



Urban and Community Forestry Society Annual Conference Program

Monday & Tuesday, November 16-17, 2026 | Union Station Hotel, St. Louis, Missouri

[Register for the UCFS Annual Conference!](#)

Monday, November 16

1:00-4:00pm – Pre-Conference Tour – St. Louis Through the Trees

Meeting Location: To be announced

Pre-registration required. Fee of \$55 for UCFS Members, \$60 for non-members

Before conference sessions begin, join fellow urban and community forestry professionals for a guided tour of St. Louis that explores how trees, parks, and green infrastructure are helping shape a more resilient and equitable city. From the transformative Brickline Greenway and the iconic landscapes of Forest Park to neighborhoods recovering from tornado damage and addressing the lasting impacts of historic redlining, this tour highlights the power of community partnerships, innovative urban forestry practices, and strategic investment. Along the way, participants will see and discuss topics such as green infrastructure, Silva Cells, structural soils, urban forest restoration, disaster recovery, public-private partnerships, native landscape management, and place-based community engagement. More than a sightseeing experience, this tour offers a unique opportunity to learn from real-world projects, exchange ideas with peers, and leave inspired with practical insights for strengthening urban forests in your own community.

5:00-6:00pm – UCFS Fun Run, Walk, or Watch

Location: Meet in the hotel lobby

Additional \$35 registration fee

Help raise money for the UCFS Urban Forest Foundation plus have fun and get some fresh air! The annual UCFS Fun Run/Walk (approximately 2 miles/3.2 km for the Run and 1 mile/1.6 km for the Walk) will be held on Monday, November 16 from 5:00-6:00pm—and anyone is welcome to come hang out and watch. Proceeds will go to the UCFS Urban Forest Foundation, which supports scholarships for urban foresters, like attending the Municipal Forestry Institute (MFI). Registered participants also receive a T-shirt!

Tuesday, November 17

NOTE: This agenda is still being finalized. Exact timing of talks and various details may change.

7:00am-4:00pm – **Registration**

7:00-8:00am – **Breakfast with the Exhibitors**

Location: Midway West

7:00-8:00am - **First-time attendees Breakfast with UCFS Members and Friends**

Location: To be announced

Morning General Session

Location: Grand Ballroom A-C

8:00-8:15am– **Welcome**

David Lefcourt, City Arborist/Tree Warden, City of Cambridge, MA, and UCFS Board of Directors President

Leslie Berckes, Executive Director, Urban and Community Forestry Society

8:15-9:15am – **50 Years of Baseline and Trends in Urban Forestry Management**

Rich Hauer, Director of Urban Forestry Eocene Environmental Group

How has urban forestry changed over the past 50 years—and what does that mean for the future of our communities? This session will provide a look at the evolution of urban forest management in the United States, anchored by insights from the new 2025 Municipal Forestry, Tree Activities, and Management Census. Drawing on data from more than 1,700 communities, we'll explore how urban forestry programs, budgets, policies, staffing, contracting, volunteer engagement, and tree care practices have transformed since 1974. This presentation offers a rare long-term perspective on where urban forestry has been, where it stands today, and where it's headed next.

This session will be followed by time for discussion.

9:15-10:00am – **Navigating Politics in Urban Forestry**

Phil Bennett, Deputy Director of Public Works, City of Snoqualmie, WA
Lance Davisson, Owner and Principal Consultant, The Keystone Concept
Jennifer Willis, City Manager, City of Longview, WA

Politics can make or break urban forestry and natural resource initiatives, yet many professionals feel unprepared to navigate the political landscape. This engaging session brings together leaders from local government, urban forestry, and the nonprofit sector to share real-world lessons on building political support, advancing projects, and maintaining credibility in politically charged environments. The presenters will explore strategies for aligning programs with community and political priorities, working effectively within different forms of government, building lasting relationships with elected officials, and overcoming common challenges that can stall progress. Attendees will leave with practical tools and insights to help turn good ideas into successful, supported programs and projects.

10:00-10:30 – **Break**

10:30-11:30am – **Practice Under Pressure Forum**

"No" right now doesn't mean "never": How to increase buy-in to tree-planting programs

Chrstine Carmichael, Principal Consultant, Fair Forests Consulting

In many communities with low tree canopy, residents can be hesitant to embrace new tree planting efforts due to past negative experiences. This session shares research-based strategies for building trust, increasing community support, and creating more equitable, community-centered urban forestry programs. Presenters will explore practical approaches for engaging residents, developing meaningful partnerships, addressing barriers to participation, and empowering communities to become active partners in restoring and sustaining urban tree canopy.

