vision development, strategic planning, goals and objectives, implementation planning, and monitoring. It will also include information on how a cost-benefit analysis is conducted, infrastructure estimates to establish a facility, and sample ROI projections for operations based on existing utilization sites. An ongoing wood utilization assessment focused on Stockton, California will be referenced in the guide and include examples of an in-depth cost-benefit analysis on a proposed wood utilization effort. Finally, post-planning will look at adaptive management and the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle.

The urban wood utilization plan guide and template is being developed for California with the assistance of CAL FIRE. A companion tool for broader use will also be developed. The tool will be available in Q1 of 2026. 🌱

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A tree inventory with Austin's Youth Forest Council at Roy G. Guerrero Park was part of an Urban Forest Grant with Circle Acres to reforest this park located in East Austin. The eastern cottonwoods (*Populus deltoides*) inventoried were some of the largest in Austin, measuring over 70 inches (178 cm) in trunk diameter. Photo Courtesy City of Austin

Tree Equity *Evolution*

How and Why Austin, Texas is Adapting
a National Tool for Local Needs

With City of Austin Geospatial Analyst Sr.
and Certified Arborist Alan Halter

What is the nature of the transition underway?

Created as part of Austin's inaugural urban forest plan, Austin's first tree prioritization tool, the [Community Tree Priority Map](#), launched in 2015 with 31 data inputs. Our 2020 update shifted to an equity-based approach, engaging with our Youth Forest Council. We also streamlined the tool, reducing the number of data inputs for redundancy and to simplify communication. By distilling complex numeric scores (0-100) into easier-to-understand “high” and “low” priority categories, we made the tool more user-friendly and saw a jump in usage. Until recently, Austin has created its own tree prioritization tools in-house because there was never an alternative available—until now.

Austin's adoption of the [Tree Equity Score Analyzer \(TESA\)](#) is a strategic move to a more sustainable, supported solution by leveraging a robust national tool managed by the nonprofit American Forests. This partnership provides enhanced support for technical issues, data updates, and user training. By using a national tool, we can dedicate less time to assessing data and more time to planting trees, which is our ultimate goal.

Some features from the Community Tree Priority Map have been integrated into the Tree Equity Score Analyzer (TESA), which helps ease the transition for users. For example, our "Priority Areas" are now directly available within the TESA tool, and American Forests has also added other relevant datasets like food access and affordable housing. >>

Who was surveyed about the move to Tree Equity Score Analyzer, and what questions did respondents have?

A small group of users of the Community Tree Priority Map were surveyed. Most use the map for their work, with participants primarily from the government and nonprofit sectors.

Some open-ended responses:

1. Why are we making this transition?
What's wrong with our existing tool?
2. What are the impacts on our community and greenhouse gas/net-zero goals if we use a lower canopy goal?
3. Is it possible for Tree Equity Scores to be more granular, especially for small-scale projects like those at individual schools?
4. Can TESA include data on other important factors like flooding and air quality?
5. What trainings are available to help users become more comfortable with TESA?

