



Georgia Planning Officials Newsletter

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Seeing the Forest and the Trees: Green Infrastructure as a Community Asset

As many cities and counties throughout the state are experiencing growth, they may also be facing a growing concern of how to protect trees in their community. While Georgia has always been a state with an abundance of trees, many communities are starting to examine whether or not a tree ordinance is necessary in wake of increased development throughout the state.

The objective of a tree ordinance, like any ordinance, can slightly differ among jurisdictions. However, they are all common in the respect that it is a way to protect current tree infrastructure, and to ensure that as development occurs, an adequate quantity and quality will be replaced. Additional common objectives found in tree ordinances include:

- Promoting clean air and reduce heat and glare
- Preventing soil erosion and improve surface drainage
- Emphasizing the importance of trees and vegetation as both a visual and physical buffer
- Protecting and enhancing the aesthetic qualities of the community

A valuable resource for a community wanting to create a tree ordinance is to simply look at what other communities have done. This provides for the opportunity to evaluate what aspects of the ordinance are most suitable for your specific needs.

The community may want to take a step further and not only research sample ordinances, but also contact the planning departments or planning commissioners from that particular jurisdiction. This is a good way to learn about how effective the ordinance is at helping to protect and sustain the amount of trees.

Local Resources

There are a number of tree ordinances throughout the state of Georgia, and this number has increased in the past 20 years. The City of Savannah Park and Tree Department serves as a good resource by providing downloadable information including a land protection and tree clearing ordinance, an ordinance compliance checklist, a plan review process manual, tree planting and tree protection details.

<http://www.ci.savannah.ga.us/cityweb/p&tweb.nsf>

State Resources

The Georgia Forestry Commission is another great resource for those considering a tree ordinance. Their site includes a tree ordinance development guidebook, a sample ordinance, and a map and listing of communities in Georgia who have implemented a tree ordinance.

<http://www.gfc.state.ga.us/CommunityForests/TreeOrdinances.cfm>

In addition, the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has a model ordinance by which communities can review for purposes of requiring preservation for a significant portion of trees on a new development site, particularly for the larger, more mature specimens.

http://www.dca.state.ga.us/intra_nonpub/Toolkit/ModelOrdinances/AltZ/3_4.pdf

It is important to note that while these sample ordinances are great resources, they may not identify the specific issues your city or county face. The creation and subsequent implementation of such an ordinance requires careful consideration of the particular desires of your community.

Seven Good Reasons to support your local Tree Protection Ordinance

- Protect existing trees and older "specimen" trees, not just require replanting to "replace" trees cut down.
- Focus on planning for tree save areas at the earliest stages of the development process, not as an unfeasible afterthought. A tree plan should be submitted at the same time as the development plat.
- Require planting shade trees in parking lots and along streets where appropriate. Parking lots contribute greatly to the "heat island effect" and should be planted with shade trees to offset this problem. Street trees are also important, but large overstory trees, such as oaks and maples, should not be planted directly under power lines where they will not be allowed to achieve their shade or aesthetic potential.
- Protect trees from unnecessary damage during construction.
- Require sufficient amounts of replanting when trees must be cut down.
- Require that trees along public streets are pruned in a healthy and aesthetic manner.
- Have the goal of no net loss of trees over time in the area.

Source: Trees Atlanta. <http://www.treesatlanta.org>

We want to hear from you! Please send us your thoughts, experiences and advice on being a Planning Official. E-mail or fax your submissions to Robbie Hayes at rhayes@atlantaregional.com or 404.463.3105