



GRAND RAPIDS URBAN FOREST

REPORT CARD

GRAND RAPIDS
URBAN
FOREST
PROJECT

2017





Urban Forest Report Card: An Independent Evaluation of Grand Rapids' Urban Forest

2017

The Friends of Grand Rapids Parks Urban Forest Project is a program committed to vibrant parks and public spaces. The Urban Forest Project seeks to engage and mobilize the entire community in growing a larger, healthier urban forest in Grand Rapids.



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Urban Forestry

Urban Forestry is the management of urban trees and associated resources that help sustain an urban forest cover, health, and numerous ecosystem services. Urban forest efforts typically focus on trees located along streets as well as in public parks and natural areas.

The main goal of urban forestry is to optimize forest benefits for all residents. Urban foresters help guide the policy and management of trees on not only public land but also private land, where the majority of a city's urban forest lies.



Introduction

The Grand Rapids Urban Forest Report Card is an assessment tool that measures the quality of Grand Rapids' urban forest including public and private efforts to expand and sustain all elements of the urban forest including canopy cover, education efforts, and forest health.

The purpose of this report card is to provide digestible information surrounding Grand Rapids' urban forest and the city's progress toward achieving the adopted 40% canopy cover goal. The Urban Forest Report Card is designed to build awareness and to encourage citizens to become involved in helping expand, protect and sustain Grand Rapids' trees. With the joint efforts of the City of Grand Rapids, Friends of Grand Rapids Parks, and the citizens of Grand Rapids we can get closer to our tree canopy and urban forest health goals.



Urban Forests are for People

Learn more about the ecosystem benefits of our urban forest and explore the trees of our city go to the Grand Rapids Tree Plotter: pg-cloud.com/GrandRapids/

Metrics Explained

Throughout the report each of the identified metrics are given a score based on the performance of their sub-metrics. Metric grades are then averaged into one final grade at the end of the Report Card.

Canopy Cover— is a measure of how much tree canopy cover there is within the 45 square miles of land that make up the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan. This metric evaluates the current cover, the city’s canopy cover goal, and canopy cover assessments.

Forest Health— is a measure of the health of our urban forest. This metric evaluates the amount of knowledge we have on our forest health, the condition of public trees, species suitability and species diversity.

Tree Planting— is a measure of the number of trees planted annually by the Urban Forest Project and the city, planting requirements established by the city, tree planting education, as well as the communication exhibited during the planting process.

Community Engagement— is the general level of knowledge and participation in tree-related issues within Grand Rapids. Is metric evaluates the representation of Citizen Foresters throughout Grand Rapids, the amount of tree related events held in Grand Rapids, and tree related neighborhood action.

Throughout Grand Rapids, the trees in parks, yards, natural areas and along streets contribute to an urban forest that provides valuable ecological, economic and social benefits. These include reduced energy use, improved water and air quality, diverse wildlife habitat, and increased human health.

Canopy Cover

The 2015 Grand Rapids Tree Canopy Assessment determined that the urban tree canopy covers 9,775 acres in Grand Rapids, providing \$1.89 million annually towards carbon sequestration and air pollution removal services alone.

1,640 additional acres of canopied land are needed to achieve the 40% canopy goal.

With 7,032 acres of possible plating space (private & public), there is ample room to grow Grand Rapids' urban forest. Frequent canopy assessments will be needed in order to track progress.



