

Mobilizing Community Support and Advocacy for Urban Forestry  
Final project report and recommendations  
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## I .Introduction

It widely known that the urban tree canopy has many benefits for city residents, from ecosystem services to energy savings, public health and well documented social and economic benefits. Our research in Tampa confirms that residents recognize these benefits and more; they help give an identity to older, historic neighborhoods and they improve quality of life. Urban residents also recognize there are many costs with having trees, especially with a mature canopy and issues with landlords not maintaining trees properly. The benefits of the tree canopy have motivated a group of residents to partner with the Friends of the Trees, Tampa to look for solutions to the barriers of tree planting and maintenance. The desire for more trees and their suggestions for how and where they should be planted are a major finding of our social science research in Tampa. These findings have been used to make recommendations for a social marketing campaign that identifies target audiences, specific behavioral objectives and promotional initiatives that engage a public that already cares about trees. As a result of our research, we have begun to implement tree workshops and planning for a tree planting event later this year. Following the steps of community based social marketing, an evaluation plan is also in effect to measure what works in changing residential behavior and improving tree stewardship.

## II . Summary of activities

- Established partnership among four institutions and three Tampa neighborhood civic associations
- Designed research protocol and conducted three focus groups in the communities
- Transcribed and summarized data
- Conducted feedback sessions with community to analyze results
- Developed draft social marketing plan
- Grant writing and scheduling of neighborhood training programs
- Scheduling of large scale community planting to coincide with 2013 rainy season
- Design of evaluation measures at six months and one year after planting

## III. Background

The collaborative team from City of Tampa Planning and Development Department, UF/Hillsborough County Cooperative Extension, Center for Landscape Conservation and Ecology/ UF and the USF Florida Center for Community Design and Research began meeting in March of 2012 and started inviting neighborhoods to participate in a Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM) initiative called Friends of the Trees, Tampa.

The neighborhoods that chose to work with us are very diverse, with a mixture of long time homeowners and younger, more recent residents that are buying properties to fix up to live in

and lease or sell. Both of these groups are very well vested in their community and they come together in the civic associations because they are friends and they share common issues. These neighborhoods are on an upswing, primarily because of the efforts of the residents; property values are increasing, crime rates are declining, and services such as parks and landscaping are getting improvements. These communities continue to face serious issues such as abandoned homes and vacant lots and problems with landlords that are not interested in making investments to improve their properties. One feature that defines them all is a rich and highly valued tree canopy. It is cited as a feature of each neighborhood's identity.

The goal of the CBSM project was to determine the most appropriate behavioral objectives for a tree stewardship campaign targeted at these urban neighborhoods. Once potential behaviors are listed, we were able to fully develop the behavior change campaign outlined in this report. Members in the leadership of the civic associations and engaged core of members were enthusiastic about the opportunities to improving trees in their neighborhoods and they came out to our meetings. More than 50 residents of Tampa were contacted through our meetings.

This effort will partner with urban residents that have indicated they value their trees for the environment, improving property values and quality of life. What they indicated they needed was better training on tree selection and maintenance as well as a community wide effort that would divide up the work. By building relationships with the group of early adopters, Friends of the Trees, Tampa, will raise awareness of trees as a valuable amenity in urban areas, increase skills for tree selection and maintenance, and use the pride of neighborhood trees to develop a tree stewardship ethic among urban residents.

#### IV. Research findings:

Residents across all three neighborhoods share a high level of appreciation of trees. The three most common positive comments:

- Trees provide a certain “feel” to the neighborhoods- an aesthetic appeal, a beautiful atmosphere.
- Trees serve as an important part of the neighborhood identity.
- Shade and canopy are important in providing a more livable environment.

When asked about how city tree programs should work, participants indicated they would like more input and flexibility for planting trees. In particular, they mentioned clustering trees in particular areas of the neighborhood such as thoroughfares, feeder streets, along the interstate as a buffer to noise & pollution, on the entrances and exits to the neighborhoods and along the underpasses.

