

# Community Forests

## **Ordinances Can Help Townships Protect and Maintain Trees, Avoid Liability**

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR



**Study after study has shown how trees benefit communities, from increasing property values to reducing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Well-written ordinances that provide for tree protection and maintenance can ensure that they remain assets and don't become safety hazards or catalysts for conflict.**

**T**wo years ago, Pittsburgh City Council gave a \$375,000 settlement to a jogger injured when a tree fell in a city park. The 29-year-old woman suffered multiple spinal and rib fractures and a collapsed lung when the rotten tree gave way and fell on top of her. The accident reportedly left her with permanent spinal nerve damage.

The young woman sued the city, a local utility, a tree service, and a contractor. All the entities settled, most for undisclosed amounts.

\* \* \*

Trees offer many benefits to a community, but if they are not properly managed, they can spell trouble. For example, if a tree in your right of way falls on a vehicle or pedestrian, who is responsible for the damages? If a person trips on exposed tree roots in one of your public parks and breaks a leg, must the township pay up? Does your township prohibit clear-cutting of trees during construction? Do you know the condition of the trees in your public areas?

If you can't answer these questions, it's time to start looking at your township trees as assets to be protected and maintained. At the same time, you need to clearly spell out who is responsible when tree-related incidents occur on or affect public property.

A well-written tree ordinance, combined with provisions in zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances, can go a long way toward keeping arboreal assets the beneficial resources they are meant to be and keeping your township out of hot water.

### **Trees provide many benefits**

Lest you think protecting trees is strictly the purview of long-haired, fringe-wearing "tree huggers," consider

these statistics from tree-related organizations, compiled by the Arbor Day Foundation:

- The net cooling effect of one young, healthy tree is equivalent to 10 room-size air conditioners operating 20 hours a day. (*U.S. Department of Agriculture*)

- Landscaping, especially with trees, can increase property values as much as 20 percent. (*Management Information Services/ICMA*)

- One acre of forest absorbs six tons of carbon dioxide and puts out four tons of oxygen. This is enough to meet the annual needs of 18 people. (*U.S. Department of Agriculture*)

- There are 60 million to 200 million spaces along city streets where trees could be planted. This translates to the potential to absorb 33 million more tons of CO<sub>2</sub> every year and save \$4 billion in energy costs. (*National Wildlife Federation*)

- Trees can be a stimulus to economic development, attracting new business and tourism. Commercial retail areas are more attractive to shoppers, apartments rent more quickly, tenants stay longer, and space in a wooded setting is more valuable to sell or rent. (*Arbor Day Foundation*)

- Trees also improve water quality, resulting in less runoff and erosion. This allows more recharging of the groundwater supply. Wooded areas help prevent the transport of sediment and chemicals into streams. (*USDA Forest Service*)

The good news is that townships that want to protect trees and remove tree hazards have the authority to do so under the Second Class Township Code. The code both prohibits the removal of trees in the public right of way except under certain circumstances and authorizes the board of supervisors to regulate shade trees. ➤

# TREE ORDINANCES

Article XXIII, Section 2325 of the code spells out that trees and shrubs in the right of way of any township road may not be removed by the board of supervisors or its agents unless the plants in question constitute a hazardous or dangerous condition or impair the use or maintenance of the street.

Likewise, no tree with a trunk diameter of more than 6 inches may be removed without notice being given first to the abutting property owner. The resulting logs, cordwood, branches, or other wood must also be given to the abutting property owners.

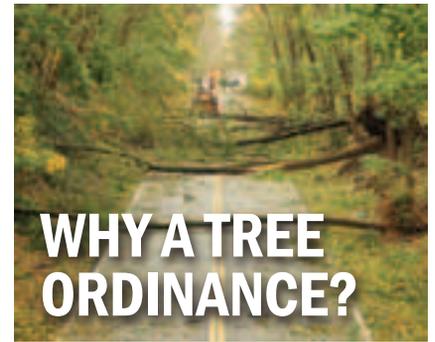
A well-written tree ordinance ensures that both the township and its residents provide proper tree care that is in the best interest of the community, says William Elmendorf, associate pro-

fessor of community and urban forestry at Penn State University. He cites several reasons for adopting a street and park tree ordinance, including protecting and increasing property values, managing tree risk, and saving cleanup costs. (See the sidebar at right for a complete list.)

