



Municipal Technical Advisory Service
INSTITUTE *for* PUBLIC SERVICE

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Step 1 - Select a Program or Standards

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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The two most popular options for urban forestry programs or standards are the National Arbor Foundation and the National Allocation Method.

A. National Arbor Foundation-USA Program standards

To qualify for Tree City USA, a city must meet four standards established by the Arbor Day Foundation and the National Association of State Foresters. These standards were established to ensure that every qualifying community would have a viable tree management plan and program. The standards include the following:

1. Tree board or department

Someone must be legally responsible for the care and management of the community's trees. This may be a professional forester or arborist, an entire forestry department, or a volunteer tree board. Often, both a professional staff and an advisory tree board are present, which is a good goal for most communities. A tree board, or commission, is a group of concerned volunteer citizens directed by ordinance with developing and administering a comprehensive tree management program. Balanced, broad-based community involvement is encouraged. Boards function best if not composed entirely of tree-related professionals such as professors, nursery operators, arborists, etc. Fresh ideas and different perspectives are added by citizens with an interest in trees that is entirely vocational. Limited, staggered terms of service will prevent stagnation or burnout, while at the same assuring continuity.

2. Tree care ordinance

The tree ordinance must establish a tree board or urban forestry department and give this body the responsibility for writing and implementing an annual community forestry work plan along with authority over all publicly owned lands. Beyond that, the ordinance shall be flexible enough to fit the needs and circumstances of the particular community. A tree ordinance provides an opportunity to set good policy and back it with the force of law when necessary. Ideally, it will provide clear guidance for planting, maintaining and removing trees from streets, parks and other public places.

3. Community forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita

Evidence is required that the community has established a community forestry program that is supported by an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita. At first, this may seem like an impossible barrier to some communities. However, a little investigation usually reveals that more than this amount is already spent by the municipality on its trees. If not, this may signal serious neglect that will cost far more in the long run. In such a case, working toward Tree City USA recognition can be used to reexamine the community's budget priorities and redirect funds to properly care for its tree resource before it is too late. Ideally, this standard will be met by focusing funding on an annual work plan developed after an inventory is completed and a report is approved by the city council. Such a plan will address species diversity, planting needs, hazardous trees, insect and disease problems, and a pattern of regular care such as pruning and watering.

4. An Arbor Day observance and proclamation

This is the least challenging and probably the most enjoyable standard to accomplish. An Arbor Day celebration can be simple and brief or an all-day or all-week observation. It can be a simple tree planting event or an award ceremony that honors leading tree planters. For children, Arbor Day may be their only exposure to the green world or a springboard to discussions about the complex issue of environmental quality. The benefits of Arbor Day go far beyond the shade and beauty of new trees for the next generation. Arbor Day is a golden opportunity for publicity and to educate homeowners about proper tree care. Utility companies can join in to promote planting small trees beneath power lines or being careful when digging. Smokey Bear's fire prevention messages can be worked into the event as can conservation education about soil erosion or the need to protect wildlife habitat. Still another way to develop Arbor Day is to link it with a tree-related festival. Some that are currently celebrated include dogwood festivals, locust bloom festivals and Macon, Georgia's Cherry Blossom Festival that annually brings more than \$ 4.25 million into the local economy. In meeting the four standards, help is available. The urban and community forestry coordinator in your state forester's office will work with communities to take these first steps toward better community forestry.

B. National Allocation method

This model, governed by the Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry, stresses the need for a community to meet the following four urban forestry elements:

- Tree board;
 - Tree ordinance;
 - Staffing; and
 - Inventory/management plan.
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DISCLAIMER: The letters and publications written by the MTAS consultants were written based upon the law at the time and/or a specific sets of facts. The laws referenced in the letters and publications may have changed and/or the technical advice provided may not be applicable to your city or circumstances. Always consult with your city attorney or an MTAS consultant before taking any action based on information contained in this website.

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