



City and Borough of Sitka

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Date: 4/2/2013

To: Mayor Mim McConnell and Assembly Members
Jim Dinley, Municipal Administrator

From: Michael Harmon, Public Works Director *for*
Gary Baugher, Maintenance and Operations Superintendent *GEB*
Lynne McGowan, Parks and Recreation Manager

Subject: Urban Forest Management Plan

Background

The City and Borough Parks Division received a \$26,000 grant from Alaska State Division of Community Forestry Program to complete an Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) and tree inventory for the municipality's trees on parks and grounds areas. The project was approved by the Assembly last summer and the 95% Draft (UFMP) is now available for review. The plan is a management framework to ensure that trees, as part of the City's living infrastructure, have a systematic strategy for their current care and long-term maintenance. The goal is to use the plan so Sitka's urban forest remains healthy and is sustainable.

Jim Flott, a consultant with Community Forestry Consultants, was retained to complete the Urban Forest plan and assist with the Tree Inventory. Mr. Flott along with volunteers and staff worked together to complete the tree inventory in October. The inventory cataloged data on the variety, condition and prescriptive management recommendations for 692 urban trees. This data was entered in a tree management software data base that was overlaid on the CBS GIS system.

Mr. Flott has also been working with staff and the public on the Sitka Urban Forest Management Plan development. A meeting was held in October to garner public input and information was gathered on the City's existing tree management program. This information along with the inventory data was used to complete the plan.

Analysis

The draft plan is 95% complete and has been reviewed by staff and Tree and Landscape Committee members. The plan is an evaluation of the tree inventory, current CBS and Tree and Landscape tree program activities and management with recommendations regarding the community forest of the CBS. The management plan provides the CBS with the framework to implement the best management practices for the community forest with recommended strategies. Trees are valuable assets to the community and the healthier the trees the more CBS's livability is improved.

The plan evaluation affirmed the existing CBS program has operated using few General Fund dollars but its success is due in large part to volunteer help and grant funding. Sitka was the first community in Alaska to be established as a Tree City. The Tree and Landscape Committee and Parks Division staff have worked collaboratively for the last twelve years to establish and grow a program of tree management and education. Sitka is considered ahead of any other city in Alaska in local government and public awareness and support for good urban forest management. With the UFMP goals and guidelines, staff and volunteers will be able to put into effect an even more comprehensive program.

Recommendations in the plan will help staff prevent tree failures, preserve tree resources, and maintain the trees of CBS. Impacts to the City's utility infrastructure will be minimized. Although good tree management programs do come with some costs, the long-term benefits are significantly greater and will result in a sustainable asset for the citizens of CBS today and tomorrow.

The urban forest management plan is considered a "living," working document. The work objectives recommended will be reviewed annually and adjustments made for the following year.

Fiscal Note

The UFMP doesn't include any fiscal obligation. Budget items are recommended funding levels for a comprehensive tree management program.