## Gather public input

Townships can find guidance on creating a tree ordinance in *Managing Natural Resources: A Guide for Municipal Commissions*, a publication from the Penn State Extension. The guide states that tree ordinances can:

- legalize a tree program through authorization of a municipal tree commission;
- establish a permit review, approval, and appeal process for tree removal, planting, and pruning;
- specify arboricultural standards for tree planting, pruning, and other tree work; and
- ensure that the people who perform work on the trees are well-qualified.



## WHY A TREE ORDINANCE?

### Townships have good reasons for regulating tree assets

Townships adopt street and park tree ordinances for many reasons, especially to define the authority and responsibilities for the care of public trees and landscapes, as well as private trees that may affect public lands. William Elmendorf, associate professor of community and urban forestry at Penn State University, says a well-written tree ordinance can help townships:

- protect and increase property values, stormwater management, and other ecosystem services;
- ensure proper species selection and the planting of the right tree in the right place;
- ensure proper pruning and other tree care;
- protect trees from improper removal and construction-related damage;
- manage tree risk and increase safety;
- lessen storm damage and cleanup by removing unhealthy trees;
- lessen damage to sidewalks and sewers by identifying and removing problem trees;
- facilitate reliable electricity service by removing trees that threaten utilities; and
- avoid obstruction of motorist views and traffic signs.

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An important part of the tree ordinance is spelling out who is responsible for planting and removing trees in the public right of way.

“Most municipal tree ordinances place responsibility for street tree removal and planting on the abutting property owner,” Elmendorf says. “This often makes managing public trees more contentious and difficult than when the municipality bears or shares the cost.”

Although street tree ordinances deal primarily with trees on public property, they can affect private property when the provisions are based on the township’s police power, or the right to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. These provisions may call for the removal of trees on private property that are diseased, insect-infested, or pose a danger to the public in the right of way.

That’s why townships should gather public input from the get-go when creating an ordinance, Elmendorf says.

“People have a right to share their views on policies that affect the places they live,” he says. “Sometimes they have good ideas.”

*Managing Natural Resources* also suggests including developers and business owners in the planning process to help them understand, comply, and cooperate with the ordinance.

The best way to create a tree ordinance is to gather a working group of interested people to assess your community’s needs and wants, resources, and existing ordinances, advises the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association (PALTA) on its website.

“Strive for a working group that balances having people with needed expertise with those who represent a wide variety of views and those who can dedicate the needed time and effort into creating an ordinance,” the site says.

Once the working group is in place, it may start the process by reviewing model street tree ordinances from other municipalities. However, townships should be sure to plan for their own needs and not rely only on model ordinances from other places, *Managing Natural Resources* cautions.

PALTA suggests the following six

## Webinar series addresses green infrastructure

An upcoming series of webinars from the Penn State Extension will explain how green infrastructure, such as open space, parks, street trees, rain gardens, green roofs, permeable pavement, and rain barrels, are helping communities conserve natural resources and capture, infiltrate, and evapo-transpire rainwater where it falls.

The series began in February, but a number of scheduled sessions remain. Upcoming webinar dates and topics are:

- April 13** Penn State Center’s Stormwater Mitigation Initiatives in Pittsburgh
- April 28** The Ecology of Streams and Forested Buffers
- May 5** Tips for Success in Establishing and Maintaining Forested Stream Buffers
- May 19** Green Roofs for Stormwater Management
- May 26** Artful Rainwater Design
- June 2** Green Infrastructure in Practice — Engaging Philadelphia: Retrofitting an Existing Green Infrastructure System

The webinars are free and begin at noon. To register, go to [extension.psu.edu/green-infrastructure](http://extension.psu.edu/green-infrastructure). Direct questions to Extension Urban Forester Vincent Cotrone at [vjc1@psu.edu](mailto:vjc1@psu.edu).

