

Urban Forestry in South Africa : Urban Forestry Stewardship Plan.

TREES ARE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR CITY/TOWN.

Local Authorities are unable to provide the environmental requirements as laid down in the Constitution (Section 24 of Act 108 of 1996) and nor do they have the ability to at present to meet the COP 21 (Paris Agreement) targets even though South Africa is a signatory to this agreement. This is the findings of a research project recently completed and presented at a National Conference of the I.E.R.M.

The research findings also revealed that no consultation was undertaken as laid down in the Municipal Systems Act with the residents regarding their wants and needs around the environment.

Essential Reading

Guidelines on urban and peri-urban forestry. FAO 178. fao.org/3/a-i6210e.pdf

Vision Statement.

Describe what your urban forest must strive for as far as your ecosystem strive for and how you as a city will value and care for these assets to ensure it is a healthy liveable city or town.

Purpose of the Plan.

Here the city/town must recognise the value and benefits of the trees in the urban forest, and the need for an integrated and adaptive approach by all departments to the hands on caring and maintenance the trees.

The urban forestry must be something worth caring for and any action must be significant. The concept of stewardship is based on an ecological framework that sees trees as a shared community resource and as part of the natural urban ecology.

The plans integrated approach must be the ability to preserve, sustain, and regenerate the urban forest over time and depend on the collective actions taken by multiple departments, community organisations, businesses, and various individuals.

In terms of the Integrated Development Plan drawn up in terms of the legal requirements of the Local Government Municipal Systems Act the community approach must roll out the community needs for a sustainable urban forest and include the actions of the various departments, neighbourhood and individuals.

The trees are each an asset with a value and collectively trees are an essential element for human and ecological health.

To define a ***sustainable urban forest***, it should read as follows-

These trees should be naturally occurring and planted in cities and be managed to provide the inhabitants with a continuing level of economic, social, environmental, and ecological benefits today and into the future.

For this to succeed the following three ideas must be accepted: -

1. Communities must acknowledge that city trees provide a wide range of net benefits.
2. Given the goal of maintaining net benefits over time, the regeneration of urban forests requires intervention and management by humans.
3. Sustainable urban forests exist within defined geographic and political boundaries.

For this to succeed the following is required: -

Vegetative Resource.

Canopy Cover	Climate appropriate tree cover, community wide.	Ideal amount but will vary by climate and region.
Age distribution	Provide – uneven age distribution.	A mix of young and mature trees and a tree inventory for easier monitoring.
Species Mix	Provide -species diversity	Species should not consist of more than 10% of the total. Pests and diseases may take a heavy toll on larger percentages.
Native Vegetation	Maintain native remnant forest and wild-life corridors to and from the city.	Native trees are admirably adapted and lend themselves to becoming replacement stock.

Community Framework.

Public Cooperation	All departments to work together -common goals and objectives.	To achieve this requires the involvement of the city/town council and all departments.
Involvement of large private and institutional landowners	These landowners embrace the city/town objectives through specific resource management plans.	Private landowners own and manage most of the urban forest. Collectively this can result in a community-wide understanding and valuing of the urban forest.
Green Industry Cooperation	They operate with high professional standards and commit to goals and objectives	The commitment of each section of this community to achieve standards, goals, objectives to plan properly.

Community Framework cont.		
Neighbourhood Action	Citizens understanding and participation in urban forestry management.	This is the area where individual's feel their actions can make the biggest difference in their quality of life.
Citizen-Government-Business interaction.	All constituencies interact for the benefit of the urban forest.	Having public agencies, private landowners, green industries, and neighbourhood groups all share the same vision
General awareness of trees as a community resource	Her the general public understanding of the value of trees in the community	People who value trees elect people who value trees elect officials who value trees. Who in turn ensure there is a high standard of management and adequate funding.
Regional Cooperation	Ensure cooperation and interaction among neighbouring communities and regional groups.	Linking efforts to other neighbour communities allows for consideration and action on larger issues such as water and air quality.

Resource Management.

City-wide management plan	Develop-Implement a management plan	Address important issues such as a shared vision, planting guidelines, goals and standards of care, requirements for new development, specification for managing.
Funding	Develop and maintain funding to implement management plan.	As urban forests exist on public and private, so the funding must come from both sources. Also reflects the level of education and awareness on the value of the urban forest.
Staffing	Employ and train adequate staff to implement management plan.	When all related staff are trained and continue to be trained from minimum to certification level.

Resource Management cont.		
Assessment Tools	Develop routine methods of continually collecting information about the urban forest.	Use whatever you can get info such as drone photos, GIS, aerial mapping.
Protection of existing trees	Conserve existing resources planted and natural.	By-Laws and Ordinances must protect and restrict the removal of trees on private and public property. Those removed must be replaced immediately.
Species and Site selection	Provide guidelines and specifications for species suitable for the region.	Provide suitable planting sites and appropriate trees -crucial to sustainability. Allowing for correct space and species to reduce short and long-term maintenance.
Tree Care Standards	Adopt and adhere to professional standards.	Consider ISA and ANSIZ133 Standards or makeup standards by combining standards.
Citizen Safety	Maximize public safety.	Regular inspection in terms of the OHS Act is a requirement. Correct placement and staking are critical initially.
Recycling	Create a close system for waste except for Polyphagous Shot hole Borer infested wood which should be incinerated or buried.	Compost, mulch and firewood and donate suitable 'material to wood turner's society.

As you can see an Urban Forestry Stewardship Plan requires a lot of work and a lot of input before it can be considered. What must also be noted here is that this document is a living document and will have to be up dated regularly to remain viable.

We must all attempt to commence the development of these plans by creating a basic framework and building on it over time. Remember this plan must be a collective effort.

Should any member/town or city wish to obtain further information and or assistance they can contact me on MichaelGLeechMGL@gmail.com

