



Best Practice: Planting One Million Trees to Develop the Urban Forest

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CITY: NEW YORK CITY

POLICY AREAS: CLIMATE CHANGE; ENVIRONMENT; PARKS AND GREEN SPACES

BEST PRACTICE

MillionTreesNYC is a citywide, public-private program with an ambitious goal: to plant and care for one million new trees across the City's five boroughs over the next decade.

MillionTreesNYC is part of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's PlaNYC, a long-term vision to create a greener, greater city. Two-thirds of PlaNYC's 127 initiatives are either completed, on-time, or ahead of schedule. MillionTreesNYC will ultimately expand the City's urban forest by 20 percent, provide New Yorkers with important health, economic and environmental benefits, and create a more sustainable urban environment.

Since the launch of MillionTreesNYC in October 2007, public, private and non-profit organizations have rallied over 8,000 citizen volunteers to plant trees in what has become an unprecedented tree planting campaign and citywide environmental movement.

ISSUE

Urban forestry is an essential aspect of healthy cities but can be difficult to sustain without a concerted effort. Between 1984 and 2002 alone, New York City lost 9,000 acres of green open space to competing land uses. Environmental and physical factors such as construction damage, invasive species, soil compaction and degradation, drought, flooding and air pollution also impact urban forests. New York City's growing population will lead to rising CO₂ emissions and other air and water pollutants, urban density and new construction, and vehicle and foot traffic which damage the health of urban forests.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

By planting and caring for one million trees, New York City can increase its urban forest—our most valuable environmental asset made up of street trees, park trees, and trees on public, private and commercial land—by an astounding 20%, while achieving the many quality-of-life benefits that come with planting trees.

IMPLEMENTATION

The City of New York will plant 70% of trees in parks and other public spaces. The other 30% will come from private organizations, homeowners, and community organizations.

Street Trees

With the new PlaNYC funding, the Parks Department will work steadily over the next decade to plant 220,000 new street trees in various ways:

- Individual requests - Individuals may request trees to be planted in front of their homes and office buildings.
- Block planting - The Parks Department will target blocks with few or no trees, planting on both sides of the street.
- Automatic tree replacement - The Parks Department will automatically replace a tree after removal of a dead tree and/or stump.

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New Forest Creation

Nearly 40% of New York City's parkland - approximately 11,000 acres - is still natural. This includes rocky shorelines and beaches, wetlands, meadows, and forests, which currently account for 6,000 acres of the total parkland. PlaNYC will provide funding to plant an additional 2,000 parkland acres of forest by 2017.

When reforesting a parkland site, the Parks Department takes certain steps to ensure successful tree planting:

- Examine existing forests in New York City as references for new forest creation.
- Select species best adapted to local soils, water requirements, and sunlight.
- Prepare the site by doing the following as needed:
 - remove invasive plants,
 - test and adjust soil chemistry, and
 - stabilize eroded soils.
- Engage volunteers and hire contractors to put trees in the ground.
- Monitor new forest health and take corrective action as needed.



Photo credit: New York Restoration Project.

Urban Forest Management Plans

Over the last several years, the Parks Department developed a series of urban forest management reports focusing on individual parks or neighborhoods. These reports follow a trend in urban forestry from a reactionary management of individual trees to a proactive, systematic, and strategic focus on the urban forest system as a whole. These management plans serve as a blueprint for future activities from planting, to tree care, community engagement, and education.

To complement the City's expanded street and park tree planting program, New York Restoration Project (NYRP) and non-profit partners will engage a community-based tree planting strategy and private funding campaign. In each targeted neighborhood, the Parks Department and NYRP will begin by working with urban forestry data and community partners to identify tree planting opportunities on public and private properties.

Role of Private and Philanthropic Support

As the Parks Department begins planting street trees, NYRP and other non-profit partners will use donations to plant trees on public lands such as schoolyards, public housing campuses, libraries, community health centers and senior centers. To ensure these public trees are properly cared for, the Parks Department and NYRP will partner with community groups and block associations to oversee stewardship of the newly planted trees.