The advertisement for Penn State Construction features a collage of images and text. At the top, there are photos of buildings: the Armenia Township Building in Bradford Co., PA; a large arched structure labeled Terra-Gro Incorp. in Lancaster, PA; and a Salt Storage Building in Achers, OH. In the center, a man and a woman are smiling. Below them is the Penn State Construction logo (PSC) and contact information: 380, LLC, 27 State Street, Lewisport, PA 17044, Phone: 717-953-9200, Fax: 717-953-9201, Email: info@pennstateconstruction.com. A small logo for WINKLER STRUCCON is also present. At the bottom, there is a photo of the Troy Township Building in Bradford Co., PA, and a text box stating: "Penn State Construction is a family-owned and -operated business specializing in maintenance and storage buildings. We offer many solutions, starting with ground breaking and providing you with a turn-key product. You, as our customer, are our number one priority." The names Dave & Emily Miller are listed at the bottom left.

# TREE ORDINANCES

steps to create a tree ordinance:

**1) Inventory your community's tree resources** — A tree inventory provides the basic information needed to make management decisions and baseline data that can be used later to evaluate the effectiveness of your tree management program. (See the sidebar on Page 41 for more information on conducting a tree inventory.)

**2) Inventory your community's current and historic tree management practices** — This should include current ordinances, rules, and restrictions, as well as how tree-related issues have been handled historically, such as who made the decisions and who implemented them.

**3) Identify your community's needs and wants** — These should include short- and long-term needs, which may be categorized into three groups:

- **Biological** (those related directly to the trees), which could include increasing tree cover, species diversity, or age distribution of trees; controlling insect and disease infestations; and identifying

planting sites that avoid conflict with sidewalks and utility lines.

- **Management** (those relating to the short- and long-term management of tree resources), which could include training of staff and volunteers, increasing inter-departmental cooperation, and communication and long-range planning.

- **Community** (those involving how the community relates to trees and management plans), which could include public outreach to residents, schools, environmental organizations, and other groups; community celebrations, such as on Arbor Day; and classes on good tree care.

**4) Identify your community's goals** — The working group should determine a set of specifically stated goals to garner community support, taking into account the available financial, human, and natural resources. Possible goals may include:

- maximizing tree cover;
- improving property values;
- preserving trees and keeping them healthy;
- resolving private tree issues; and
- providing for the replacement of trees lost during construction and the protection of trees on land undergoing development.

**5) Identify the appropriate management tools to meet your community's needs and wants** — These could in-

## Funding available for tree inventory, planting

Townships that would like to increase the number and/or diversity of trees in their community may apply for grants under the TreeVitalize Program of the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The deadline for applications is **July 30**.

**Inventory grants** are available to offset the cost of having existing trees inventoried by local college or university students or by a professional arboriculture firm. A street tree inventory provides information on the composition, health, and condition of public trees, as well as available opportunities to plant additional trees.

An inventory establishes a benchmark from which a community can begin to plan for the long-term management of its trees. The goal is to ensure a diverse species mix spanning all ages, properly pruned for structural soundness, with trees removed and replaced when necessary to protect public safety.

TreeVitalize **planting grants** may be used to offset the cost of trees; supplies, such as stakes, ties, mulch, watering bags, and topsoil; site preparation, including removal of dead trees, stump grinding, and sidewalk cuts; and planting expenses.

For more information, applications, and guidelines, go to **[www.treevitalize.net](http://www.treevitalize.net)** and click on "TreeVitalize Applications" in the left column. Townships may also call Christine Ticehurst, community greening and grant administration specialist for DCNR's Bureau of Forestry, at (717) 346-9583 or email [c-ticehur@pa.gov](mailto:c-ticehur@pa.gov).



An ordinance can ensure that work performed on trees, such as pruning or removal, is done by certified professionals.

