

Developing Community Tree Ordinances

Alaska Department of Natural Resources / Division of Forestry / Community Forestry Program
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Our community trees play a major role in the health and livability of our cities and towns. Trees offer shade, clean the air, muffle noise, add beauty to our neighborhoods and business districts, enhance property values, reduce energy costs, provide wildlife habitat and instill community pride. Ordinances can implement programs to better manage the community forest resource to maximize these benefits.

Why Ordinances are Important

- Reduce liability for city governments
- Ensure public safety
- Reduce conflicts among citizens
- Establish authority for tree-related issues
- Prevent and control damaging insects and diseases
- Reduce tree-related costs
- Establish professional standards for tree work
- Incorporate trees as part of community development

If designed properly to meet your community needs, ordinances are an important management tool for your community forest resource.

Authority

There are various municipal state codes that permit the establishment of ordinances, tree commissions and the authority to plant, remove, maintain and protect municipal trees.

Ordinance Sections

- Define trees (public vs. private) and definitions
- Establishment and authority of tree commission
- Determine duties and responsibilities for both homeowners and the municipality
- Define prohibited activities
- Establish insurance requirements for tree work
- Establish penalties, claims, and appeals process
- Establish enforcement process
- Develop permits, issuance, and inspection system
- Establish authority to develop and modify standards and specifications

Standards and Specifications

- International Society of Arboriculture and National Arborists Association standards
- American Standard for Nursery Stock
- Safety standards for arboricultural work
- Planting and removal standards
- Maintenance standards (fertilizing, pest management, cabling, watering, etc.)
- Preferred species list
- Standards for tree protection
- Design/landscape specifications

Fit Ordinances to Your Community

The following is a step-by-step procedure for developing ordinances that enable you to better manage your community forest resource.

- Form an ad hoc committee (involve municipal officials, department heads, and the public)
- Define community needs and issues
- Gain assembly approval to proceed with ordinance development
- Acquire various example ordinances
- Utilize/modify sections to fit your community needs
- Write draft ordinance
- Seek public input
- Have city attorney and assembly review draft document
- Hold public meeting
- Revise ordinance as needed
- Submit to assembly for approval

Other Types of Ordinances

- Landscape requirements for new developments
- Tree protection during new development
- Open space preservation ordinances
- Rare and historic tree protection/preservation
- Parking specifications/landscaping

*Reprinted from John Beauchamp and Vincent Cotrone,
Pennsylvania State University Cooperative Extension Svc.
August, 1995*