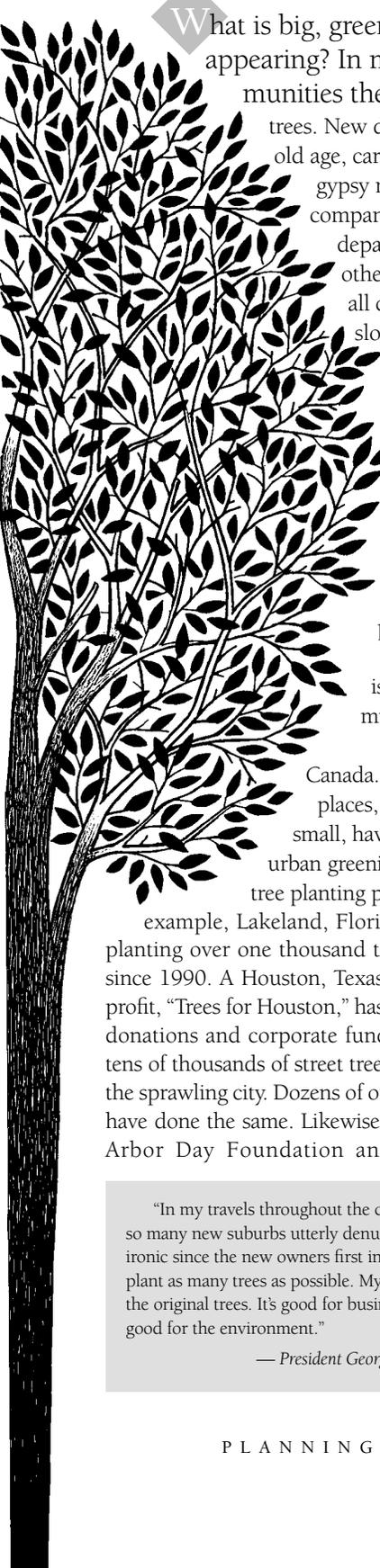


Green Enhances Growth

by Edward T. McMahon



What is big, green, and disappearing? In many communities the answer is

trees. New development, old age, careless cutting, gypsy moths, utility companies, highway departments, and other culprits are all combining to slowly strip our communities of trees.

For the most part people care about trees. As a result, tree preservation and planting have become hot issues in communities across the U.S. and Canada. Hundreds of places, both big and small, have established urban greening and street tree planting programs. For

example, Lakeland, Florida, has been planting over one thousand trees per year since 1990. A Houston, Texas, based non-profit, "Trees for Houston," has used private donations and corporate funding to plant tens of thousands of street trees throughout the sprawling city. Dozens of other big cities have done the same. Likewise the National Arbor Day Foundation and American

"Global ReLeaf" program have helped hundreds of small towns start tree planting programs.

While the simple act of planting trees can have a profound long-range impact on a community and its inhabitants, until relatively recently the idea of protecting existing trees through local tree preservation ordinances was rare. As recently as 1984, the University of Pennsylvania could identify only one hundred communities nationwide with tree protection laws. But today, tree protection ordinances are sprouting up all over the country. In California and Florida alone almost two hundred communities now have city tree ordinances.

"Of the many ways to watch the sky, one of the most familiar is through the filigree limbs of a tree, or around and above trees; this has much to do with how we actually see and observe the sky. Trees conduct the eye from the ground up to the heavens, link the detailed temporariness of life with the bulging blue abstraction overhead. In Norse legend, the huge ash tree Yggdrasil, with its great arching limbs and three swarming roots, stretched high into the sky, holding the universe together, connecting earth to both heaven and hell.

— From *A Natural History of the Senses*, by Diane Ackerman (Vintage Books 1991), 240.

As you might expect, ordinances mandating landscaping and requiring the protection of existing trees and woodlands have provoked protests from the business community in many places. Now, however, a growing number of homebuilders, developers, and other businesses are embracing landscaping and tree protection measures because they realize protecting trees makes economic sense.

Two new publications, one by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and the other by the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB), make clear just how valuable trees and landscaping can be.

In 1991, the ULI, in cooperation with the American Society of Landscape Architects, examined eleven real estate

"Municipal tree programs are often the first part of the municipal budget to be cut. Yet trees are the only part of the municipal infrastructure that actually increases in value every year. Trees not only increase in their individual value, but they also add to adjacent property values. This, in turn, leads to increased tax revenues for the municipality — and often to the revitalization of residential and commercial areas."