# TREE ORDINANCES

“People didn’t understand that **street trees are not their trees** and would prune them incorrectly or cut them down.”

clude a tree ordinance, public outreach and education, financial or technical assistance, voluntary planting programs, and a tree commission.

**6) Prepare a tree ordinance** — If the working group determines that a tree ordinance is appropriate for your community, this is the time to develop it. (See the sidebar on Page 45 for an explanation of some common elements of a tree ordinance.)

## Creating a shade tree commission

Many municipalities that decide to begin regulating and managing their tree resources create a shade tree commission to develop and implement a program. Article XXIX of the Second Class Township Code authorizes the

board of supervisors to establish these commissions to administer regulations for planting, maintaining, and removing shade trees in the township.

Shade tree commissions may be advisory to the board of supervisors or may be given authority to make final permit decisions and control all work on public trees. The Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences says that in addition to specifying the number, requirements, and method of appointing commission members, the ordinance should spell out their duties.

These may include adjudicating tree-related issues; approving permits for tree removal, planning, or pruning; reviewing hazardous trees yearly; providing educational opportunities and materials; arranging for tree planting

and removal; and overseeing pruning and maintenance.

The ordinance should also explain if the commission’s power, whether advisory or managerial, is limited to public rights of way or covers all public property and includes overseeing landscape plans for street trees only or on all development sites.

Ideally, tree commissions will include members with expertise in forestry, horticulture, arboriculture, and landscape architecture, as well as teachers, businesspeople, and other concerned citizens. When the township begins discussing a tree ordinance, those residents who show the most interest and offer suggestions may be a natural choice for a tree commission, Penn State’s William Elmendorf says.

## Implementing a tree plan

The tree commission in Harris Township, Centre County, is helping the municipality deal with an infestation of emerald ash borers, the Asian beetle that has decimated ash trees across the commonwealth and many surrounding states.

“We have 97 ash trees in our township,” manager Amy Farkas says. “One residential development has all ash trees along the streets; the developer probably got them on sale. Now the township is replacing blocks of trees.”

The township’s tree ordinance, adopted in 2004, created a tree commission and charged it with preparing a plan for street trees, including recommended policies for suitable species for various environments.

“The township wanted to make sure that the tree commission’s recommendations have teeth so we don’t end up with all the same species in a development again,” Farkas says. “The commission has been proactive in identifying and replacing diseased trees.”

Farkas says that the tree commission is made up of a landscaper, a profes-

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# DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR TREES ARE?

## Use these techniques to inventory public trees

Street and park tree inventories provide information that townships can use to plan for the planting, maintenance, and removal of community trees. An inventory may be the best way to justify starting and funding a community tree program.

The Penn State Extension's urban and community forestry division explains that a tree inventory can identify trees that need pruning or removal to reduce risk, indicate the number of trees in the public right of way, determine the ecological value that trees provide, and identify available planting sites. It can also discover insect or disease problems and identify young trees that need irrigation, pruning, or other maintenance.

As years pass, a periodic inventory can show changes in the number, age, and species of trees. A well-maintained inventory can also be used in cases of liability to show that there was no negligence in the inspection or care of public trees. Inventories also improve the chances of receiving grants and other help from various agencies.

The process of conducting a tree inventory involves four phases: planning, implementation, application, and maintenance.

**1) Planning** — This phase includes the following activities:

- identifying the types of information needed;
- assessing the availability of computers, software, and people to maintain the inventory;
- determining how the data will be collected, such as by driving or walking around the township; and
- assessing the requirements for labor, equipment, and funding.

**2) Implementation** — This phase includes:

- training people to gather data;
- collecting data and checking its accuracy; and
- entering and maintaining data in a computer or GIS system.

**3) Application** — This phase may include:

- analyzing the data and using the information;
- establishing objectives for tree removal and planting to increase species and age diversity; and
- preparing annual work plans and budgets for removal, planting, and pruning.

**4) Maintenance** — This final phase involves:

- periodically inventorying the trees to maintain the information at a current level, or
- continuously updating the information when permits

are issued and tree work is completed.