Sub-Metric	Key Objective	Low (0)	Fair (1)	Good (2)	Optimal (3)	2017 Figure	Score
City-Wide Goal and Plan Adoption	Implement a comprehensive canopy goal to achieve appropriate degree of cover, community-wide.	No adopted Canopy goal exists.	A vague canopy goal has been adopted by the city, with minimal implementation.	A strong goal exists however it does not have a set timeline and is limited in action strategies.	Existing goal has an established timeline with identified action strategies set by the city with input from the community.	The 2011 Green Grand Rapids amendment to the city's master plan established a 40% tree canopy goal in Grand Rapids. The goal however lacks a timeline.	2
Canopy Cover	Achieve the adopted 40% urban canopy goal.	Existing canopy cover is less than 30%	Existing canopy cover is 30-34%	Existing canopy cover is 35-39%	Existing canopy cover has achieved or surpassed the 40% urban canopy goal.	Urban tree canopy covers 34% of the City of Grand Rapids based on a 2015 Tree Canopy Assessment.	1
Relative Right of Way (ROW) Canopy Cover	Achieve appropriate degree of ROW canopy throughout Grand Rapids	Existing ROW canopy cover equals 0%-25% of potential.	Existing ROW canopy cover equals 26%-50% of potential.	Existing ROW canopy cover equals 51%-75% of potential.	Existing ROW canopy cover equals 76%-100% of potential.	The existing relative canopy cover for right of ways in Grand Rapids is 56% of potential right of way planting area.	2
Canopy Cover Assessment	Assess the existing and potential canopy cover for the entire Grand Rapids community.	No canopy cover assessment exists.	Canopy cover assessment is over 5 years old.	A canopy cover assessment has been completed within the last 5 years.	Completed an assessment within last 5 years by management units and by neighborhood.	The latest Urban Tree Canopy Assessment was completed in March 2015 and can be found on both the City of Grand Rapids and the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks websites.	3



Forest Health

Grand Rapids' urban forest is at risk of being negatively impacted by natural and social factors including insects and disease, severe storms, climate change, lack of adequate maintenance and an increase in development. As urban expansion continues throughout Grand Rapids, challenges are likely to arise. Neighborhoods and communities can plan together for sustainable growth of our city.

To ensure forest health we must gather periodic data on the condition of our urban forest, allowing data to drive proper decision making for combatting these challenges.

Sub-Metric	Key Objective	Low (0)	Fair (1)	Good (2)	Optimal (3)	2017 Figure	Score
Knowledge of Public Trees in the Built Environment (streets, parks, etc.)	Establish an inventory detailing the condition of public trees which guides planning.	The condition of the urban forest is unknown.	Sample-based inventory is established which indicates tree condition.	Statistically-significant urban forest inventory in place that includes detailed tree condition and risk.	Statistically-significant urban forest inventory taken that includes detailed tree condition and risk rating that are used to guide proper forest management.	The City of Grand Rapids completed the full public tree inventory and report in 2016. All data has now been made public and is available at pg-cloud.com/GrandRapids/ .	3
Current Condition of Public Trees	Work towards improving the condition of the public urban forest.	No condition assessment available, tree conditions unknown.	<50% of sampled trees are in fair or better condition.	50-75% of sampled trees are in fair or better condition.	>75% of sampled trees are in fair or better condition.	Based on the completed 2016 tree inventory, 86% of trees are in fair or better condition, 14% are in poor, critical or dead condition. In 2017 Grand Rapids undertook a major initiative to remove and prune all priority 1 hazard trees and limbs.	3
Species Suitability	Establish and incentivize use of an approved tree species list that is suitable for the Grand Rapids regional environment.	The city has no approved tree species list.	The city has an approved tree species list based on biodiversity data, but it is not enforced.	The city has an approved tree species list based on biodiversity data, and is used to make selections on public property.	The city has an approved tree species list based on biodiversity data, and has incentive programs in place to promote suitable species planting on private property.	In 2013 the City of Grand Rapids adopted an approved tree species list. This defines and directs the desired composition of the urban forest while providing flexibility in selection of species that are suitable.	2
Species Diversity	Establish a genetically diverse tree population citywide.	At least one species represents more than 25% of the entire tree population	No species represent more than 25% of the entire tree population	No species represent more than 15% of the entire tree population citywide	No species represent more than 10% of the entire tree population citywide	Norway Maple represents 31% of Grand Rapids' Urban Forest based on a completed 2015 street tree survey available at pg-cloud.com/GrandRapids/ .	0

Tree Planting

Every spring and fall the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks Urban Forest Project plants trees throughout the city. These trees are largely funded through sponsorships, donations, and grants. While all of the trees planted by the city and most of the trees planted by the Urban Forest Project are planted on public property, we need neighbors like you to help us reach our canopy goal by planting trees on your own property as well.