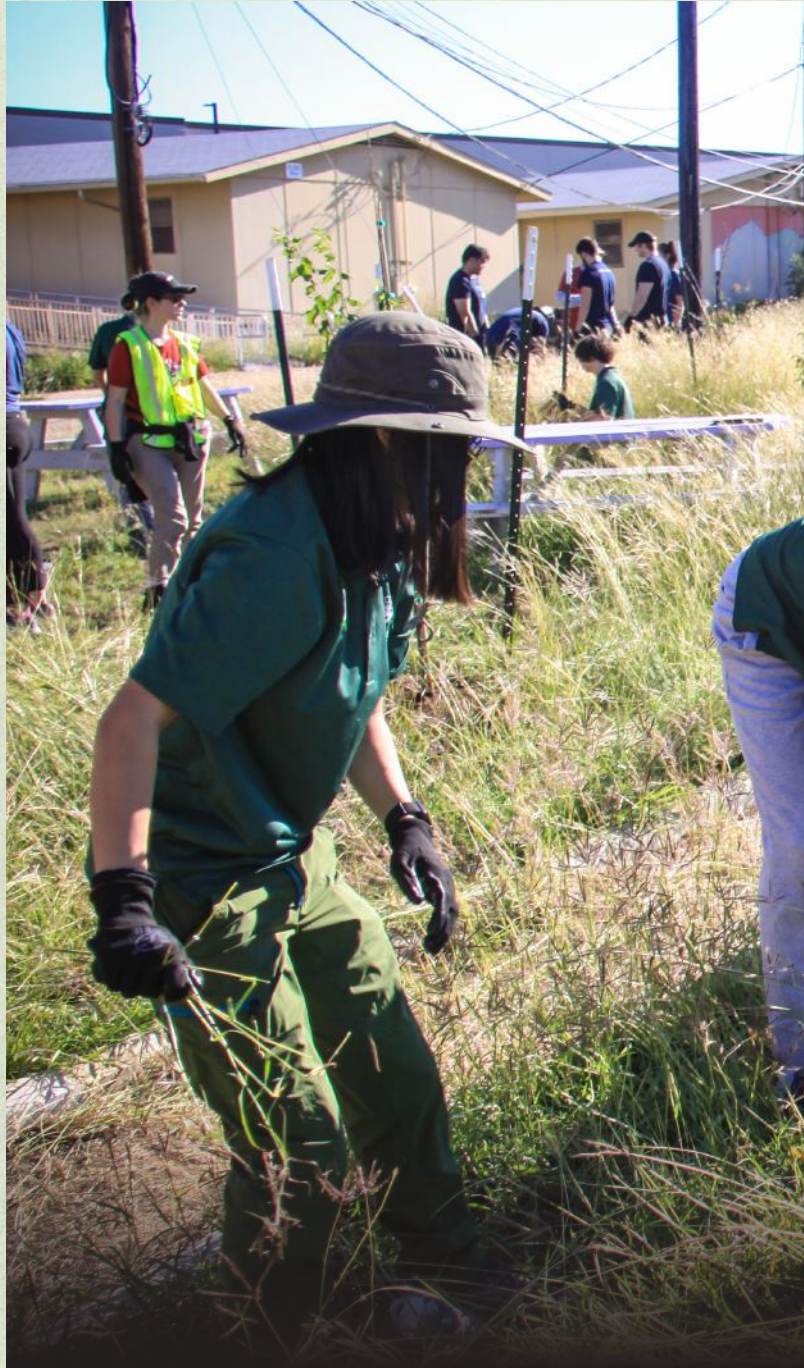
The survey tried to identify if any significant barriers to adoption exist and tried to understand opportunities for growth. Questions probed opinions about canopy targets, and tool usefulness for identifying neighborhoods for improving tree equity.

Findings:

1. Clear consensus that tree canopy is a critical factor in determining tree equity.
2. The majority of respondents believe Tree Equity Score is effective in identifying neighborhoods where their efforts will help improve tree equity.
3. Desire for more training. ([American Forests offers this!](#))

What was particularly surprising about the survey results?

The biggest surprise was the reaction to the canopy goal discrepancy. Although TESA's 30% goal conflicts with Austin's 50% goal, it wasn't a deal-breaker for most users. Nearly two-thirds of respondents said they would still use the tool. Austin is collaborating with American Forests on solutions.



Tree Equity Score sets a minimum canopy goal of 30%, meaning a neighborhood has achieved tree equity if its tree canopy covers at least 30% of the land. This contrasts with Austin's more ambitious Climate Equity Action Plan, which sets a goal of 50%. Some respondents expressed concern that the lower target could create a misleading sense of success as a lower canopy target translates to higher Tree Equity Scores. On the other hand, some also noted the value of the 30% target as a practical first step for calculating a goal and prioritizing areas with the greatest need. After all, we have seen that when outcomes improve for those areas with the greatest need, outcomes for everyone else can rise as well.