The best way to collect data is by inspecting individual trees and entering the data on handheld computers or other electronic devices. Townships must decide how much of the community will be inventoried, which areas will be completed first, who will collect the data, and what information is needed.

The Penn State Extension says that the most commonly collected data in a tree inventory are:

- location of the tree by GPS, street name, and building number;
- name of the tree species;
- diameter of the tree's trunk, usually at a set height from the ground;
- condition of the tree, such as good, fair, poor, or dead/dying;
- which trees require urgent pruning or removal;
- which trees require timely maintenance;
- location and quality of potential planting sites for new trees;
- potential restrictions on planting sites, such as near utility wires and in narrow tree lawns (*the grassy area between the sidewalk and the curb*); and
- location and extent of tree damage to sidewalks and curbs.

For help with conducting a tree inventory, townships may contact the Penn State Extension, which has regional foresters who can help townships manage their community forests. Call William Elmendorf at (814) 863-7941 or email [wfe1@psu.edu](mailto:wfe1@psu.edu).



# TREE ORDINANCES

sor of forestry economics, an expert in insect diseases, an engineer, and an interested resident who has been on the commission for years.

Thanks to the tree ordinance and the commission's work, the township manages some 1,200 street trees and plants about 20 each year. The township spends about \$6,500 on tree removal, \$2,500 on maintenance, and \$7,000 on planting each year. The planting dollars come from an annual fundraiser and private donations, Farkas says. Having that money available is important to the township's tree management plan.

"We try to replace as many trees that have been removed as possible," she says. "We also had a Penn State professor identify holes in our landscape where we could use more trees."

Farkas says that the ordinance spells out rules and regulations for work that is done on street trees that, while in the public right of way, are often regarded as private property.

"People didn't understand that street trees are not their trees and would prune them incorrectly or cut them down," she says. "Now, they can come to the commission, describe what they want to do, and request a permit for the work."

The commission members also walk around the township each year and look at the trees to identify any that need to be removed due to disease or damage or that pose a public safety hazard. A contracted arborist also inspects trees, and residents call if they notice an issue with a public tree, Farkas says.

"It has been a very successful program," she says.

In fact, it is so successful that the township has been designated a Tree City USA by the Arbor Day Foundation. To qualify for the status, a community must:

- have a tree commission, board, or department;
- have a tree ordinance;

## State, other agencies lend a helping hand with township trees

Townships that want to conduct a tree inventory, draft an ordinance, or create a shade tree commission may turn to these resources for information and guidance:

- **Pa. Community Forests** — This program from the Bureau of Forestry, the USDA Forest Service, and Penn State University offers a number of publications and resources, including archived webinars on tree-related subjects. Go to [www.pacommunityforests.com](http://www.pacommunityforests.com).

- **Pa. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry** — Service foresters give communities advice and guidance on planting, maintaining, and managing community trees. Go to [www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry) and click on "Community Trees" in the column on the left. Townships may also call the Rural and Community Forests Section at (717) 783-0385.

- **Penn State Extension, Urban and Community Forestry** — Regional extension foresters help communities manage their trees and green spaces properly and safely through technical advice, workshops, and grants that promote proper tree planting and care. Go to [extension.psu.edu](http://extension.psu.edu) and click on "Natural Resources" at the top of the page and then the link for "Forest Resources." Finally, select "Urban and Community Forestry" in the left column. Townships may also call William Elmendorf at (814) 863-7941 or email [wfe1@psu.edu](mailto:wfe1@psu.edu).

- **PSATS sample tree ordinances** — To view sample tree-related ordinances, go to [www.psats.org](http://www.psats.org), log in with your member ID and password, and choose the "Member Resources" tab. Select "Resource Center" and enter "tree" in the keyword field and choose "Ordinance" in the drop-down category menu.

- **International Society of Arboriculture** — This site offers information and guidelines on a number of tree-related topics, including municipal tree ordinances. Go to [www.isa-arbor.com](http://www.isa-arbor.com), choose "Education and Research" at the top of the page, "Online and Downloadable Resources" in the left column, and then "Tree Ordinance Guidelines." Finally, click on the link for "Guidelines for Developing and Evaluating Tree Ordinances" near the bottom of the page.

