

The Benefits of Trees in Communities

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It is easy to come up with reasons to plant trees. They add beauty and grace to any community setting. They make life more enjoyable, peaceful, and relaxing. Recent studies by the University of Illinois reveal that exposure to trees and vegetation seems to reduce mental fatigue and feelings of irritability that come with it (Kuo et al.). Employees with views of nature are ill 23 percent less often than employees without views (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). Hospital patients that see trees need less medication and have faster recovery times following surgery (Ulrich, 1985). The National Arbor Day Foundation (2002) reports that trees can be a stimulus to economic development, attracting new business and tourism. Commercial retail areas are more attractive to shoppers, apartments rent more quickly, tenants stay longer, and space in a wooded setting is more valuable to sell or rent.

More than that, we can attribute a monetary value to the trees along our streets. Since 1992, the USDA Center for Urban Forest Research has provided scientific evidence that the benefits of urban forests add real value to communities by:

- ◆ Conserving energy by shading buildings and paved surfaces
- ◆ Filtering airborne pollutants
- ◆ Removing atmospheric carbon dioxide
- ◆ Reducing stormwater runoff
- ◆ Increasing the value of our homes

The Center has developed web-based programs to help communities assess the benefits of their street trees. Trees properly placed around buildings can reduce air conditioning needs by 30 percent (Simpson and McPherson, 1996) and can save 20-50 percent in energy used for heating (Heisler, 1986). A large tree intercepts up to 4000 gallons of rainfall per year in its crown, reducing runoff of polluted storm water (McPherson et al., 1999 and 2000). Typical benefits - in terms of energy savings, air quality, health benefits, positive impacts on business – from 100 trees over 40 years, have been calculated at a worth of \$225,000 (McPherson et al., 2002).

All that said, it is so important for communities to embrace the value of its trees, and to realize the need to support local forestry programs. These needs should be addressed as natural resource elements within community strategic plans. With threats of diminishing federal- and state-based funding programs, local leaders need to pursue innovative methods of supporting forestry programs in their communities.



Tree beautification in New Rockford.