A tree planting event at Rodriguez Elementary, featuring members from Austin's Urban Forest Program and Youth Forest Council. Photo Courtesy City of Austin

American Forests is well aware of this, and we are collaborating on solutions. Our current options include running "what-if" scenarios to see the effect of different canopy targets and calculating new scores to align with Austin's 50% goal.

How is using the Tree Equity Score Analyzer expected to influence key partners?

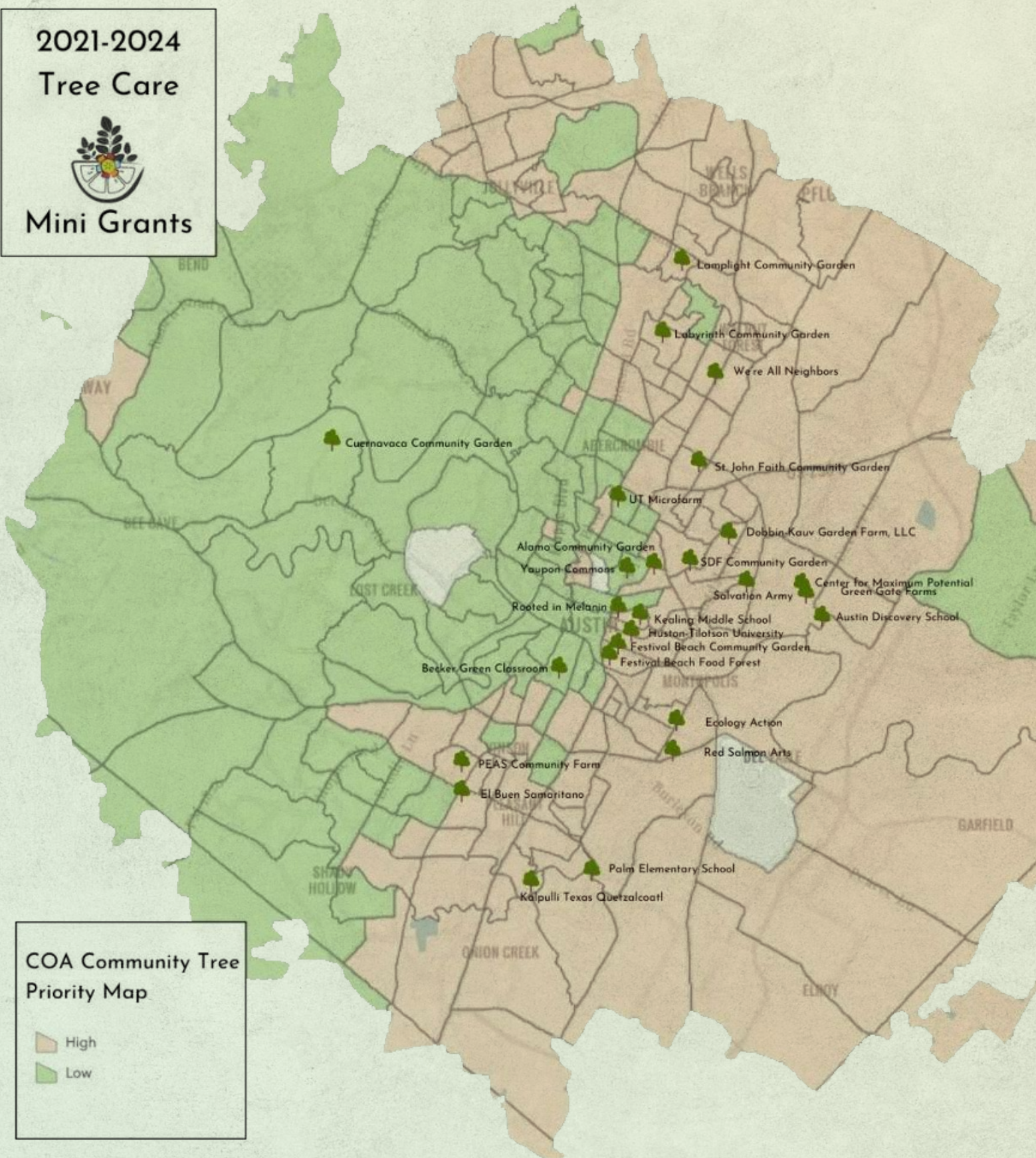
To provide guidance, the City of Austin's Urban Forest Program group is serving as a "go-to" resource for tree equity analysis and prioritization. By adopting TESA as a guiding tool, the program hopes to encourage its partners to do the same, creating a "ripple effect."

