

## Reforest Urban America

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By Adam R. Moore

Elm City. Forest City. Park City. So named are the cities of New Haven, Middletown and Bridgeport. Our nation's capital is even known as the "City of Trees." Yet despite these monikers, the tree cover of cities across the United States is in decline.

Anyone with an interest can view the changes in Connecticut tree cover at the University of Connecticut's Center for Land Use Education and Research website (<http://clear.uconn.edu>). Between 1985 and 2002, the cover of deciduous forest, coniferous forest and forested wetland in the Elm City, the Forest City and the Park City all declined, as did forest cover statewide. The Courant noted this national trend last month and called on Hartford to plant more trees and increase the canopy cover.

This call comes at the right time. At a recent meeting of the Connecticut Urban Forest Council, John Parry of the U.S. Forest Service asked: What more can the Forest Service do to help urban forests in Connecticut?

On my bookshelf rests an old, paper-bound picture book of New Haven. The images are from the turn of the 20th century, before the onslaught of Dutch Elm disease. The black and white plates portray a city of jaw-dropping beauty. Pairs of elms, one after another, arch gracefully over shaded avenues below. One can sense the civic pride that must have beat in the heart of every resident, and the memories that must have stirred in the minds of every visitor.

Such beauty was not limited to New Haven. A planner from Middletown walked into my office this week and remarked on that city's nickname of "Forest City," and noted how visitors used to leave town, jaws agape, while praising Middletown's sylvan beauty.

Nor was sylvan splendor confined to our cities; our small towns were similarly endowed. While the sugar maple-lined Main Street of Durham is handsome today (within the historic district), it is no match for the Main Street of a century ago, as depicted in the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust's book "Long Ago, Not Far Away."

One rode in a carriage, or strolled on the sidewalk, or even rode in an early motorcar, through a veritable tunnel of trees.

We've lost that. Travel Washington Street in Middletown, between the railroad overpass and Route 157. See bleak stretches of asphalt and concrete, whose only trees are telephone poles, shorn of branches and strung with wires. Where trees do grow, many are diminutive species that will never achieve a state of grandeur, and the tall ones are lopsided from power line pruning. And a garish bouquet of signs, all manner of signs, substitutes for vernal blossoms and autumnal foliage.

We've lost it, but just as the forests of our countryside grew back with remarkable success, so can the forests of our communities. The eastern half of this nation - where its old, industrial cities are located - is naturally a forest. If given a chance, trees will grow.

I call upon the Forest Service to exercise its power and plant trees in American cities. Plant a white oak in Hartford, a sweet gum in Stamford, an elm in New Haven.

And I ask the Forest Service to not only plant trees, but also plan for trees. The Forest Service can meet with tree wardens, city foresters, transportation and public works professionals, planners, utility companies, chambers of commerce and citizen groups - and plan for a tree-lined city.

The benefits of a canopied community extend far beyond aesthetics. In fact, the title of the Connecticut Urban Forest Council's annual conference scheduled for Oct. 26 is "A Breath of Fresh Air," and the conference will focus on links between urban forests and public health.

If we reforest our cities and our communities, we will not see the results - but our descendants will. We can grant to them a growing arboreal endowment, or we can continue our present course, and deplete what endowment we have left. I choose the former. I thank the Forest Service for asking what it can do. What can it do? The Forest Service can reforest urban America.

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