Residents have expressed interest in doing tree planting and maintenance activities as a group. Some possible ideas:

- Do a neighborhood street inventory to identify where trees should go

- Monitor trees during neighborhood events such as clean-ups
- Have occasional neighborhood prune and trim days where everyone participates and the city may haul away the debris
- Establish block captains who are responsible for monitoring trees in certain areas

There was a lot of interest by participants in using native species of trees. There were also suggestions that we should evaluate how tree plantings on public land in Tampa have been cared for in the past. All of the focus groups voiced dissatisfaction with the utility company and with street crews that improperly trim trees in the city. Participants pointed out that the success of the urban forest is dependent on the culture of the city and whether nature is valued. Money and resources must be invested in order to ensure the health of the urban forest. For example, some cities have a separate department that is dedicated to tree planting, maintenance, and watering. At the very least, residents would like to see coordination between the Community Tree Program and city projects that might threaten (or facilitate) new plantings, such as sidewalk projects, road widening, etc. Other issues that were raised included the use of private property for tree planting and planting in vacant lots and FDOT land. The participants saw the city water trucks as a way to overcome the barrier of watering new trees every day but this misses the point of community responsibility and stewardship. The matrix of identified barriers and possible solutions can be found in Appendix 2.

#### V. Literature review and website benchmarking

The literature on urban forestry projects stresses that stewardship programs increase the long-term survival rate of urban trees and maintains program success. Stewardship can be fostered by education and empowerment of individuals/communities to properly care for trees. Whenever possible, updated contact information for participants should be maintained to ensure that trees have designated stewards for follow up. Incentives are also helpful, whether it is direct pay or contractual agreements with participants. Private ownership (instead of the city maintaining ownership) encourages stewardship. Use of pledges, such as signing cards to care for trees also results in better tree care. Finally, there has to be follow up by municipal agencies or utilities to maintain the program over the long term.

We found two kinds of urban tree planting initiatives: Those where citizens contact the city and get free trees and those that are more community organizations that disseminate tree stewardship. The latter is the kind we are trying to develop in Tampa. The former type of project can be found in the cities of San Antonio, Boulder, Raleigh, Philadelphia, Chicago and Maryland.

The tree stewardship programs are those like:

- Friends of the Urban Forest in San Francisco
- Friends of Trees (“Crewleader” program) in Portland, Vancouver, and Eugene
- Tree People in Los Angeles
- Casey Trees (Washington, DC) which is a citizen forester training.
- Treevitalize in Pennsylvania (tree tender classes)
- Leaf in Ontario (urban forest stewards)

## VI. Recommendation for a social marketing plan

Our proposed social marketing plan follows the outline of steps used by most practitioners. By engaging partners early, the project will define major issues with the help of neighborhood residents themselves. This improves recruitment of research participants, helps us avoid pitfalls and increases dissemination using local communication networks.

1. Engage **partners** to help understand the audience and respond to their issues
2. Identify **policies** that may influence behavioral outcomes
3. Select the **target audience** you want to influence
4. Specify the **behavior** you want the audience to adopt
5. Offer **benefits** that the target audience really wants
6. Recognize and reduce the **barriers** to adopting the behavior
7. Make the behavior **easy** and **convenient**
8. Use best practices for **promoting** the behavior

The Friends of the Trees Tampa has relied on its partnerships to conduct formative research on different audience segments of the city. This comes at a critical time as the City of Tampa is revising development codes to foster better care and planning for urban forest canopy. The target audiences will consist of those homeowners that are concerned for property values and the character of their streets. The behavior we are promoting has several steps: attending the workshops offered by Extension, planting several trees in the right of way near their property and watering the trees until they survive their first year. We know that residents value the sense of community in their neighborhoods and their efforts to make their homes better are normative.

## VII. Next Steps

Working with Uppercase Inc., a graphic design and social marketing studio in Tampa, we have created a Facebook page for Friends of the Trees, Tampa. Once residents “like” our page, we will have a two-way communication tool to help us continue to formulate, evaluate and adjust the campaign tactics as we work with the neighborhoods. Traditional social marketing communication tools such as meetings, flyers, events and even door-to-door efforts are useful strategies to encourage program participation and behavior change; but using a social network site like Facebook allows us to communicate with our entire audience collaboratively and more frequently. We can ask for their continued participation and solicit feedback from them on an ongoing basis. Utilizing this already highly used social communication site can help us stay tapped in to our audience and stay flexible to their educational and behavior-changing needs. The program’s Facebook page is located at [www.Facebook.com/FriendsOfTheTreesTampa](http://www.Facebook.com/FriendsOfTheTreesTampa) and currently has information on tree steward training classes, trees available through the City of Tampa’s tree initiative and pages to directly contact us with tree-related questions and concerns.

The project team has already begun seeking funds for a tree campaign in the spring of 2013. Rob Northrop has created a tree stewardship training program ((see appendix) and it will be offered this spring to the neighborhoods that participated in the study. We expect the planting to take place in June with an evaluation and follow up after six months.

Appendix 1.

