

City of Antigo Urban Forestry History

The City of Antigo Park, Recreation and Cemetery Department title describes a large portion of our year round duties. Unfortunately, it leaves out urban forestry; an important and relatively recent component for which our department of 4 full time, 1 year round part-time and 6-8 seasonal maintenance staff is responsible.

In the mid 90s a local Forestry Technician with the DNR, Pete Solin, staffed a booth at the Wisconsin State Fair. He was approached by a gentleman who mentioned a small town up north (Antigo) that he frequently traveled through, and how the condition of the trees was less than favorable. Pete took it upon himself to approach the City Council, the Mayor and the Park and Recreation Director to change how things were done.

Don Kissinger, with the DNR, suggested applying for an urban forestry grant to assist with implementing a plan to not only remove hazardous, dead or dying trees, but to also replace them once removed. The City of Antigo received a grant through the DNR, allowing them to inventory their trees and begin a replacement program.

In 1999, 34 acres of wooded area, within city limits, was gifted to the city by Dan and Diane Kretz. In 2009 a walking/bike path (partially funded through a stewardship grant) was constructed through this wooded area expanding the possibilities for public education and appreciation of forested areas within easy access to local residents.

Public education and awareness are driving forces behind gaining our public's support for our forestry programs. In 2009 we were awarded another urban forestry grant from the DNR; this time our focus was preparing a readiness plan for EAB. We also began implementing an educational component that would target the local public through our webpage and other largely distributed media like our summer recreation guide.

Cooperative efforts continue between organizations. We partnered with local contractors and arborists and offered a number of free classes to the public that dealt with tree health and the urban forest. In addition, we created site plans for our ten priority parks that highlighted tree plantings for each area. The site plans have helped us secure tree planting donations and positive public feedback. We have recently been working with Pete Solin to coordinate a timber sale and create management plans for our city owned wooded areas.

Choosing an appropriate tree to plant can be an overwhelming task. To assist our local residents with determining appropriate planting choices we have developed tree guide brochures that are available in our office and on our website. The guides also list planting techniques and proper tree care.

The All Saints Girl Scout Troop 7041 worked with the city to create forestry themed educational signage that will be placed along the recently constructed trail within city

limits. Invasive species were also identified within our wooded park areas and plans are being drafted for their removal.

Staff education and training has kept us abreast of current practices and trends. This past year our staff has attended the annual urban forestry conference and also a pruning workshop. We attend quarterly forestry meetings with our regional urban forestry coordinator, and network with other communities. Staff stays busy throughout the year with various forestry related activities. We are able to prune and remove all year but primarily this occurs in the summer and winter. We try to schedule the bulk of our plantings in the fall or spring, but donated trees will also be planted in the summer. Applicable trainings and classes are attended when offered.

The current direction of our forestry program began, because of Pete Solin's drive, initiative and personal pride to improve the forest health of his community. He eventually received the International Society of Arboriculture's Gold Leaf Award in recognition of his accomplishments. Continued cooperative efforts between the DNR, Wisconsin Public Service and local contractors and residents have helped Antigo establish an urban forestry program that continues to grow and be more proactive than reactive. Arbor Day celebrations, Tree City USA awards and continued efforts to improve our community's forest health are annual goals for our department, staff and residents. We look forward to increasing our canopy coverage, constantly improving our urban forest health and establishing a strong urban forestry program for our community.