- **Arbor Day Foundation** — This organization promotes tree planting and offers resources to support community forests, including the Tree City USA program. Go to [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org) and select the "Programs" tab at the top of the page. Townships may also call toll-free (888) 448-7337.



- spend at least \$2 per capita on a community forestry program; and
- observe Arbor Day with a proclamation and celebration of some kind.

Whitpain Township in Montgomery County has been a Tree City USA every year since 1994 and has received the Arbor Day Foundation's Growth Award every year since 1999. In 2009,

the township was designated a Sterling Tree City USA, one of only seven such communities in Pennsylvania, achieved by receiving a Growth Award for 10 consecutive years.

The township established a shade tree commission in a 1978 ordinance, which it updated in 2013.

"The board of supervisors developed

# TREE ORDINANCES

a mission, vision, and values statement a few years ago, which included preserving natural resources,” assistant township manager David Mrochko says.

The ordinance establishing the tree commission cites the following goals for the township:

- preserve, protect, and maintain existing trees and increase the overall tree canopy and understory on both public and private lands;
- ensure that land development applications respect and preserve existing trees;
- preserve and protect all heritage trees;
- prohibit clear cutting of trees;
- encourage the planting of native vegetation; and
- educate the public on the value of trees.

“The board of supervisors developed **a mission, vision, and values statement** a few years ago, which included **preserving natural resources.**”

The residents have been very receptive to the tree program, Mrochko says, participating in an annual Earth Day/Arbor Day celebration and a yearly tree giveaway.

“People line up very early to get the trees,” he says. “You’d think we were giving away money or something.”

The three-member tree commission has been instrumental in these and other activities, he says. Unfortunately, the long-time chair, Joe Steuer, passed away in late January.

“He led the charge for many years,” Mrochko says. “He was the driving force behind the Heritage Tree Registry and often kept tabs on those historic trees.”

The Heritage Tree Registry is a list of trees in the township of significant

size or age or unusual species. The tree commission first compiled a list of such trees in 1987 and published its first registry in 2001 in conjunction with the township’s 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary. An updated version of the registry was published in 2009, listing 30 trees.

The shade tree commission identified the trees for the registry through visual inspection and measurements and then photographed and recorded the specifics about each tree. The commission registered specimens that qualified for champion status with the Pennsylvania Forestry Association, which maintains a list of the largest trees of their species in the commonwealth.

A certified arborist from Morris Arboretum evaluates and inspects township trees that have been designated

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# Elements of an Ordinance

## Include standard provisions in your municipal tree regulations

Townships that want to draft a street tree ordinance may review regulations from other municipalities to get an idea of what to include. However, they should understand and plan for their own community's needs and abilities when creating their ordinance.

The Penn State Extension says that most street tree ordinances contain the following sections:

**1) Location** — Defines the section of the municipal code where the ordinance should be placed, such as public works, parks and recreation, or planning.

**2) Purpose** — Describes the purpose of the ordinance, why it is needed, and how the township will benefit from it. It should justify the need for the ordinance and tie it to the municipal police power to protect the public health, safety, and welfare.

**3) Definitions** — Defines legal and technical terms used in the ordinance.

**4) Establishment of a tree commission** — Spells out the characteristics and responsibilities of a tree commission, including membership, terms of office, compensation, duties, and authorized activities.

**5) Community tree plan** — If included in an ordinance, mandates the creation and maintenance of a tree management plan and its elements, including administration, tree risk management, maintenance, public education, design, and maintenance standards and guidelines.

**6) Permits and fees** — Explains any permits or fees that are required for planting, removal, or maintenance of public trees.

**7) Authority and permit processing** — Defines the permitting process, including who is charged with reviewing and approving them and what standards or guidelines must be followed.

**8) Appeal procedure** — Establishes an appeal procedure for permit approval or denial or an order to perform work, such as removing a hazardous tree or limb on private property.