Developer Outreach

NYRP will meet with commercial and residential developers, architects, and landscape designers to set specific tree planting goals for each development. NYRP will also encourage large landowners and business improvement districts to develop long-term greening plans.

The Department of City Planning has implemented regulations that require planting of street trees connected with any new development, major enlargements, or conversions throughout all residential and commercial areas within the City.



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Homeowner Outreach

The Parks Department and NYRP will introduce public education campaigns that highlight the economic and health benefits associated with trees. Neighborhood residents will be invited to participate in tree planting workshops, join community-based stewardship networks, participate in volunteer tree planting days, and register their newly planted trees online. As a result of this new comprehensive tree planting approach, neighborhoods throughout New York City will see their streets, parks and public spaces, business districts and front yards transformed into beautiful green landscapes – providing New York City families with the positive benefits associated with urban trees.

COST

To achieve MillionTreesNYC's ambitious tree planting, stewardship and education goals, New York Restoration Project and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City are raising important private dollars to support the initiative. MillionTreesNYC is a true citywide effort – requiring the financial and in-kind support of individuals, corporations, small businesses and foundations to provide a healthy, clean and sustainable future for all New Yorkers!

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Through the use of intense marketing campaigns during the fall and spring planting season, special events such as New York Cares Day, and commemorations like Million Trees Month, we have thus far planted over 660,000 new trees. A running tally can be found at www.milliontreesnyc.org.

MillionTreesNYC has an advisory committee comprised of over 100 other City agencies and non-profit organizations that help steer the direction of the initiative. The advisory committee provides constructive feedback on the initiative's design and implementation. Additionally the advisory committee has developed our objectives for community outreach and stewardship, education, public policy, community gardens, marketing, green jobs and public relations.

TIMELINE

Winter 2013

116 participants attend the Grow Our Grassroots Summit, a networking and skill building event offered to connect, empower and build a network of committed green New Yorkers. Participants share skills, receive training, and better understand how to access City resources to expand their greening projects.

Parks Horticulture Crews, MillionTreesNYC staff and volunteers participate in a new series of winter tree care workdays, pruning young trees, mulching and cleaning up tree beds in East New York, Morrisania, East Harlem, and Far Rockaway. In total, 156 trees were cared for by 163 volunteers.

Fall 2012

1,365 volunteers plant 20,000 trees in natural areas throughout the five boroughs during Fall "Wangari Maathai Memorial" Planting Day

Summer 2012

Mini-Grants pilot program launches, empowering community groups to fund and expand tree care efforts in their neighborhoods. Citywide tree stewardship and watering campaigns engage residents in citywide tree care. Thirteen community groups care for almost 260 trees and engage more than 600 volunteers in tree care projects.

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Spring 2012

1,171 volunteers plant over 20,000 trees in natural and landscaped areas of parks throughout the five boroughs.

Winter 2012

127 participants attend the Grow Our Grassroots Summit (see description above)

Fall 2011

The 500,000th tree planting in St. Nicholas Park in Manhattan, commemorates the halfway point of MillionTreesNYC planting goals.

1,773 volunteers plant 20,000 trees in natural areas throughout the five boroughs during Fall “Wangari Maathai Memorial” Planting Day

Summer 2011

Citywide tree stewardship and watering campaigns engage residents in citywide tree care.

Spring 2011

1,600 volunteers plant over 20,000 trees in natural and landscaped areas of parks throughout the five boroughs.

Fall 2010

1,200 volunteers plant 20,000 trees in parks and natural areas throughout the five boroughs on Fall Planting Day.

Summer 2010

Five borough tree stewardship and watering campaigns engage residents in citywide tree care.

Spring 2010

1,400 volunteers plant 20,000 trees in parks and natural areas throughout the five boroughs on Spring Planting Day.

“MillionTreesNYC, Green Infrastructure, and Urban Ecology” research symposium brings together over 200 professionals to discuss the innovations and challenges of urban forestry and related ecological issues.

Trees and retail business and community outreach campaign begins.

