

TheMiddletownPress

Forum: How trees make Middletown the Forest City

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MIDDLETOWN — This year, after the devastating ash tree blight, we have the opportunity to replenish our streets and reestablish the canopies that protect us. Trees make an enormous contribution to our lives, often without our realizing how.

They shade us, process the air, increase property values and draw us out to explore our city. They can reconnect us to the place we love.

Trees cool and protect us

Street trees shade the people walking on the sidewalk. Walking in the shade versus walking in the sun can easily make a perceived difference of 20 degrees due to solar radiation on your skin.

Trees reduce sidewalk and roadbed temperature. Sidewalks store a lot of heat due to their mass and then radiate that heat to everything around them, including people walking. Properly placed trees can shade the sidewalk 20 to 45 degrees F, according to Lance Hosey. Trees' shading effect can be compounded by their evapotranspiration ability, the water they give off through evaporation of their leaves. Evapotranspiration can reduce temperatures around the trees by 2 to 9 percent.

Properly placing street trees — between sidewalk and travel lanes — physically protects people walking on the sidewalk. Trees next to the street also encourage drivers to slow down due to visually narrowing the street width. Street trees have been shown to be as effective against speeding as cameras, according to The Telegraph.

It's critical to reduce atmospheric carbon through any means possible and trees will do that work for us. No high-tech, expensive solutions are needed. Trees take in carbon and release oxygen, and they sequester carbon within the tree as the tree grows.

Forests can contribute greatly, but creating an abundance of trees on city streets can accomplish far more than most people realize. New Haven's street trees alone store an estimated 80,000 tons of carbon annually.

Trees build wealth, attract us to streets

Street trees are good for business. Street trees leading to a neighborhood center draw customers in to businesses from surrounding neighborhoods by elevating Walk Appeal.

Engineer Jeff Tumlin says street trees are a critical economic development and sustainability investment. And they're good for the economy of a neighborhood in general. Street trees raise the value of the real estate around them, if properly selected. On a tree-lined street, the value of every house is raised by \$22,000.

On the lot the tree is located, its value is raised \$7,000. Real estate agents assign 10 to 23 percent of lot value to its trees.

Trees can save billions in stormwater infrastructure across the city: Each tree absorbs the first inch of storm water. One hundred mature trees catch about 139,000 gallons of rainwater per year.

Trees, along with rain gardens and gravel wells and other upstream techniques, can reduce the rainwater that floods low-lying areas, rather than having to completely manage the storm water within the area at risk.

Street trees reduce crime. Why this is so is no mystery. As urbanist Jane Jacobs said 60 years ago, more street trees equal stronger walk appeal, which equals more people walking, more eyes on the street and less crime.

Increasing street tree plantings by 10 percent can reduce crime by 12 percent, according to a study from Baltimore. And when more people are walking, there are fewer car trips, less pollution and less need for parking.

Trees tie us to places we live, love

Most people consider trees beautiful. Street trees are the only things we contribute to a street that get bigger and more beautiful over time, all on their own. But beauty isn't the only way they appeal to our senses. "Street trees help you know when you are because of how they behave across the seasons," says urbanist Victor Dover.

Because street trees are beautiful, they are good indicators of the most-loved parts of town, increasing not only the real estate value, but also the stature of the neighborhood.

Almost without exception, places with lots of street trees are the most-loved neighborhoods in town. No sign of a vibrant, lovable place can be seen from further down the street than a line of street trees. Recovery of a seriously disinvested place should begin early on with a street tree program, because trees change the perception of the place from a place where nothing is possible to a place that may see more affection.

Trees achieve more grandeur over time and give a sense that the area will endure. They are a promise of decades and sometimes, even centuries, of the city's commitment to a place.

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