

Omaha Metro Community Forest Plan

What is a Community Forest Plan?

A community forest plan can take many forms, but every plan generally accomplishes three things:

1. Establish the value of the community's trees and forests through data collection and analysis.
 - In addition to aesthetic value, trees offer millions of dollars in infrastructural benefits each year by managing stormwater, purifying air/water/soil, lowering local temperatures, and producing food among other services.
2. Set broad goals for the tree canopy's future.
 - Broad goals do not identify specific canopy coverage percentages or unique projects, but seek to guide how our community thinks about and manages our trees.
3. Develop a criteria for tree planters to use to determine if, what, and how trees should be planted at a given site.
 - The goal should not be to plant any tree anywhere. Rather, the surrounding ecological and social factors should determine the course of action.

Why develop a plan now?

According to 2016 aerial scans of Douglas County, the city of Omaha has a canopy coverage of 26.5 percent. While this is not a bad coverage percentage, there are two trends that are cause for some concern:

- The US Forest Service found that Nebraska's urban canopy cover dropped from 20.4 percent to 18.8 percent between 2009 and 2014, the third highest loss in the country. While it is not possible to know if and how Omaha contributed to this urban canopy decline, it is not unreasonable to assume it contributed given it is the largest metro area in the state.
- Emerald ash borer, an invasive pest that infests and eventually kills ash trees, was confirmed to be in Douglas County in 2018. The US Department of Agriculture office at SUNY Syracuse found that 9.2 percent of Omaha's trees are ash, while the Parks Department has estimated that 14 percent of Omaha trees are ash trees. Regardless of the exact percentage, the city stands to lose a significant portion of its canopy due to emerald ash borer. The pest will have a similarly negative affect on the metropolitan area at large.

A community forest plan puts our trees at the front of our minds, encourages us to take steps to improve our canopy, and learn from past decisions.

Want to get involved?

The community forest plan is the 2020 big idea of the Heartland 2050 Natural Resources Committee. There is a steering group of community members involved in forestry locally who are guiding the plan's development more closely.

If you are interested in joining the steering group or simply receiving updates on the plan, feel free to reach out to Timothy Kerkhove at timothy.kerkhove@cityofomaha.org

If you are interested in the Heartland 2050 Natural Resources Committee, feel free to email Jeff Spiehs at jspiehs@mapacog.org

