

The Tree Program

Village of Orland Park, Illinois

“ I sincerely believe that this program enhances the livability of communities and quality of life for many people.”

-Daniel J. McLaughlin, Mayor, Village of Orland Park, Illinois



Project Overview

The Tree Program of the Village of Orland Park, Illinois fosters land protection as well as tree planting and preservation. Initiated in 1995, The Tree Program has resulted in an estimated 4,750 trees planted. A significant accomplishment of the Program was the passage of a \$20 million referendum to purchase and preserve open tracts of land containing old-growth trees, resulting in the preservation of nearly 300 acres. To continue fundraising, the non-profit organization Open Lands of Orland Park Corporation was established. Open Lands is the Village’s main partner in the Tree Program, and the Village has also formed an Open Lands Fund Commission to guide preservation efforts, which include overseeing Fund activities and providing input on the Tree Program. The Tree Program is implemented within 28 square miles of the Village of Orland Park, a suburban community located 32 miles southwest of Chicago. Program activities take place throughout the Village, in areas such as public parks, parkways, boulevards, schools, retail zones, as well as commercial, and office park landscapes. The Tree Program directly benefits the 60,000 residents of the Village, and because Orland Park is home to a large retail base, the Program also affects thousands of people from nearby communities, including from neighboring Indiana.

Project at a Glance

Project Partners: Open Lands of Orland Park Corporation, Open Lands Fund Commission, Village of Orland Park

Location: Orland Park, IL

Award Category: Population 100,000 or less

Timeframe: January 1, 1995 - present

Size and scope: 4,750 trees planted in 28 square mile area with 60,000 residents

Total cost of project: \$24,680,000

Outstanding Accomplishments

- Planted 4,750 (3” average diameter) trees.
- Passed a \$20 million referendum to purchase and preserve open tracts of land containing old-growth trees. Preserved nearly 300 acres.
- Enhanced a regional destination for travelers and shoppers that are drawn from surrounding communities.
- Preserved key landscapes in the Village of Orland Park, helping to maintain its character.
- Preserved natural beauty of the community, created recreational opportunities, alleviated traffic and addressed other concerns associated with land development.
- Encouraged tree plantings in established residential and commercial areas.
- Helped reduce stormwater runoff by an estimated 485,000 gallons per year.

The Tree Program - Project Description

Pre-existing Conditions

Prior to the Tree Program, undeveloped land was increasingly being purchased and developed for residential and commercial purposes. Land containing old-growth trees, or lots located in densely forested areas, near water bodies and in other natural areas, were particularly attractive targets for development. The rate of development had significant impacts on the canopy cover, stormwater management, suspended solids in lakes and ponds, and wildlife habitat. Recognizing that much of the land in Orland Park would be developed without some protection, the Mayor led the initiative to purchase open parcels of land for preservation. Through preservation and tree planting efforts, natural areas and the benefits they provide to the community were protected.

Tree species: Before the Tree Program, new development was often accompanied by the planting of non-native and disease-susceptible tree species, including ash. These trees have shown to have poor survival rates, due to their susceptibility to the Emerald Ash Borer and other pests, and have not measurably enhanced the existing tree stock. With the implementation of the Tree Program, species that survive better in Orland Park's climate and soil-types are now encouraged, as is the planting of trees in areas where development has already occurred.

Project Components

The Tree Program includes a 50/50 program where 50% of the cost of trees planted along parkways are paid for by the Village and the other 50% by homeowners. It also has a tree planting program in public parks. The Village has also formed an Open Lands Fund Commission to guide preservation efforts, which includes overseeing fund activities and providing input on the Tree Program. Impacts of development are minimized through an updated Land

Development Code under which conservation easements and tree mitigation requirements protect trees and necessitate new plantings either on site or in parks. Existing trees potentially impacted by construction require snow fencing to be installed along the drip line in order to protect the trees' roots. For Arbor Day, the Parks Department supplies schools with trees and educational materials on how to identify trees, their benefits, and guidance on care and maintenance.

Outreach: The Village government obtained community input via formal and informal meetings before proposing a \$20 million referendum to help purchase nearly 300 acres of open land. Prior to the referendum, a flyer was distributed to residents detailing the impacts of land development, including loss of open space, traffic congestion and the growth in school population, and estimating the average tax increase to a homeowners if the referendum was passed. The Village also issued

Project Goals

- Preserve natural areas containing old-growth trees and other desirable natural features.
- Increase the environmental benefits derived from trees, and enhance community aesthetics by landscaping, public parkways, parks, boulevards, businesses, and personal residences.
- Foster development that appropriately plans for, sites, selects and plants trees.
- Use trees strategically to enhance pedestrian features and attract people to key public areas.
- Utilize trees in landscaping to help manage and mitigate stormwater.
- Utilize trees to provide habitat for and preserve wildlife.

press releases and the Mayor spoke publicly about the Open Lands program, which received coverage in local and regional papers.



Funding

Both public and private funds have been utilized as part of the Tree Program. The largest funding source has come from the Open Lands Bond Referendum, a \$20 million bond issuance that created funding for Open Lands, the preservation component of the Tree Program. Other funders include the Village of Orland Park Recreation and Parks Department and the Public Works Department, which allocate an annual budget towards the purchase and installation of new trees. The State of Illinois and Cook County also allocate grants to assist in the acquisition of lands for preservation and to redevelop a park near an affordable housing development, respectively.