1. **NeighborWoods:** This partnership with the nonprofit TreeFolks distributes over 7,000 trees annually. The City of Austin provides the contract and funding. The program will now use TESA exclusively to aid planning annual tree distribution, ensuring trees are planted in low Tree Equity Score areas.
2. The **Urban Forest Grants** program, which awards over \$1 million annually, will now use TESA to assess project locations and guide funding decisions. TESA's new "Location Insights" feature will also allow the program to evaluate a project's ecosystem service impact during the planning stage. >>

2021-2024 Tree Care



Mini Grants



COA Community Tree Priority Map



The Community Tree Priority Map with Fruitful Commons' Tree Care Mini Grants displayed as little trees, which, when viewed against the high-priority areas (peach color), show how the map may steer project locations. Map by Fruitful Commons, courtesy of the City of Austin.

And on neighborhood gardening projects ... one of our respondents, Fruitful Commons, receives annual funding from us (close to \$200K now) to care for their urban orchard and to provide [Tree Care Mini Grants](#) (see Map). They are very excited to adopt TESA and welcome the change. Fruitful Commons Program Manager Angie Holliday was pivotal in helping expand TESA to Austin.

As Austin adopts the Tree Equity Score Analyzer tool, how will the City ensure that greening efforts don't lead to green gentrification?

To address this complex issue, Austin uses [The Uprooted Project](#) data from The University of Texas to see at what gentrification stage a neighborhood might be under (e.g. Susceptible, Early Stage, Late Stage). Austin now plans to collaborate with their regional American Forests' representative Jake Simon to try to get this same layer loaded into the Tree Equity Score Analyzer, so users can continue to be aware of and discuss the potential for gentrification in their proposed project areas.

Has the process thus far revealed any potential limitation of TESA?

Concerns were raised about geographic coverage gaps. Seventy percent of respondents noted the absence of Tree Equity Score data in eligible planting areas on the edge of town. This is a common issue in many cities. To address this, respondents suggested displaying these missing areas on the map or, at a minimum, providing clear transparency about the data gaps. American Forests is aware of this feedback and is exploring possibilities for communities like Austin where some parts of the city may not be considered "urban," such as expanding coverage to urban-rural fringe areas or providing the necessary formulas for us to calculate the scores ourselves. Many of these areas have low to no population. Regardless, this is important because many decisions will be based on Tree Equity Scores.

What will be the biggest challenge for Austin's urban forestry strategy as you shift from your current tool to TESA?

Tracking changes to Austin's urban forest, especially with new construction, is a constant challenge as our data often lags behind. TESA, which relies on U.S. Census data, will likely have this same issue. I'm looking forward to Location Insights, a new feature in the Tree Equity Score National Explorer, and how it may be used to see the impact of proposed tree planting in a neighborhood. This could help determine the number of trees needed to reach a perfect Tree Equity Score.

How does TESA differ in methodology or priorities from Austin's previous tool?

