



**Staff Report**

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**TO:** Mayor and City Council  
**THROUGH:** Steve Powers, City Manager  
**FROM:** Peter Fernandez, PE, Public Works Director

**SUBJECT:**

Salem 2020 Annual Tree Report

Ward(s): All Wards  
Councilor(s): All Councilors  
Neighborhood(s): All Neighborhoods  
Result Area(s): Natural Environment Stewardship; Welcoming and Livable Community.

**ISSUE:**

Receive the Salem 2020 Annual Tree Report.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Information only.

**SUMMARY:**

The 2020 annual tree report (Attachment 1) provides a snapshot of City-owned trees for the 2020 calendar year. The report summarizes work done by the Public Works Department to inventory, assess, increase, and enhance Salem’s trees through its Urban Forestry section work, contractors, and volunteer efforts. In 2020, the City continued to meet Tree City USA (TCUSA) standards and maintain its TCUSA “Sterling City” status.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Public Works Department continued its urban forestry projects, utilizing staff, a street tree planting contract with Treecology, and its long-standing Friends of Trees contract. New tree plantings continued to focus on low tree canopy areas of the city. Through these efforts, 655 large trees and 2,120 small trees or shrubs were planted in 2020. In addition, nearly 15,000 street trees were inventoried, over 3,000 street trees were pruned, and 286 City-owned trees were removed. The 2020 Salem Tree Report provides details about these efforts, as well as the City’s outreach and community engagement activities.

## **FACTS AND FINDINGS:**

Contracted and City Tree Plantings. To increase trees on City-owned properties, including street rights-of-way, the Urban Forestry section of Public Works, under the guidance of the Urban Forester, continued its contracts with Friends of Trees and Treecology.

In 2020, Friends of Trees planted 182 large stock trees in parks and 2,120 small stock trees and shrubs in natural areas. Due to the pandemic, volunteer participation was severely reduced and Friends of Trees staff, tree stewards, and City staff did the majority of plantings. Plantings occurred at the following parks and neighborhoods: Wallace Marine Park (West Salem); Cascades Gateway Park (SEMCA); Geer Park (NESCA); McKay School Park (NOLA); and Fisher Road Park (Northgate).

Treecology planted 208 large stock trees in street rights-of-way. Streets where tree planting took place included Liberty Street SE, Clay Street NE, Pearl Street NE, Rickey Street NE, Winter Street NE, Campbell Drive SE, and Salem Parkway. Plantings occurred in six neighborhoods: SCAN, ELNA, NEN, SEMCA, Grant, and Northgate.

Urban Forestry section staff planted 265 new trees, pruned 3,372 trees, and removed 286 trees.

Following the recommendations of street tree inventory work, tree species diversity is being increased through these new tree plantings. A new draft "Recommended Street Tree List" has been developed in consultation with the Salem Parks and Recreation Advisory Board's Tree Committee. This list expands the variety of species suitable for Salem's streets based on ultimate size of the tree, planting strip width, and adjacent overhead or underground infrastructure.

Street Tree Inventory. In 2020, Urban Forestry staff began a more comprehensive street tree inventory. Building off the two previous statistical surveys, the 2020 inventory is a street by street analysis. Using iPhones and iPads, Urban Forestry staff assigned each tree a unique code and identified species, diameter at breast height, general condition, size, and specific location characteristics. Locations where trees were missing and could be planted were noted. Through this inventory, 2,500 new locations for future street trees have been identified. This information is uploaded into the City's Geographic Information System (GIS) and will help to better manage urban forestry work.

Tree City USA. Salem is a founding member of Tree City USA. As of 2020, Salem has been a member of the Arbor Day Foundation's Tree City USA for 44 consecutive years. Urban Forestry section spent over \$1.3 million in 2020 to plant, maintain, remove, and manage City trees. Salem continues to be recognized as a "Sterling City" by doing additional work toward enhancing the tree canopy and the urban forestry program, such as acquiring forested open space (Fisher Road Park addition), continuing tree inventory work, and supporting additional staff to become certified under the International Society of Arboriculture.

The City received a small Arbor Day "booster" grant from Oregon Community Trees. With this grant

we were able to produce 100 cotton tote bags with the City's TCUSA logo printed on it. Unfortunately, the Arbor Day event was cancelled in 2020; however, the tote bags will be provided at the next public tree planting event.

Education and Outreach. In 2020, Salem Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (SPRAB) formed an ad-hoc tree committee to assist in promoting Salem's tree canopy, implementing the Community Forestry Strategic Plan, and improving outreach to the public about the value and benefits of trees. A new educational brochure was developed by the City for dispersal at public events; however, owing to the pandemic the brochures await a future public event.

In 2020, the City also participated in commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima through the planting of a "Peace Tree" at Pringle Park. The persimmon tree was grown from a seed of a tree that survived the bombing. A commemorative plaque was installed and a new kiosk with an informational poster has been installed in the park. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic the planned planting ceremony was cancelled; however, the tree was planted and continues to thrive.

Salem Climate Action Plan. In 2020 Salem staff began work on a climate action plan. The effort seeks to meet the goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 50 percent by 2035 and becoming carbon neutral by 2050. Trees are one of the main ways to sequester and store carbon dioxide. A 2019 ecosystem services analysis of Salem's tree canopy estimates Salem's trees provide \$4 million in annual environmental and aesthetic benefits, and 847 million pounds of annual carbon storage. Trees will continue to be an important tool to reach our climate action plan goals.

February 2020 Ice Storm. On February 14 and 15, 2021, the region experienced a severe ice storm. In addition to the immediate damage to power and communications lines, there was significant and widespread damage to trees throughout Salem and the mid-Willamette Valley. The extent of the losses and the adverse, long-term impacts to Salem's urban trees and tree canopy are still being assessed and will not be known for some time.

## **BACKGROUND:**

In 2019 a new canopy goal of 28 percent by 2030 was set. The tree canopy coverage in 2019 was 24 percent. Work outlined in the *Community Forestry Strategic Plan* continues to be implemented (Attachment 2) and tree planting efforts continue to focus on low canopy areas of the City to work towards tree canopy equity across all portions of the city.

Despite the impacts of the unprecedented global pandemic on our community, Salem's Urban Forestry staff and contractors were able to accomplish increased tree plantings, street tree inventories, and tree maintenance work.

Since the end of the 2020 calendar year covered by this report, there have been significant changes in the health and coverage of our city's tree canopy due to the ice storm in February 2021. The full extent of damage to our City owned trees is not yet known; however, the 2021 Annual Tree Report will certainly reflect these changes.

Robert D. Chandler, PhD, PE  
Assistant Public Works Director

**Attachments:**

1. 2020 Summary of Public Works Tree Projects
2. Community Forestry Strategic Plan Implementation Summary