Fall 2009

Mayor Bloomberg and Bette Midler plant the 250,000th tree to celebrate two-year anniversary of MillionTreesNYC.

“Put Down Roots” homeowner tree planting campaign begins.

Summer 2009

TREE Fund Announces Partnership with MillionTreesNYC – New green jobs initiative will train students over five years, bringing together leaders from several aspects of the arboriculture industry for the betterment of students.



With the support of Sesame Street's Big Bird, Mayor Bloomberg helps plant the first tree of the MillionTreesNYC initiative, October 9, 2007. Photo by Daniel Avila.



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Spring 2009

MillionTreesNYC Training Program – Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and US Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announce that the Department of Agriculture has awarded a \$2 million grant to create green jobs and restore urban forests in New York City.

Winter 2008

NYC Parks launches “Acorns to Oaks” MillionTreesNYC afterschool program.

October 2007

MillionTreesNYC is launched. Mayor Bloomberg and Bette Midler plant the first of one million trees.

April 2007

PlaNYC is unveiled.

LEGISLATION

MillionTreesNYC has an advisory subcommittee dedicated to public policy. It is through this group of advisors that MillionTreesNYC will make policy recommendations to ensure the sustainability of tree planting and care in New York City legislation.

In April 2008, the NYC City Council passed a Zoning Amendment requiring street tree planting for any new development, major enlargements, or conversions throughout all residential and commercial areas within the City. In spring 2010, the NYC City Council passed a Local Law Amendment requiring any public or private entity to obtain permission from the Parks Department in order to remove any existing street trees and to provide for the replacement of any trees removed from the public right-of-way. Additional information on this initiative can be found by contacting the Department of City Planning.

LESSONS LEARNED

MillionTreesNYC is still developing strategic goals and implementation policies. Because the initiative is relatively new, there are constantly lessons learned on how to achieve our goal of planting one million new trees over ten years. Over the course of the initiative, we have developed a model street tree procurement and planting program centered on selecting optimum tree species for each planting location, engaged a citywide network of volunteer tree stewards to help care for newly planted trees, and disseminated a series of robust marketing campaigns and public service announcements with the goal of engaging as many New Yorkers as possible in MillionTreesNYC.

MillionTreesNYC has worked to expand our capacity to engage local residents in continuing maintenance of street and park trees. Through concerted efforts at community-specific outreach, online and printed educational materials, mini-grant funding to neighborhood groups, networking events, provision of tree care tools, and ‘TreeLC’ workshops, we have engaged over 10,000 citizen stewards in tree care since the start of the initiative.

As we expand the network of tree stewards throughout NYC’s five boroughs, MillionTreesNYC is strategic about engaging volunteers along a spectrum of activities, making our programs accessible and relevant to everyone. Through a range of outreach programs and techniques, we are aware that some volunteers are not yet aware of the benefits of trees, while



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active community organizers are ready to lead local tree stewardship efforts. To ensure programmatic sustainability and expand our staff capacity, MTNYC offers Care Captain trainings, special workshops designed to empower community leaders to champion tree stewardship on their blocks. The 2012 Care Captains produced astonishing results, engaging over 600 additional volunteers in caring for over 350 trees. These Care Captains utilized outreach approaches that were unique to their respective neighborhoods' needs, from leading children in creative tree guard decoration contests to hosting naming ceremonies for young street trees.

TRANSFERABILITY

MillionTreesNYC is at the forefront of addressing critical issues of climate change and environmental sustainability. Many cities across the country and the world are engaged in developing new strategies to reduce carbon emissions and protect and enhance efficiency in the use of our environmental resources. Tree planting has a direct impact on energy conservation, air quality, soil erosion and storm water maintenance—major efforts currently pursued internationally in strategies geared at mitigating the impact of climate changes and global warming. The notion of planting trees through a public-private partnership can be transferred to any number of cities around the world, and MillionTreesNYC is considered a model initiative from which many other municipalities have benefitted. Examples of other cities doing the same include Los Angeles, CA, Chicago, IL, and Syracuse, NY, Salt Lake City, UT, Philadelphia, PA, Baltimore, MD, and Washington, DC.

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