

Urban Forest Management: A Primer to Strategic Planning for Municipal Governments—an Introduction¹

Michael Andreu, Robert Northrop, and Wayne Zipperer²

Urban planners and city administrators face daily challenges in managing complex urban environments, such as maintaining sufficient levels of clean water, clean air, energy, housing, and green spaces, as well as addressing conflicts of interest related to land use. More than ever, they must rise to the challenge of ensuring that their cities are economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable. Well-designed and -managed urban forests are integral to meeting this challenge: urban forests can make significant contributions to the sustainable development, economic viability, and livability of cities. In an urban environment, healthy and thriving trees, woodlands, and parks require careful planning, design, and management to achieve their full economic, social, and ecological potential.

A strategic plan for urban forest management identifies a series of practical and quantifiable steps that guide activities and resources to accomplish predetermined outcomes. Further, a strategic plan establishes the time frame for implementation and the responsible agency or partnership that will complete the work. By establishing clear lines of responsibility and measurable objectives tied to reasonable timelines, a city can measure successes and identify programmatic areas in need of further attention. The plan itself is best seen as a long-term process, a living and adaptable plan of action, and not a static product.

The purpose of the book linked below, titled *Urban Forest Management: A Primer to Strategic Planning for Municipal Governments*, is to assist in the organization of a strategic plan for urban forest management. The book is a guide written specifically for use by people responsible for the initiation, or redesign, of an urban forest management program. The methodology in it is flexible, adaptable, and appropriate for town, city, county, and state urban forest management program development. It was initially developed for use in the State of Florida, but this framework can be applied universally.

Our experience suggests that, in the current environment, urban forest management tends to involve short-term decision-making reacting to immediate needs (safety, tree hazards, etc.), principally driven by rapid land-use change and local economic concerns. It tends to address the symptoms of the problem rather than the problem itself (in other words, it is likely to be reactive rather than proactive). As a result, decisions and actions are often redundant and inefficient, and sometimes must be completely redone as other priorities are identified later. A longer-term perspective that puts forest management within the broader context of the city's infrastructure and does not leave it as an afterthought is necessary for effective forest management.

1. This document is FOR387, one of a series of the School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences. Original publication date January 2023. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.

2. Michael Andreu, associate professor, forest systems, School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences; Robert Northrop county Extension agent IV, M.S., urban forestry, UF/IFAS Extension Hillsborough County, Seffner, Florida; and Wayne Zipperer, research forester, USDA Forest Service SRS-4952.

An effective and sustainable urban forest management program must address three major components: social systems, governance systems, and ecological systems. The social component provides the justification for the plan by demonstrating value to the people who live in and near the forest and who use the forest. The governance component provides guidance to responsible entities on how, when, and where management activities will occur. The ecological component addresses the dynamic nature of biological systems, which is the reason this process is different from simply managing other infrastructure such as transportation systems, sewer systems, or electrical grids. As you might expect, the social and governance components add a level of complexity to the planning process not often encountered when developing an urban forest management program. Ideally these three components are integrated throughout the plan to inform government department procedures, policies, and other activities.

This guide will lead you through a series of steps to develop a long-range strategic plan that will:

- identify the perceptions and values of the citizens;
- create a citizen-based vision for the urban forest;
- identify broad qualitative goals that define the vision;
- draw up guiding principles that define the limits of government purpose and action;
- identify quantifiable management objectives;
- implement plans (short range);
- develop annual work plans; and
- monitor implementation and effectiveness.

There are five sections in this guide:

1. the conceptual framework,
2. plan initiation and engagement,
3. plan development,
4. plan re-engagement and adoption, and
5. plan implementation and accountability.

For each implementation step, we provide the “*who, what, how, and why*” needed to proceed. In addition, we indicate specific appendices with information on various techniques and methodologies, and we include an annotated bibliography. Download the full copy of this book for free: <https://ffgs.ifas.ufl.edu/urbanforestmanagementbook/>.