Community's Awareness: The Tree Program and its outreach program have improved the community's awareness of the multiple benefits of trees. In addition, as a result of the efforts in proposing and passing the Open Lands referendum, many people throughout the region are now better informed about the benefits open areas provide, not only in maintaining the aesthetic quality of the landscape, but also the avoided traffic and burdens on the local school system from continued rapid land consumption and development.

The Tree Program - Benefits

Access to green space for low-income residents: Newly planted trees have increased the comfort and enjoyment of people using the parks by providing shade, screening from roads and wind breaks. The Village of Orland Park has applied for and received a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to reconstruct Cameno Park, which will serve lower income families. Formerly an area with few surrounding trees, the plans for the park natural plantings, and expanded recreational facilities to accommodate a broader age group of children.

Real estate value: Land preservation efforts and property enhancement through planting trees has had a significant positive affect on the desirability of real estate within the Village, and property values are among the highest in the region. Additionally, Orland Park was recently ranked the 45th best place to live in the United States by Money Magazine. Part of the evaluation included a ranking of the available Arts and Leisure opportunities, the category in which the community scored the highest.

Resident involvement and satisfaction: The Tree Program was developed in direct response to the interest and concerns expressed by residents. Continued commitment and active engagement of the public is ensured by educational tree programs for schools, Arbor Day observances that include the distribution of trees to residents, two not-for-profit organizations as partners, a partnership with the local school district, a commission to represent the public's interest in land use decision making, and landscaping classes. As the program moves forward, neighborhoods will continue to be revitalized and improved through the collaborative efforts that have made the Village's Tree Program possible.

Economic vitality: The Tree Program has enhanced the redevelopment of a business district located in the historic part of town. A "lifestyle" shopping center has been a part of this redevelopment process, which includes pedestrian-friendly crosswalks and store fronts, as well as native trees and landscaping. Trees installed as part of the project add to the aesthetics of the

district, promote pedestrian comfort, and help create an atmosphere where people enjoy congregating for events such as the annual Fine Arts Fair.

Environmental Benefits

Canopy Restoration: Canopy cover has increased through the planting of 4,750 new trees and the maturation of existing trees. Preservation of nearly 300 acres of land containing old-growth trees has contributed to the gradual reversal of the adverse effects of development that have been witnessed in recent decades.

Greenway Connectivity: Improved greenway connectivity between parks, forest preserves and other natural areas, as well as along roadways, sidewalks and bike paths. Plantings along bike paths have been particularly effective in drawing natural areas together and improving wildlife habitat. Created a greenbelt linking various destination points and promoted the use of the paths by making them more attractive and comfortable for potential users.

Carbon Sequestration: Sequestered an estimated 61,750 pounds of carbon dioxide annually after 4,750 trees have been planted.

Stormwater: Trees are used strategically to help prevent erosion, maintain swales and other drainage-related topographical features, and increase water retention capabilities in soils. Tree plantings have noticeably slowed runoff and benefited areas that had previously experienced erosion or flooding. Newly planted trees are estimated to have reduced runoff and retained almost 485,000 gallons of stormwater per year (assuming an average of 102 gallons/year per tree).

Energy Efficiency: Increased the energy efficiency of heating and cooling buildings by providing shade and wind breaks.





2007 Awards of Excellence Community Trees Case Study



The Tree Program - Looking Ahead

Project Monitoring and Evaluation

The Tree Program incorporates a number of municipal initiatives, including plantings to help manage stormwater and enhance parks, parkways, boulevards, schools and other areas. Evaluations include a qualitative assessment to determine the degree to which new tree plantings have impacted stormwater management during storm events. Enhancement programs are evaluated for aesthetic improvement, quality of the tree installation, and health of the tree after planting. Additionally, financial expenditures for trees are reviewed to determine tree budgeting needs for upcoming budget years.

Project Maintenance

A written tree maintenance plan has become part of the local Orland Park Village Code. Private homeowners are responsible for maintaining trees that are on their property and along the parkway. The Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for maintaining trees that adorn public parks, parkways, streets, municipal building landscapes, and other public lands. A full-time certified arborist is on the Village staff and is responsible for ensuring that trees under the care of the Parks and Recreation Department are properly maintained and healthy.

Challenges Faced

One challenge to the preservation component of the Program was how to protect some of the most valuable undeveloped land within the community. To overcome the funding challenge, the Village issued and passed a referendum calling for a \$20 million bond sale to raise funds for the preservation effort. To ensure that money continued to be raised for the fund, the Open Lands Commission was formed to direct fund-raising efforts. In addition to the lack of funding, the Village had to compete with private developers for undeveloped land, who sought these wooded lots for their appeal and profit potential. This challenge was addressed by identifying land owners who were supportive of the Village's preservation efforts and who were willing to sell or donate their land to the Program to support its cause.

Innovation Applied

Orland Park's Tree Program has made use of an innovative referendum to fund land and tree preservation. Appearing on Village ballots in 2000, Orland Park residents approved the \$20 million referendum and created a fund that has a lasting impact on the beauty of the community. Since the passage of the referendum, 300 acres containing old-growth trees and other natural features have been preserved in key areas throughout the Village. The Open Lands Referendum approach has far reaching potential to be used as a model by communities in other regions who are committed to preserving land, protecting trees and expanding local tree cover.

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