The Tree Equity Score Analyzer differs from Community Tree Priority Map in its scoring methods and geographic scope. Both tools use tree canopy and socioeconomic data, but TESA defines Austin by U.S. Census urban areas, whereas the city's previous tool used jurisdictional boundaries. This difference means some low-population areas are excluded from TESA. However, research conducted by one of our state foresters, Alison Fulton, along with Paul Ries and Gretchen Riley, showed that both tools found the most canopy need on the east side of Austin. This was expected given the low current distribution of tree cover, the higher percentage of people experiencing poverty, and the higher percentage of people of color. In the aforementioned research paper, [Where Are the Benefits of Trees Needed Most? A Comparison of Equity-Based Mapping Tools in Austin, Texas](#), you can see a map comparing the geographic areas covered by different tree prioritization tools.

How will funding decisions be influenced by Tree Equity Scores? What specific scores or criteria in the TES will determine how funding is allocated?

To prioritize funding, Austin will likely focus resources on "high" priority neighborhoods, defined as having a Tree Equity Score of 80 or below. This will be implemented by filtering Urban Forest Grant applications through a Tree Equity Score lens and by maintaining a target in tree distribution contracts that 60% of trees go to areas with scores below 80. 🌳

From Generic to Specific: Crafting Newsworthy Media Messages



SUSTAINABLE
URBAN
FORESTS
COALITION

Thank you to the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition for giving us permission to share this with our readers.

Purpose:

Learn how to take a broad, generic topic and make it newsworthy, relevant, and specific to your audience or local community.

Start with a Generic Statement

Generic Example:

“Urban forests are important.”

True – but too broad to catch a journalist’s attention or connect with your audience.

Make it Specific + Newsworthy Using These Values

News Value

Timeliness

Improved Message Example

“This summer’s heatwave has made shade from urban trees more critical than ever.”

Relevance

“In [City Name], tree canopy coverage is 30% lower in low-income neighborhoods – affecting residents’ health and energy bills.”

Conflict

“A proposed development could remove 200 mature trees – sparking debate over the future of the city’s urban forest.”

Emotion

“For 8-year-old Mia, the tree outside her window is more than shade – it’s a daily nature escape in a concrete neighborhood.”

Impact

“Urban trees in [City] reduce stormwater runoff by 50 million gallons per year – saving the city over \$2 million annually.”

Your Message Toolkit



To move from generic → specific:

- Add local data, policy, or context
- Connect to timely events or seasons
- Include a human or emotional angle
- Highlight clear benefits or consequences





Photo by Michelle Sutton

Inside the 2025 UCFS Mentoring Program



The UCFS Mentoring Program is a member benefit that cultivates leadership and camaraderie for urban and community forestry professionals. Program participation keeps growing, so for this story we solicited a subset of folks to reflect on their experience. Applications for the [2026 cohort of the UCFS Mentoring Program](#) will be due in April (stay tuned for announcements).



From left: Sally Bentz-Dalton, Carolina Arango, and Michelle Cole meet at MFI 2025.

Alex Senauke – Mentee

I began my UCFS mentorship during the most pivotal—and challenging—time of my career so far. I had been working for an urban forestry nonprofit, and was looking forward to another contract term in 2025. Sadly, the cuts to Inflation Reduction Act grants meant that my program was not renewed, and I was left out of work. Additionally, I was wrapping up a two-year Arboriculture program, and had to put the finishing touches on my degree in order to qualify for my ISA Certified Arborist credential.

As soon as I met my mentor Grant Jones (forestry superintendent for Oak Park, Illinois), I knew that he would be a terrific resource for the challenges I was facing.

He had experience with many sectors of the industry, including tree-planting nonprofits and municipal forestry. Additionally, he had been through several academic environments and was familiar with the expectations of the ISA.

Although the first few months of the year were emotionally draining as I struggled to find a new position that met my expectations, Grant's support and our biweekly meetings helped me focus on practical goals. Little by little, we chipped away at the obstacles I was facing. In June, it all paid off: I started a position as an urban forestry aide for the City of San Leandro, California; I completed my A.S. degree; and I passed my Certified Arborist exam. All in less than a month!