Tree plantings are a great opportunity to get outside, get dirty, and positively impact your community. We have year round opportunities to get involved with the trees in Grand Rapids. Find out more on the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks website.



Sub-Metric	Key Objective	Low (0)	Fair (1)	Good (2)	Optimal (3)	2017 Figure	Score
Planting Diversity	Preservation & enhancement of local tree biodiversity is implemented in plantings.	Voluntary use of native or adapted non-native species on public and private lands.	The use of native or adapted non-native species is encouraged on a project appropriate basis in publicly-managed areas.	Native or adapted non-native requirements have been incorporated into city code.	The use of native or adapted non-native species is required on a project-appropriate basis. Non-native invasive species are recognized and prohibited.	The use of native or adapted non-native species is required in publicly-managed areas.	3
Tree Plantings	Host cross organizational and collaborative plantings with engaged volunteers.	No tree plantings occurred throughout the city in 2015.	Urban Forest Project planted trees with minimal engagement and collaboration with the city.	Both the city and Urban Forest Project planted trees throughout Grand Rapids.	Collaborative plantings occurred between the city, Urban Forest Project, and engaged volunteers and citizens.	The Urban Forest Project and city of Grand Rapids have collectively planted close to 1200 trees in 2017. Trees were planted in street tree lawns, parks, schools, and private property.	3
Tree Planting Communication	Establish open communication with adjacent property owners on new publicly established trees.	No communication to adjacent property owners.	Minimal communication to adjacent property owners.	Direct but not optimal communication with adjacent property owners during entire planting process	Direct and open communication before tree planting, with follow up and tree maintenance recommendations post planting.	It is a goal of UFP and the city to maintain communications with property owners during the entire planting process, from planning to maintenance.	2
Planting Education	Provide strong education so citizens know to plant the Right Tree in the Right Place (RTRP) for the right reason.	No tree planting demos or classes exist within the city.	Tree planting demos are provided during volunteer tree plantings. No class exists that teaches RTRP.	Tree planting classes are offered that teach RTRP principals. No tree planting demos are offered.	Free tree planting classes are offered many times in both spring and fall with hands on demo tree plantings at each volunteer planting.	Most problems can be avoided by selecting the appropriate tree species for the available planting space. The Urban Forest Project Tree Planting course teaches about this importance.	3



Community Engagement

Our community engagement and education programs and services help the residents of Grand Rapids get more involved in our urban forest. Friends of Grand Rapids Parks provides education and training to help you become knowledgeable in tree planting, maintenance, advocacy and identification.

In 2017 we logged over 2000 volunteer hours with over 700 volunteers in 24 neighborhoods.

Get Involved Today!

Certified Citizen Foresters are constant advocates and leaders for trees in their communities. We rely on our Citizen Foresters to help educate, advocate, and provide support for tree based neighborhood projects.