## Neighborhood Tree Steward Program Hillsborough County, Florida

Practical Educational Programs for Neighborhoods  
Concerning the Care of Trees

Classes available may include any combination of the following:

1. Planting site assessment
2. Tree selection
3. Tree planting
4. Tree establishment
5. Pruning young trees
6. Pruning mature trees
7. Preventing damage to sidewalks, curbs and driveways
8. Tree ordinances
9. Identifying opportunities for financial and technical assistance for neighborhood-wide tree programs

For more information, or to set up a preliminary meeting, contact:

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The Neighborhood Tree Steward Program is a partnership between the University of Florida IFAS and Hillsborough County Extension.



## Appendix 2. Literature reviewed:

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### Appendix 3. Community Opinions About Barriers and Solutions

**Commonly identified issues:**

**Proposed solutions:**

<p><b>Right-of-way has limitations:</b></p> <p>The space may be nonexistent or too small to plant a tree.</p> <p>Trees planted in the right of way might eventually conflict with infrastructure like sidewalks, water pipes, power lines.</p> <p>Right of way may be harder to reach with hoses or irrigation may interfere with pedestrians. Carrying buckets may be difficult for those with physical limitations.</p>	<p>Allow planting on private property, vacant lots</p> <p>Plant trees into sidewalks</p> <p>Plant appropriate trees in the appropriate spaces</p> <p>Plant trees along the side of the street without power lines</p> <p>Use water bags</p> <p>Ask youth to help those with limitations</p> <p>Find out if the city can offer water truck services</p>
<p><b>Trees require a great amount of care during the first couple of years to get established</b></p> <p>Trees need to be watered regularly, which requires considerable investment of time, energy, and may increase water bill significantly</p>	<p>Plant trees that require less water, use mulch</p> <p>Plant trees at the beginning of the rainy season</p> <p>Use water bags</p> <p>Create a program where residents get a fixed amount or percentage credit off of their monthly water bill if they are caring for trees in the right of way.</p> <p>Utilize youth groups to help with watering</p> <p>Find out if the city can offer water truck</p> <p>Resources for rainwater capture, such as extension rainbarrel program</p>
<p><b>Trees require ongoing maintenance/trimming for decades</b></p> <p>Trimming and maintenance services can be expensive</p> <p>Some residents fail to maintain trees, and these trees may pose a danger to others</p>	<p>Choose appropriate trees to reduce maintenance requirements</p> <p>Use preventative maintenance to reduce storm damage, get multiple estimates, ask your neighbors for referrals to find reliable, affordable professionals</p> <p>Neighbors help those who are unable to do simple maintenance (possible neighborhood events for pruning and maintenance in which city carries away debris)</p> <p>Establish a fund to take care of grand trees in the neighborhood, fines for those who do not maintain trees that pose a danger to others</p>

<p><b>Trees require specialized knowledge</b></p> <p>Residents may not know how to properly care for specific trees</p>	<p>Utilize Tampa’s urban forestry expertise</p> <p>Use information/workshops available through university extension offices</p> <p>Attend Master Gardener workshop</p> <p>Native Plant Society</p> <p>Locate books/info in print and online</p> <p>Ask neighbors who have knowledge about trees</p> <p>Participate in a tree stewardship class</p> <p>Schedule workshops with local professionals for neighborhood groups</p>
<p><b>Community Tree Program improvements</b></p> <p>Residents unaware of what species are available</p> <p>Planting sites not always properly vetted</p> <p>Tree recipients received differing levels of information about caring for trees</p> <p>Need to create a sense of ownership so that trees are maintained</p> <p>Need to make the Community Tree Program more attractive and visible</p> <p>Need to get more neighbors involved</p>	<p>Completion and distribution of a comprehensive list of appropriate species (already underway)</p> <p>Make sure that the planters know what they are doing</p> <p>Soil testing to ensure that conditions are favorable for a tree to survive</p> <p>Need follow-up visits or phone calls to ensure residents have enough knowledge to care for trees</p> <p>Need for more or better connection to available resources such as guidelines for choosing trees from Community Tree Program or personnel at the extension service.</p> <p>Plaques, pavers, or some other identification so that people can be directly associated with the tree, either the planter or as a memorial for someone else.</p> <p>Create an online community with information, pictures and updates related to trees that have been planted</p> <p>Create events, possibly work with artists to advocate the program and plantings</p> <p>Get groups like the Junior Civic Association, the Community Garden club involved.</p> <p>Go door to door, hand out flyers, mail postcards</p>