Co-Designing Green Cities: Community-Led Urban Reforestation and Climate Action

Sebastián Díaz Barbosa, Green Infrastructure Coordinator, La Maraña - Servicio Forestal Comunitario

Discover how a community-centered urban reforestation initiative in Caguas, Puerto Rico, is using trees, partnerships, and local leadership to address extreme heat and build climate resilience. This session highlights a collaborative effort among nonprofits, community organizations, and local government that is engaging residents in tree planting, community nurseries, environmental education, and neighborhood greening projects.

NYC Parks Neighborhood Tree Planting Program - A Shift in Strategy to Address Equity & Efficiency

Navé Strauss, Director of Street Tree Planting, New York City Parks

This session explores New York City’s groundbreaking shift from a request-based street tree planting model to a proactive, data-driven strategy that prioritizes heat-vulnerable neighborhoods and advances canopy equity across all five boroughs. Learn how NYC Parks is implementing a comprehensive 9-year planting cycle that improves efficiency, eliminates a backlog of 42,000+ tree requests, and delivers more predictable, neighborhood-scale urban forestry services.

11:30am-1:00pm – **Lunch and Awards Ceremony**

Location: Midway West

Canopy Conversations

Locations: TBD

1:00-2:50pm

UCFS Member and Friends are a wealth of knowledge. During these Canopy Conversations, participants will be able to pick from a variety of topics that they most want to learn about and discuss with fellow participants. Each topic area will be led by an expert in the field who will briefly present on the issue. Then, it’s time to learn from one another! A moderator will lead the group in discussion. Share what has worked—and not worked—in your experience.

Each Canopy Conversation will be 30 minutes long with 10 minutes for wrap-up and transition. Participants will have the opportunity to **choose three topics** in this time frame.

Topics are being finalized. You can expect to hear more about:

Potential Topics
Tree Ordinances and Code
Urban Wood
PROWAG and ADA
Maximizing Tree Planting Space
Tree Stewardship Engagement
Quality Nursery Stock
Partnership development
Tree Risk Assessment and Management
Tree Inventories

2:50-3:20pm – **Break**

3:20-4:30pm – **Plans That Work: Lessons from Nearly 50 Years of Collective Experience Developing Urban Forest Plans**

Ryan Allen, Group Lead – Urban Forestry, Dudek
Rachel Comte, Co-Founder, Urban Canopy Works
Ian Hanou, Founder and Chief Innovation Officer, PlanIT Geo
Chris Peiffer, Director of Urban Forestry Strategy, PlanIT Geo

Developing an Urban Forest Management Plan is only the beginning—turning that plan into action is where the real challenges often emerge. In this candid panel discussion, experienced urban forestry consultants from three different companies will share practical lessons from helping communities navigate the full planning process to stakeholder engagement, canopy assessments, budgeting, policy development, and council adoption. Through real-world case studies, attendees will learn strategies for building public and political support, making the case for investment, navigating stakeholder conflicts, and overcoming the unexpected obstacles that can cause plans to stall, offering valuable insights for anyone involved in urban forest planning and management.

4:30-4:45pm – **Closing**

David Lefcourt, City Arborist/Tree Warden, City of Cambridge, MA, and UCFS Board of Directors President

5:00-6:00pm – **Annual UCFS Member Meeting**

Location: Ballroom A-C

David Lefcourt, City Arborist/Tree Warden, City of Cambridge, MA, and UCFS Board of Directors President

Urban and Community Forestry Society Members are invited to the annual member meeting. Hear from Society leadership on the status of the organization, new initiatives, and the long-term strategic direction of UCFS. Members will have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss issues that are of importance to them

6:00-7:30pm – Post-Annual Meeting Get-together

Location: Midway West

It's time to mix and mingle with your tree people! Join us for a time to network and connect with your colleagues from across the United States and beyond.

During our networking reception, we'll extend the conversations from the day's sessions, have opportunities for Municipal Forestry Institute (MFI) alumni to gather, play the popular Heads or Tails game to raise money for UCFS's Urban Forest Foundation, and more!

7:00-8:00pm – UCFS Affinity Group, LGBTree Social

Location: TBD

Join a meet-up and social for LGBTQIA+ urban forestry professionals!