Grant not only offered practical career advice, he helped me keep my cool when things felt unworkable. In the time we have left in the program, I hope to take stock of what we've been able to accomplish this year—and lay the groundwork for the steps I'd like to take next in my career.



Andrew Billon – Mentee

Fortunately, my UCFS Mentor Darren Green runs a forestry program in Alexandria, Louisiana that is similar enough to my own in climate and culture, but different enough in scope and structure, that we find endless fruitful topics to discuss. My own role as a municipal forester for the City of New Orleans is gradually trending from operational toward organizational, and that bigger picture organizational perspective is a specialty of Darren's.

One specific takeaway that has given me helpful perspective is Darren's idea that often the hardest people/organizations to win over to your cause are groups who work closely to yours, but toward a different goal. We talked about how this rings true for me in my interactions with other city agencies—i.e., utility and public works departments. Darren pointed out that even "adversaries" of your cause can be easier to win over than these near-parallel organizations. We discussed how this dynamic scales down well to a forestry operation itself and can apply to one's own colleagues and advocates. Awareness of this led me tackle some conflicts with a focus on aligning our goals, using a "we're not so different, you and I" mindset*.

Above even the practical advice and perspective gained, I value this mentorship for the reassurance it brings me. Having access to a competent professional outside of my organization who knows the challenges of our niche (but growing) field is a relief to me as I navigate a role that can be thankless and overwhelming.

*One of the skills we teach at MFI is to try to find common ground with the lateral colleagues who don't quite understand what we do—i.e., we all work for the people, we are all just trying to get our jobs done, I can make your life easier by taking this off of your plate, call me if you're ever unsure about anything and I'll gladly walk you through it. With most people these tactics will disarm them and in the long run, you will create some good allies in other departments.



—Darren Green

Sally Bentz-Dalton – Mentee

In November 2024 I saw the mentoring story in *City Trees*; the program seemed interesting, so I signed up. I thought it would be just the push I needed to create goals and make changes at work. I have worked as the town arborist for the Town of Atherton, California for almost eleven years and had started getting the feeling of stagnation. I was matched with Carolina Arango, who has proven to be a great mentor. She is easygoing, but very professional.

Having Carolina as my mentor motivated me to set goals that I am now working towards; two of those goals are conducting a tree talk and updating the municipal tree code. I am the only arborist where I work, so it is helpful



to have someone to talk to who understands what I do at my job. Carolina has given me helpful tips and examples of how she handles things in her position, and she tells me about policies at her job. It is nice to have an outside perspective that understands my position and workload. It has also been nice to have a female role model in our industry.

I don't think I can overstate how valuable this program is. I would recommend it to anyone needing a little push and quality time with someone who can relate to their work.

Carolina Arango – Mentor

Sally has been an amazing mentee. I was very fortunate to start our relationship by meeting in person at MFI last February, where we broke the ice and talked about who we were as people, and I encouraged her to think of some goals she would like to pursue. I also got to meet my first UCFS Mentor, Michelle Cole, in person. It was a unique and wonderful moment.

Sally had a thoughtful list of goals which we narrowed down to a few to begin with. We talked about ways to get them done. I shared my own personal experience and followed up with some materials I thought would be helpful. To my admiration, in the next meeting, Sally shared she had achieved multiple goals! What a proud moment for her, and for me. After the first couple of meetings, we fell into a steady tempo of goal setting and achievements.



I have enjoyed getting to know other mentors through the program as well, where we share our experiences and get ideas, advice, and support. UCFS Program and Education Manager Karla Nagy encouraged me to help Sally dig deeper into the big picture and create a vision for the future. (I have set my own goal as a mentor to expand our relationship and transition from task-oriented goals to a deeper growth mindset for both of us.)

