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: Midway West
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!

Note: MFI Reunion will be held in conjunction with the full UCFS reception on Tuesday, Nov. 17.

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: Pegram Room

Morning General Session

Location: Regency Ballroom 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

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

Rich Hauer, Director of Urban Forestry Eocene Environmental Group
Jamie King, Director of Coaching and Consulting, Field Delivery, American Forests, and UCFS Board of Directors President

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
Evangeline Costa, Chief Strategist, 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 in Caguas, Puerto Rico
Sebastián Díaz Barbosa, Green Infrastructure Coordinator, La Maraña - Servicio Forestal Comunitario
Erid Román Rosario, 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 Tree Planting, New York City Parks
Jessica Einhorn, Chief of Forestry Programs, New York City Parks and Recreation

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

Location: Regency Ballroom A, B, and C
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.

Canopy Conversation Topics

Topic	Conversation Leader
Tree Ordinances and Code	**Drue Epping, Facet**
This facilitated conversation examines different formats and structures for tree codes. Many tree codes are well-intentioned but end up creating friction, inequities, or compliance challenges because they are not tailored to city capacity, local context, or funding realities. Together, you'll share how data and community priorities can shape tree ordinances and discuss how different municipal tree code frameworks perform once adopted and enforced.	
Urban Wood	**Thaddeus Driscoll, Colorado State Forest Service**
This canopy conversation is an opportunity to discuss the why and how of developing urban wood programs from both municipal and state forestry perspectives. Gain insights into leadership, advocacy, coalition building, and the evolving role of city foresters in advancing sustainable wood utilization programs to connect the "chain" of urban forestry into circular systems.	
Sidewalks, PROWAG, and ADA	**Stehpanie Helms, City of Baltimore, Maryland and Darya Barar, HortScience - Bartlett Consulting**
Join this conversation to discuss successful projects that, through thoughtful planning and collaboration, have achieved urban tree preservation in the right-of-way while complying with the anticipated new Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines.	
Maximizing Tree Planting Space	**Jenn Cairo, City of Portland, Oregon**
Space is the final frontier in urban areas, with nature and trees often seen as competing with built infrastructure and losing out. This conversation will begin with examples from Portland, Oregon and expand for all to share approaches to planting, tree care, policy, funding, and infrastructure conflict resolution that can be adapted in your own community.	

Long-Term Tree Stewardship	Asha-Lé Davis and Dana McNally, Pennsylvania Horticulture Society
Volunteer tree planting days are fun and rewarding! But, what happens after the final tree is planted? Join this conversation to discuss how to sustain long-term tree stewardship beyond the planting day. We'll look beyond tree distribution and planting and share how year-round engagement, operational support, and data-informed decision-making work together to build community capacity and grow equitable urban canopy.	
Quality Nursery Stock	**Sarah Low, Oregon State University, Jim Grob, Urban Tree Root Quality Alliance, and Jehane Samaha, U.S. Forest Service**
Join nursery professionals, urban foresters, researchers, and tree purchasers for an interactive discussion on improving urban tree root quality. This conversation will explore challenges throughout the tree production chain, the impacts of root defects on long-term tree performance, and opportunities for collaboration between growers and end users. Participants will share experiences and strategies related to specifications, inspections, contracting, and production practices that can help ensure healthier, more resilient urban trees.	
Partnership development	**Alex Acevedo and Sarah Balistreri, City Parks Foundation**
This discussion will explore strategies for building trust, increasing participation, and connecting urban forestry to broader community priorities such as public health, youth engagement, and neighborhood well-being. Through conversation and shared experiences, attendees will discuss successes, challenges, and practical approaches for creating more inclusive, community-centered urban forestry programs.	
Tree Risk Assessment and Management	**Ryan Suttle, HortScience – Bartlett Consulting and Steve Duffy, Presidio Trust**
How does a program move from tree risk assessment to strategic, defensible tree risk management? This conversation will focus on how communities can use data-driven information on likelihood of failure, tree condition, target characteristics, and tree size – within a GIS framework – to create repeatable prioritization across thousands of trees. Share ideas about how highest-risk conditions can be addressed first while maintaining operational efficiency.	
Tree Inventory Successes and Lessons	**Anna Heckman, City of Kirkland, Washington**
Join municipal representatives, consultants, and inventory field staff for an interactive discussion on tree inventory projects. Participants will share successes, challenges, and lessons learned throughout the process, from needs assessments and RFP development to contract management, implementation, and long-term staff engagement. Explore strategies for improving communication, aligning expectations, and creating inventory programs that deliver lasting value.	
AI, LiDAR, and Tree Inventories	**Philip Potyondy, Davey Resource Group and Paul Buck, City of Plymouth, Minnesota**
What does the future of tree data look like with artificial intelligence and LiDAR? Join this conversation to find out how cities and consulting companies are working together to navigate the changing landscape of tree inventories that will impact monitoring, risk assessments, and urban forestry decision making.	

2:50-3:20pm – **Break**

Panel Session

Location: Regency Ballroom C

3:20-4:30pm – **Panel**: **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
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

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5:00-6:00pm – **Annual UCFS Member Meeting**
Location: Regency Ballroom 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 – **Starlights and Champions Reception**
Location: *Midway West*

It's time to mix and mingle with your tree people! This year, we're turning up the volume! Our conference theme is Practice Under Pressure, and we're embracing the spirit of Under Pressure with a little David

Bowie-inspired glam and Queen-style arena energy. After all, the people who make up our urban forestry community are rock stars, and we're ready to celebrate you!

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