— From "On the Value of Trees and Open Space," by Elizabeth Brabec, PCJ #11 (Summer '93).

developments to assess whether money spent on site planning, landscaping, and preservation of mature trees justified the added cost of development. What they found was that landscaping and greenspace increased profits for developers while providing numerous other benefits to both the user and the community. Specifically, greenspace and landscaping translated into increased financial returns of 5 to 15 percent depending on the type of project. Landscaping also gave developers a competitive edge and increased the rate of project absorption.  "Value by Design"

Likewise, *Building Greener Neighbors*, a new publication by the NAHB, demonstrates how builders and developers can save money, generate sales, and enhance their prestige in the community by creating tree preservation plans. The report points out that "lots with trees sell for an average of 20 to 30 percent more than similarly sized lots without trees," and that "mature trees that are saved during development add

"A three hundred-year-old oak tree was cut down in 1994 in the north end of Wooster so a street could be widened to allow for another turning lane for an incoming Red Lobster. A planning commission could realize the benefits of an historic tree and refuse to allow its destruction. Why not retain the beauty and naturalness of the land while at the same time allowing for growth?"

— From Andrea Kincaid's 1st Place Essay in the PCJ's 1995 national high school essay competition. Printed in PCJ #19 (Summer '95).

"In my travels throughout the country, I see so many new suburbs utterly denuded of trees; ironic since the new owners first instinct is to plant as many trees as possible. My advice, leave the original trees. It's good for business and very good for the environment."

— President George Bush, 1990.

more value to a lot than post construction landscaping.”

Reinforcing these findings is a 1995 survey conducted for a group of the nation's largest volume homebuilders by American Lives, a San Francisco-based firm. Pollster Brook Warrick says that the results show that “consumers are putting an increasingly high premium on interaction with the outdoor environment through the inclusion of wooded tracts, nature paths, and even wilderness areas in housing developments.” In fact, 77 percent of consumers put “natural open space” as the feature they desired most in a new home development.

“One of the most successful place-keepers I've ever met was the late Hattie Carthan, the ‘tree lady of Brooklyn,’ who lived in Bedford-Stuyvesant ... When Mrs. Carthan's block on Vernon Avenue began to go downhill, she decided it would cost too much to move, and that anyway she was tired of running away from problems. Mrs. Carthan was already sixty-five and about to retire when the idea of raising money to plant trees first hit her. By the end of the sixties, her Vernon Avenue tree planters had inspired the founding of seventy-five different block associations in Bedford-Stuyvesant dedicated to planting and taking care of trees.”

— From *The Experience of Place*, by Tony Hiss (Alfred Knopf Co. 1991), 96.

These and other studies make one thing abundantly clear: *trees are not frills or cosmetic add-ons*. They are basic infrastructure and a major factor in contributing to community pride, quality of life, and economic development. Street trees, for example, are important not just because they absorb noise and air pollution, lower utility costs, and provide a habitat for birds and other wildlife, but because the roadway and its frontages are a community's major public arena or ordering device. Trees growing along a street visually tie a neighborhood or a development together and make it a unit.

American communities need aggressive tree planting programs as well as comprehensive programs to protect existing trees and to mandate landscaping of commercial areas and parking lots. While mandating anything in today's political climate is likely to encounter some resistance, passing tree protection and landscaping ordinances may not be as hard as it once was. This is because more and more builders and developers are recognizing that trees not only make our communities more livable, but also make their developments more valuable. ♦

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“A city without trees is like a world without poetry and music. Tree lined streets are more than shaded passage-ways linking buildings. They give us a chance to bring nature into the heart of our communities, while linking us to our past. Scientists also have come to find a rational beauty in trees. Trees can significantly reduce temperatures in town and city centers, countering the ‘urban heat island’ effect. This is accomplished not only through the shading effect of trees, but also through trees' ability to store large quantities of carbon — a key factor in global warming. ...

If this weren't enough, the leaves and branches of trees slow the movement of raindrops, lessening soil erosion and storm sewer system overload. Trees have also been found to reduce air pollution, by removing particulate matter from the air, while restoring oxygen to the atmosphere.”

— From, “Planning for Trees,” by Henry Arnold, PCJ #2 (January/February 1992).

“An analysis of the reasons people gave for liking trees on their street is revealing.

1. They provide shade.
2. They make the street more alive by their movement and richness.
3. They are soothing to the eyes.
4. They purify the air and increase the oxygen content.
5. They hide buildings.
6. They add a sense of privacy.
7. They provide contact with nature and give warmth as opposed to the hardness of cold concrete.
8. They cut down on noise.
9. They can make the streets look neat and provide residents with an opportunity to show they care for them.
10. They provide an identity if they are unique ...”

From *Livable Streets*, by Donald Appleyard (Univ. of Calif. Press 1981), 66.



Resources:

National Arbor Day Foundation
100 Arbor Ave.

Nebraska City, NE 68410
402-474-5655

American Forest's Global ReLeaf Program
1516 P Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005
202-667-3300

Building Greener Neighborhoods is available from the National Association of Home Builders, 1201 15th St. NW, Washington, DC 20005; 800-223-2665.

Value by Design: Landscaping, Site Planning and Amenities is available from the Urban Land Institute, 625 Indiana Ave., Washington, DC 20004; 800-321-5011.