Sub-Metric	Key Objective	Low (0)	Fair (1)	Good (2)	Optimal (3)	2017 Figure	Score
Citizen Foresters	Certified Citizen Foresters represent every neighborhood helping to educate, advocate, and provide support for neighborhood based tree projects.	Less than 25% of all neighborhoods are represented by a certified citizen forester.	25-50% of all neighborhoods are represented by a certified citizen forester.	51-75% of all neighborhoods are represented by a certified citizen forester.	More than 75% of neighborhoods are represented by at least one citizen forester.	The Citizen Forester program has 90 graduates that reside in 49% of Grand Rapids' neighborhoods or outside of city limits.	1
Urban Forest Project Events	Annually host urban forestry events in each Grand Rapids neighborhood connecting people to trees and engaging them in urban forest stewardship activities.	An Urban Forest Project event was held in less than 25% of all neighborhoods.	An Urban Forest Project event was held in 25-50% of all neighborhoods	An Urban Forest Project event was held in 51-75% of all neighborhoods.	More than 75% of all neighborhoods had an Urban Forest Project event.	In 2017 the Urban Forest Project held a total of 48 community events that were hosted in 65% (24/37) of Grand Rapids' neighborhoods.	2
Neighborhood Action	At the neighborhood level, trained citizen foresters and volunteers cooperate in urban forest management.	0-25% of neighborhoods have demonstrated involvement in their urban forest (urban forest plan, volunteer led plantings, citizen foresters, etc.).	25-50% of neighborhoods have demonstrated involvement in their urban forest.	50-75% of neighborhoods have demonstrated involvement in their urban forest.	More than 75% of neighborhoods have demonstrated involvement in their urban forest.	The Urban Forest Project is working on engaging 3 neighborhoods in neighborhood level forest management plans. In addition, over 100 active Citizen Forester trainees and/or graduates reside and volunteer in 78%(29/37) of Grand Rapids neighborhoods.	3

Final Grade

The final grade of the Grand Rapids Urban Forest Report Card represents the efforts made by many organizations and individuals in expanding, enhancing and sustaining our Grand Rapids urban forest. The 2017 final grade is 73% based on the grades of the four metrics:

- *Canopy Cover (8/12)*
- *Forest Health (8/12)*
- *Tree Planting (11/12)*
- *Community Engagement (6/9)*

In comparison, the 2015 Urban Forest Report Card also had a score of 73%. All of the scores however, are not the same. With the street tree inventory completed our tree diversity went down, but with our many education efforts this year our community engagement score went up.



73%

Summary

In capturing our successes with a report card we celebrate forward momentum, striving towards the next steps to keep making headway in our urban forest. The last seven years of urban and community forestry actions have set the groundwork for the coming years—2018 holds a bright future for urban forestry in Grand Rapids including dozens of tree plantings, urban forestry ordinance updates, adoption of residential tree planting incentive programs and Right Tree, Right Place education and outreach. Updating our systems and continuing existing projects helps provide vital services that sustain and improve the resiliency and health of our communities.

This Report Card is made possible by Urban Forest Project Committee, The Grand Rapids Community Foundation, City of Grand Rapids Forestry Department and Parks and Recreation Department, and our valued partners for helping compile this report that captures past efforts, recognizes current issues and opportunities, and identifies metrics to move our city's urban forestry efforts forward.



Urban Forest Project

The 2011 Green Grand Rapids amendment to the city's master plan established a 40% tree canopy goal in Grand Rapids. Recognizing the need to involve citizens in expanding the urban tree canopy, the City of Grand Rapids and Friends of Grand Rapids Parks launched the Urban Forest Project with core funding from the Grand Rapids Community Foundation.

Since its beginning the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks Urban Forest Project has been planting trees, educating citizens, and working with the communities of Grand Rapids to make our urban forest healthy and beneficial to all.

Help Grow Our Urban Forest!

The Urban Forest Project seeks to offer a diverse menu of opportunities for citizens to learn about and directly impact the Grand Rapids urban forest. From planting to pruning, we can each do our part to maximize the tree canopy in all parts of the city so that everyone in Grand Rapids can experience the cultural, social, economic, public health, and environmental benefits of trees.

We invite you to join us. Whether you have an hour, a day, or even more time to give, we have an opportunity for you, and the list is always growing! Take part in a volunteer tree pruning or planting event, take a class and become a Citizen Forester, apply for a mini-grant, or participate in our annual Mayor's Greening Initiative for Arbor Day. There is always a way to get involved and help the forest.

Each of us comes with unique gifts, talents, and creativity that can play an important part in helping our urban forest be as healthy and vibrant as possible.

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