

Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission

August 5, 2020

The Commissioners of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
The Members of the Minneapolis City Council
The Mayor of Minneapolis

Honorable Elected Officials:

We, the Members of the Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission, have the honor to transmit to you our 2020 Annual Report which is attached. As you all know very well, you Officials collectively are responsible for the most significant element of the Minneapolis environment: our city trees, our urban forest. In addition, MPRB Commissioners are responsible for “the park in front of everybody’s place”: the “boulevard tree lawn” in front of houses, apartments, and a great many businesses as well. You are the trustees of this immense asset.

Minneapolis’s trees are not only beautiful. Our trees are also a great money-saving public utility. Without its lakes, Minneapolis would still be Minneapolis, but without its city trees, Minneapolis would be (in words that Vice President and Mayor Hubert Humphrey once borrowed from a member of our Commission), “just a cold version of Omaha”. Minneapolis would also be poorer without our trees cooling us (by evapo-transpiration) in the summer, keeping us warmer in the winter by calming winds, reducing city noise and storm water runoff, and improving the physical and mental health of Minneapolitans. Importantly, our trees don’t just happen. They have to be planted, watered, pruned and tended. Recognize that city trees don’t get taller by their trunks lengthening (in spite of some peoples’ mistaken belief). Trees cost more to maintain when that maintenance is delayed.

We know you “have a lot on your plates” in these troubled days, so we are bringing three very important recommendations to you in this Annual Report. They are:

1. **Save our extremely valuable large trees from needlessly being killed during construction by converting the Forestry Preservation Coordinator to a permanent position.**
2. **Engage Minneapolis youth and volunteers in our urban forests and in “tree careers” by completing the process of hiring the Forestry Outreach Coordinator.**
3. **Care for young trees assuring that the MPRB’s recent investments in tree planting pay off by implementing a Young Tree Care Levy.**

We hope that even with all that is troubling you and all of us this year, you will still take the time to give our three recommendations your careful consideration when preparing for the 2021 budget.

Respectfully submitted,

THE MINNEAPOLIS TREE ADVISORY COMMISSION



Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission

2020 Annual Report

Minneapolis is proud of its lush and growing canopy of trees. This “urban forest” is an investment in supporting the city’s goals in making Minneapolis a growing and thriving place to live. The significant investment that Minneapolis has made recently in our urban forest is at risk, however. The capital investments we’ve made in our urban forest will be squandered unless strategic decisions and funding are committed to sustaining our resources.

Specifically, the Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission urges the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (with support from the Minneapolis City Council) to act on these three important recommendations.

- 1. Save our extremely valuable large trees from needlessly being killed during construction by converting the Forestry Preservation Coordinator to a permanent position.**
- 2. Engage Minneapolis youth and volunteers in our urban forests and in “tree careers” by completing the process of hiring the Urban Forestry Outreach Coordinator.**
- 3. Care for young trees assuring that the MPRB’s recent investments in tree planting pay off by implementing a Young Tree Care Levy.**

Save Trees

The greatest benefits come from large healthy trees. Yet, too often those most valuable trees are killed or irreparably damaged unnecessarily through construction practices. The MPRB, with City of Minneapolis support, are commended for hiring the Forestry Preservation Coordinator who has made a tremendous difference in protection of large healthy trees threatened by construction and assuring the proper provision of new tree infrastructure, including adequate root space.

This work is possible because a well-respected and knowledgeable urban forester is at the table with Public Works and Planning during development decision-making and in the field advising crews and contractors. While the position was filled in 2020, it and all its accomplishments are at risk unless it receives ongoing funding. This very modest investment provides hundreds of thousands of dollars of benefits.



Engage Youth & Volunteers



Urban forestry is an outstanding career opportunity for our city's youth, IF they can receive compelling and meaningful opportunities. In addition, well-trained and coordinated volunteers can make a huge difference in caring for our public trees. Neither youth nor volunteer engagement with Minneapolis trees will reach its potential without the MPRB's modest investment in a new professional position to implement this work.

MPRB approved creation of the Forestry Outreach Coordinator in 2019. Many excellent candidates applied and interviews were scheduled. Unfortunately, COVID19 halted the hiring process. Launching of the youth-oriented hands-on careers in urban forestry program, with UMN support, awaits hiring of this position. It also means resuming and expanding the Citizen Pruner program. The Forestry Outreach Coordinator will develop a broad range of outreach activities that will involve school kids, community groups and corporate teams.

Care for Young Trees

Many people assume that everyone can plant a tree that grows to be healthy and mature. However, national research shows that only about 60% of newly planted public urban trees reach the optimum stage of healthy maturity. Why? One common reason is inadequate maintenance of newly planted trees in their first 10 years after planting.

Of the factors that kill young developing trees, lack of proper structural pruning is a cause not obvious to laypeople. This service requires professional leadership, work and equipment. In the last 8 years, through a special levy the MPRB has accomplished the amazing task of planting over 60,000 new trees. These trees will yield millions of dollars in environmental and economic benefits and increase our quality of life – if they thrive to maturity.

Without proper care, young trees live shorter lives because structural problems make them much more susceptible to storm damage as they mature. With severe storms increasing in frequency and intensity, relatively inexpensive young tree care can save thousands of dollars in pruning/felling costs. Looking ahead, an ongoing Young Tree Care Levy is needed in 2022 to permanently retain and preferably increase the number of arborists whose work improves the longevity of trees.



Summary

The Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission strongly supports the three recommendations outlined above. The MPRB needs to continue funding the Forestry Preservation position to protect valuable large trees. Under the leadership of its Forestry Outreach Coordinator, MPRB needs to develop a cadre of tree stewards to invest in youth and engage volunteers in caring for trees. MPRB (with City support) need to lay the groundwork now to implement an ongoing Young Tree Care Levy in 2022 to keep and expand crews essential for new trees to pay off in benefits for us all.