**9) Maintenance** — Sets standards for all aspects of maintaining the community forest, including planting, pruning, irrigation, pest control, and fertilization. This section is often attached as an appendix so that technical changes can be made without amending the ordinance.

**10) Public safety** — Sets standards for the removal of hazardous trees, along with traffic and other obstructions on public and private property.

**11) Nuisance and condemnation** — Defines legal and economic procedures that may cause the removal of hazardous or nuisance trees on private property, such as disease or insect infestation or hazardous trees affecting the safety of the public right of way.

**12) Nonliability of municipality** — Establishes that nothing in the ordinance shall be deemed to impose a liability.

**13) Insurance and bonding for tree workers** — Requires that people or firms involved in the care and maintenance of public trees have insurance and/or bonding to certain levels.

**14) Prohibited activities and violations** — Lists prohibited activities, including those that are illegal or legal only with a permit. These could include removal, planting, or pruning trees without a permit, damaging trees during construction, and vandalism of trees.

**15) Interference** — Prohibits interference with municipal foresters or tree personnel in the performance of their duties.

**16) Enforcement and restitution** — Describes violations and the fines and other costs of violating the ordinance's provisions. It also defines the ability of the community to seek restitution for tree destruction or damage.

**17) Enactment and effective date** — Gives the document legal status and requires the signatures of the township officials and witnesses.

For more information about municipal tree ordinances, see *Managing Natural Resources: A Guide for Municipal Commissions* by the Penn State Extension. To view this publication and other helpful resources, go to [extension.psu.edu/natural-resources/forests/urban-community](http://extension.psu.edu/natural-resources/forests/urban-community) and click on "Publications" in the left column.

# TREE ORDINANCES

“Maintaining a **safe and healthy urban forest** requires the support of informed and **involved citizens**, elected officials, and municipal staff.”

Pennsylvania champion trees. The commission instituted a maintenance program to ensure that these trees are properly preserved and protected.

The commission also spearheaded a survey of the urban tree canopy in the township, Mrochko says. The survey, conducted by the Davey Resource Group, showed that the township has 3,537 acres of tree canopy, covering 43 percent of the township. According to a fact sheet about the analysis, that exceeds by 3 percent the coverage recommended by American Forests for cities east of the Mississippi River.

Other activities of the shade tree commission, as authorized in the tree ordinance, have included developing tree planting plans to beautify specified areas and resolve disputes between

homeowners and the township, reviewing and rewriting the township’s tree ordinance, working with a local school district to create an outdoor science classroom that incorporates trees, and conducting a hazardous tree assessment to correct issues and address safety concerns.

### Using other tools to protect trees

Ordinances are not the only regulatory tools townships may use to manage their trees. The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission has compiled a list of measures townships can take to protect them.

For example, zoning ordinances may protect natural resources through provisions for steep slopes, woodlands,

landscaping, timber harvesting, riparian buffers, stormwater management, wetlands, sensitive areas, and conservation subdivision design. Such ordinances may include standards for:

- landscaping to control stormwater runoff;
- protection of trees of a certain size, species, or other identified value;
- preservation of a certain percentage of tree cover on a site;
- preservation of vegetated buffers along streams or between residential and commercial uses or roads and buildings;
- protection of landscapes with important environmental or aesthetic value; and
- replacement of trees removed during development.

Subdivision and land development ordinances may also contain requirements for trees to be shown on development plans and set strict standards for protecting and maintaining trees during and after construction.

Townships may also use planning tools, such as comprehensive plans, tree management plans, and natural resource and tree inventories, to document their green infrastructure and set policies for protecting and maintaining their trees.

Whatever means a township uses to manage its community trees, the only way they will work is if everyone is on board.

“Maintaining a safe and healthy urban forest requires the support of informed and involved citizens, elected officials, and municipal staff,” Penn State’s William Elmendorf says. “Public input, education, and volunteer projects help people understand and support community trees.

“Street tree ordinances are one of the easiest to implement,” he adds. “There is really no reason to not have one to protect these natural resources.” ♦

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