This journey has brought a lot of learnings for me—like about a new area of the world and the challenges in doing similar work where the geography, climate, and species are different. I have learned a lot about urban trees species in parts of California, and how different demographics result in different interests and concerns about trees. Above all this, I have grown as a mentor and have been motivated to become a better coach with Sally and beyond [Carolina is the Urban Forestry Coordinator for the City of Maple Ridge, British Columbia and she is the MFI Instructional Facilitator for UCFS]. I am very thankful to UCFS for providing me the opportunity to be both a mentee and twice a mentor; the experiences have been invaluable.

Earl Eutsler – Mentor

My participation in the UCFS Mentoring Program with Zach Wirtz [on parental leave as of this writing] was an incredibly enriching, two-way experience, truly embodying the program's goal of providing mutual benefits to mentors and mentees. Zach, who serves as the Director of the Chicago Region Trees Initiative (CRTI) at the Morton Arboretum, and I discussed many important topics, including strategic planning for CRTI's 2050 master plan refresh, and managing his rapidly growing team, which recently expanded from five to twenty-two full-time staff.

A key question came up: "What is the metric that only CRTI can deliver?" For me, understanding CRTI's unique organizational structure, with many distinct job descriptions and a hierarchy designed for introductory management experience, was fascinating. Our conversations underscored how strategic use of data, like CRTI's highly accurate shrubby invasive mapping developed with Purdue Digital Forestry, can transform localized problems into compelling narratives for public engagement and funding.



This mentorship highlighted several universal challenges and allowed us to share a variety of innovative solutions we have deployed in our respective urban forestry programs. [Earl is the Associate Director/State Forester, Urban Forestry Division, for the Washington, DC Department of Transportation.] We attempted to meet every 2 weeks to ensure we had a cadence that allowed us to easily maintain momentum.

One key we found that helped facilitate productive sessions was to end each meeting by identifying agenda items for the next meeting's discussion. This was super useful in helping us both arrive prepared, and with a shared understanding of at least one important topic that we wanted to discuss. Overall, the UCFS Mentoring program has been invaluable for us both.

Dana Karcher on Mentorship

Known for her generosity towards colleagues, Dana Karcher volunteered to be a mentor for the 2025 UCFS Mentoring program. Dana has served in many roles in the industry; she is currently the project developer for Davey Resource Group-Central US and Rocky Mountain Regions.



Dana Karcher with mentor and friend Rose Epperson at the Atlanta ISA Conference in 2024.

What is the wisest advice a mentor has given you?

My first mentor was my mother who asked me, “What is the worst that can happen?” and said, “You can do anything you set your mind to doing.” Those two statements have seen me through a lot of difficult decision making both personally and professionally. I pass them on to others on a regular basis.

Another mentor that I met in a leadership program taught me the importance of making a “pro-con” list. That is another tool to live by and I give that advice freely. It is not a matter of making a decision based on the weightiest side of the list. It causes a thought process that allows one to consider all the advantages and disadvantages of a decision.

What is the wisest piece of advice you have given?

I talk a lot about patience with people who want my advice. Most of the circumstances are around potential job promotions with increased responsibilities that come with increased pay, but may also move someone out of doing a job that they really like. So, I preach patience. It isn’t always what someone wants to hear, but a solid resume with time put in and mastery of a position is important.



Dana with Davey Resource Group colleagues hiking in Cuyahoga National Park, Ohio.

Who was one of your most important mentors?

I have a few who were really important to me in my early career. One was [Rose Epperson](#), who is the executive director of the Western Chapter of the ISA. From the beginning of my career, she was encouraging and knowledgeable about the industry. She gave me advice on getting involved in leadership at the chapter level. I ran for office and lost, and she encouraged me to take an appointed position on the board that was being offered to me. The second time I ran, I was elected as a board member. I believe that exposure to leadership that she encouraged really helped me understand what giving back to the arboriculture industry was all about. She was and is a model for that and I have always appreciated that about her. Although we are not as connected as we once were, she continues to have an impact on my decisions.

