

DRAFT

2015 Aurora University Arboricultural Plan

Purpose

The purpose of the Aurora University Arboricultural Care Plan is to identify best practices for the sustainability of the campus tree canopy. This plan, while not an official document, will guide the administration and maintenance departments in protecting, maintaining, and removing trees on the Aurora campus. Aurora University is a 37-acre campus located in an urban environment with a well established neighborhood tree canopy. The university plan is to align with the city of Aurora's *Arboricultural Specifications and Standards of Practice*. Aurora University works to maintain a safe, attractive and sustainable campus tree canopy for the beauty of its campus and provide an aesthetic learning, living and working environment. .

This plan is being established to meet the criteria for designation as a Tree Campus USA through the Arbor Day Foundation. It is the intent of Aurora University to utilize the plan for the advancement of grounds maintenance.

Responsible Department

The department of Administration with the oversight of the division for Physical Properties under the direction of the Vice President for Administration is the responsible department.

Campus Tree Advisory Committee

Aurora University's task force on sustainability along with the Green Campus Committee of the Aurora University Student Association (AUSA) is the committee formed as the AU Campus Tree Advisory Committee. The task force meets at the request of the university president and AUSA meets monthly. The basic tenets of sustainability are within the university's strategic plan. The sustainability task force is made up of a diverse group of administrators, faculty and staff.

Campus Tree Care Policies

The Grounds Manager, under the direction of the Senior Director of Physical Properties, has the responsibility for the arboricultural care of the Aurora University campus tree canopy. Aurora University is located entirely within the boundaries of the city of Aurora and Chapter 47 of the Aurora Municipal Code which includes, *Arboricultural Specifications and Standards of Practice*, is the guide for tree management on the campus of Aurora University. The ordinance includes definitions, enforcement, penalties, and prohibited policies.

Reference to the Chapter 47 Code of Ordinances for the city of Aurora can be found at:

www.cityofaurora-il.org

Municipal Code Library: http://library3.municode.com/default-mow/home.htm?infobase=10143&doc_action=whatsnew

Pruning

We prune trees to develop and nurture their future growth. Aurora University hires a professional firm with an arborist to determine what kind of pruning is necessary to maintain or improve the health, appearance and safety of our tree canopy. We prune trees through two techniques which are for hazard reduction and maintenance.

Hazard Reduction Pruning

Hazard reduction pruning is recommended when the primary objective is to reduce the danger to a specific target caused by visibly defined hazards in a tree. For example, HRP may be the primary objective if a tree had many dead limbs over a walkway or student path.

Maintenance Pruning

Maintenance pruning is recommended when the primary objective is to maintain or improve tree health and structure, and includes hazard reduction pruning.

- Remove or prune laterals that interfere with buildings, roofs, windows, or obstruct streets or sidewalks.
- Remove deadwood
- Remove diseased or weak limbs that could pose a hazard in the future.
- Perform weight reduction by selective removal of branches as needed to create a better structure that lessens wind and storm damage.
- Repair storm damage
- Thinning or removal of unnecessary branches to better develop the tree growth
- Improving the shape when necessary

Hazard Reduction Pruning and Maintenance Pruning in the Aurora University right of way easements that are adjacent to the city streets are completed twice per year in cooperation with the forester from the city of Aurora. The forester is a member of the tree advisory committee.

Removals

Although tree removal is a last resort, there are circumstances when it is necessary. Aurora University hires a professional firm and in consultation with the arborist can help decide whether or not a tree should be removed. Removal is recommended when:

- The tree is dead or dying.
- The tree is considered irreparably hazardous.
- The tree is causing an obstruction that is impossible to correct through pruning.
- The tree is crowding and causing harm to other trees.
- The tree is to be replaced by a more suitable specimen.
- The tree should be removed to allow for new construction.

Hazardous Tree Evaluation – Risk Mitigation

- When Aurora University deals with hazardous tree situation, we involve an arborist. Even the most beautiful trees can sometimes present unexpected dangers. Our intent is to save trees and reduce removals through a pro-active maintenance program.
- Our hazardous tree evaluation takes into consideration the three aspects which are: a defect, the potential for failure, and a target.
- Defects- When determining the hazard potential of a tree, we look for visible defects. However, it is very important to understand that even if when we don't see a defect, the tree may still be hazardous. A limb that has broken and is hanging on top of other limbs is a defect. This "hanger" could break the limbs below it or slip off the limbs at anytime. Observing the condition of the leaves (color and abundance) will sometimes give us an indication of the tree's health.
- Potential for Failure - This is perhaps the most difficult aspect to determine. Failure may result from a variety of circumstances including decay, excessive branch end weight, storm damage, root system failure, unnatural lean, cracks, excessive water drainage, and a hollow trunk or tree cavity. Decay is most easily identified by the presence of fungi (mushrooms, conks) that live in decayed matter. Weakened trees will also harbor insect populations, and be more prone to diseases.
- Target - The target is relatively easy to determine. If there is nothing in the vicinity of the tree that can be damaged, the tree is not a hazard. If there are people or other valuable objects frequently in the vicinity of the tree, the tree should be considered a hazard tree.

Fertilization

An integral part of the plant health care program at Aurora University is the proper nutrition of plants which includes trees and shrubs. Plants with good vigor are better able to withstand the numerous detrimental effects of weather, insect activity, disease activity and changes in their immediate growing environment.

The professional grade fertilizer products we use in our fertilization program contain two forms of nitrogen, micro-nutrients and minerals. The program is managed by the grounds manager and is applied through a third party vendor. Our application goals are to provide immediate benefit and remain in the soil for 8-12 months.

The following criteria are used for determination of fertilization of trees and shrubs:

- Trees or shrubs before/after construction activity.
- Trees or shrubs that you feel are valuable to your property.
- Trees or shrubs that have been planted in the last few years.
- Trees or shrubs that have lost their vigor or are in poor health.

Protection and Preservation

Protection and preservation of the Aurora University tree canopy is fulfilled through the strict adherence to standards of federal, state and local codes. This section includes the policy governing tree damage assessment, prohibited practices, and definitions.

All landscaping plans include the local Aurora Zoning Ordinance section 5.4 “landscaping” in addition to Chapter 47 of the Aurora Municipal Code of Ordinances as referenced in the campus tree policy section.

All construction projects are engineered to include the earthwork general notes which include the scope of work for the protection and preservation of all landscape including trees with silt runoff, trenching, compaction and tree fencing.

All codes for landscaping and trees are referenced in the Aurora University Master Plan adopted in April 2009 between the city of Aurora and the Aurora University.

Goals and Targets

In accordance with Aurora University’s overall vision and mission, which is to improve the learning, living and working environments on our campus and the surrounding community, the campus tree plan will lead to an annual service learning project. The project will involve collaboration between academics, maintenance and the student organization for advancement of our campus landscape.

As presented in our inaugural year for Tree Campus, USA designation, a group of students completed a tree inventory on the campus. A future goal will be to GIS map the tree inventory by specie and to develop a more comprehensive and quantitative benchmark of the overall tree canopy at Aurora University. The service project should be a continuation of learning and research to promote and support the Aurora University mission.

Communication Strategy

The formal process for communication of initiatives and achievements is directed by the President of Aurora University to the Vice President for Communication. Communication can include announcements through the campus e-mail, press releases to local media outlets, communication through the university virtual newspaper *Campus Links*, and postings on the university webpage.