Have you had the experience of being mentored by someone of a younger generation?

Years ago, I met [Lance Davisson](#) when he was the urban forestry coordinator for the State of New Mexico. He invited me to attend a conference with him about water and sustainability. Not exactly a tree conference, but I certainly understood the connection. He wanted me to see his vision for his program and I learned what he was trying to do, which was to set a bigger table for urban forestry. From there we have worked on projects together, weathered leadership challenges, celebrated successes, and learned from one another. Never a formal mentor/mentee relationship, he has taught me a lot over the years. I consider him a “go-to person” as I have navigated a number of leadership roles and situations. Also, he is such an innovative thinker, I like to pick his brain for ideas.

Do you find that as you accumulate experience, you seek more mentoring opportunities?

I don't seek folks to mentor, but there is something about this grey hair that is a magnet! And I am so happy to be that person who is a resource or a listening ear. I thrive on both teaching and learning, so being available for others is one way that I am fulfilled in my career.



Dana cutting the wire basket off a tree at a planting in Fort Collins, Colorado.

For example, at Davey, we host some very special internal workshops that engage one of our underrepresented employee groups. I have had the absolute pleasure of teaching about leadership and communications at these workshops. I always put my contact information up at the end of my presentations and tell attendees if they want to talk, I am there for them. This leads to the opportunity to talk to a lot of folks that are younger and newer in their career and I get the chance to give advice as they ask. It is so rewarding to me that they are seeking to learn more about our company, the opportunities we have to grow, the arboriculture industry, and ideas around leadership at the local and national level. This has broadened my network and taught me new things as well. I believe that mentorship can definitely be a two-way street.

What is the one of the most surprising things that has happened?

My “accidental” ongoing current mentee came to me through a challenge that she was having. Her supervisor said to get in touch with me to get my thoughts on what she was facing. Four years later, we talk biweekly, rarely missing the opportunity to connect. I have watched her grow, and seen her become an integral part of the division where she works. But the surprising part is the number of times I call her and say, “Do you have time for me to run something by you?” She is a resource for me in my work as well! I learn so much from her!

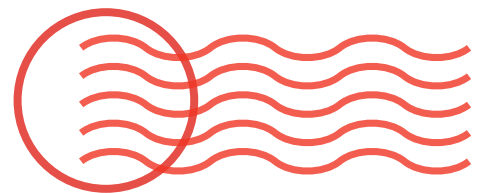
We had contemplated writing a paper together and instead we ended up co-presenting at the Partners Conference. Our bond is very strong and I consider her such a close ally and friend. I was so surprised by the friendship that formed with someone who is so much younger than me and in a different stage of her career! It has been really fun and truly a gift for me. 🌱



A large Algerian oak in Croydon, Victoria that is listed on Australia's National Trust Register of Significant Trees. Photo by Raelene Ryder

Algerian oak (*Quercus canariensis*) is a large tree that can grow to 30m (98 feet) in height and width. In Australia it is best suited to the southeast of the continent, where it has predominantly been planted for shade and amenity in parks and large gardens. Algerian oak is semi-deciduous, with leaves usually present through winter and falling as new leaves emerge. The large crown is borne on massive branches that can extend 15m (49 feet) or more.

Originating from Northern Africa, Spain and Portugal, Algerian oak has good drought and heat tolerance and is relatively fast growing once established. Like many of the oaks it is a long-lived species that can deliver its many benefits for centuries when well established and maintained. Planting of Algerian oak appears to have declined over recent years, most likely due to increasing competition for space above and below ground, but in areas where space is available this species can help to achieve canopy cover targets into the long term, and many shade-loving shrubs and groundcovers thrive under its airy canopy.



Postcard from Australia: *Algerian Oak*

Thank you to Treenet News and author Raelene Ryder for sharing this with us.



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