



Accountability - Dedication
Honesty - Integrity - Respect

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 21, 2026
TO: Tara Vasicek, City Administrator
FROM: Sydney Mroczek, Parks and Recreation Director
RE: Columbus Urban Forestry Management Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend approval of the Columbus Urban Forestry Management Plan, which utilizes the City's Tree Inventory to establish priorities for tree maintenance, removals, replacements, species diversity, and future canopy growth throughout the community.

DISCUSSION:

Approval of the Columbus Urban Forestry Management Plan will provide the City with a consistent, data-driven framework for future urban forestry decisions. The plan prioritizes the replacement of hazardous and declining trees while identifying opportunities to expand the community tree canopy throughout parks, golf courses, and other public spaces. As part of the Nebraska Inflation Reduction Act Community Forestry Grant, 137 trees will be strategically planted using a phased approach based on inventory data and site suitability.

Adoption of the plan demonstrates the City's commitment to responsible asset management, environmental sustainability, and maximizing the long-term benefits of grant funding.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None.

SIGNATURE:

Concurrence: Betsy Eckhardt, Director of General Services

By: Betsy Eckhardt

Signature: Sydney Mroczek, Park and Recreation Director

By: Sydney Mroczek

Approved: Tara Vasicek, City Administrator

By: Tara Vasicek



COLUMBUS URBAN FORESTRY

Management Plan

Inventory results and recommendation for
adoption

Sydney Mroczek & Betsy Eckhardt | July 2026

PARK BOARD + CITY COUNCIL



The plan turns inventory data into a management framework



A complete GPS-based inventory now supports safety, maintenance, planting and budgeting decisions.

3,766

Trees inventoried on city-owned properties and in parks

77+

Tree species represented across the inventory

100%

Coverage of parks and city-owned property

2026

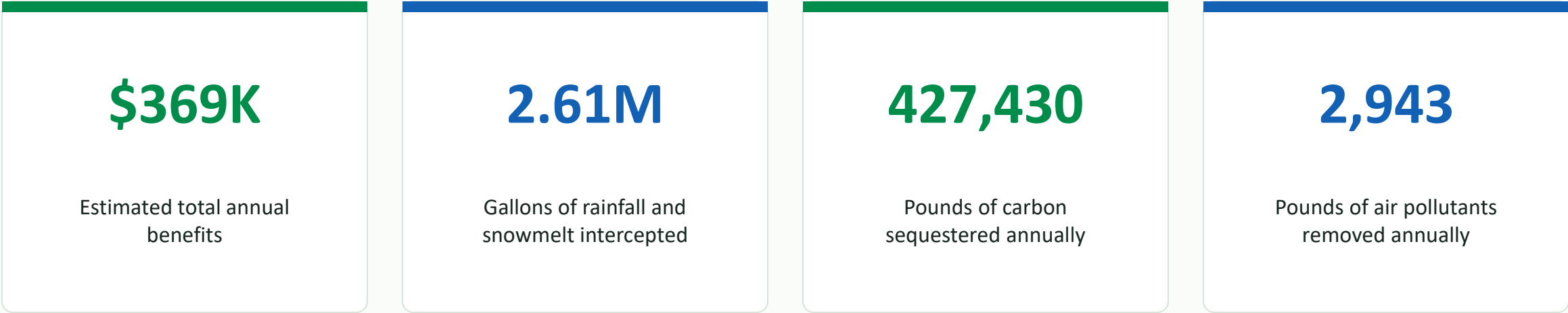
Baseline year for an updateable GIS inventory

A shared, defensible baseline for annual work planning

Columbus’s public trees return measurable value every year



Benefits vary by species, size, health and location; the average is approximately \$98 per tree.

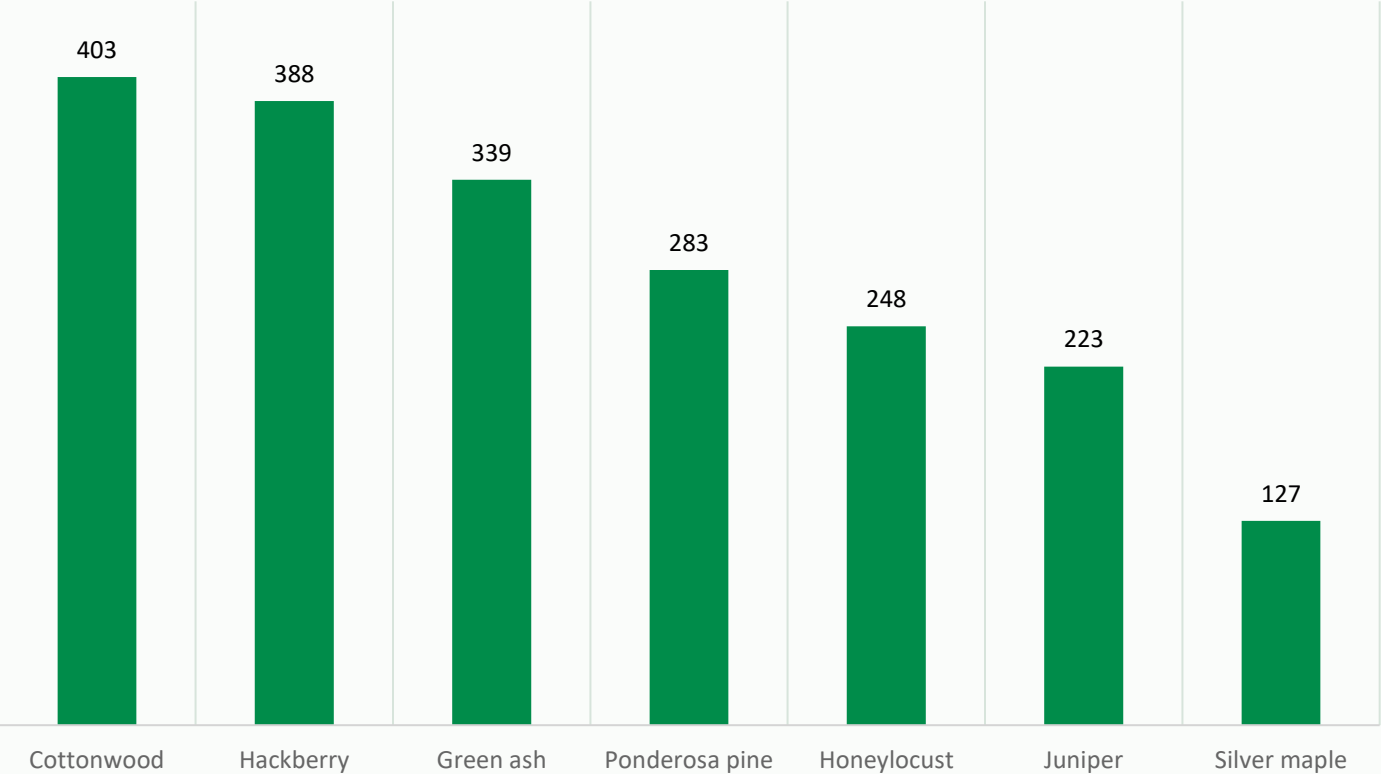


The urban forest is public infrastructure—providing environmental and community value while it grows.

A few species make up a large share of the public forest



Cottonwood, hackberry and green ash together account for roughly 30% of inventoried trees.



Why diversity matters

Diversity reduces the risk that one pest, disease or weather event causes widespread canopy loss.

PLANNING TARGET

No genus above 20%
No single species above 10%

The canopy is older than the ideal replacement curve

Most trees should be in smaller size classes so natural mortality does not create a sudden canopy gap.



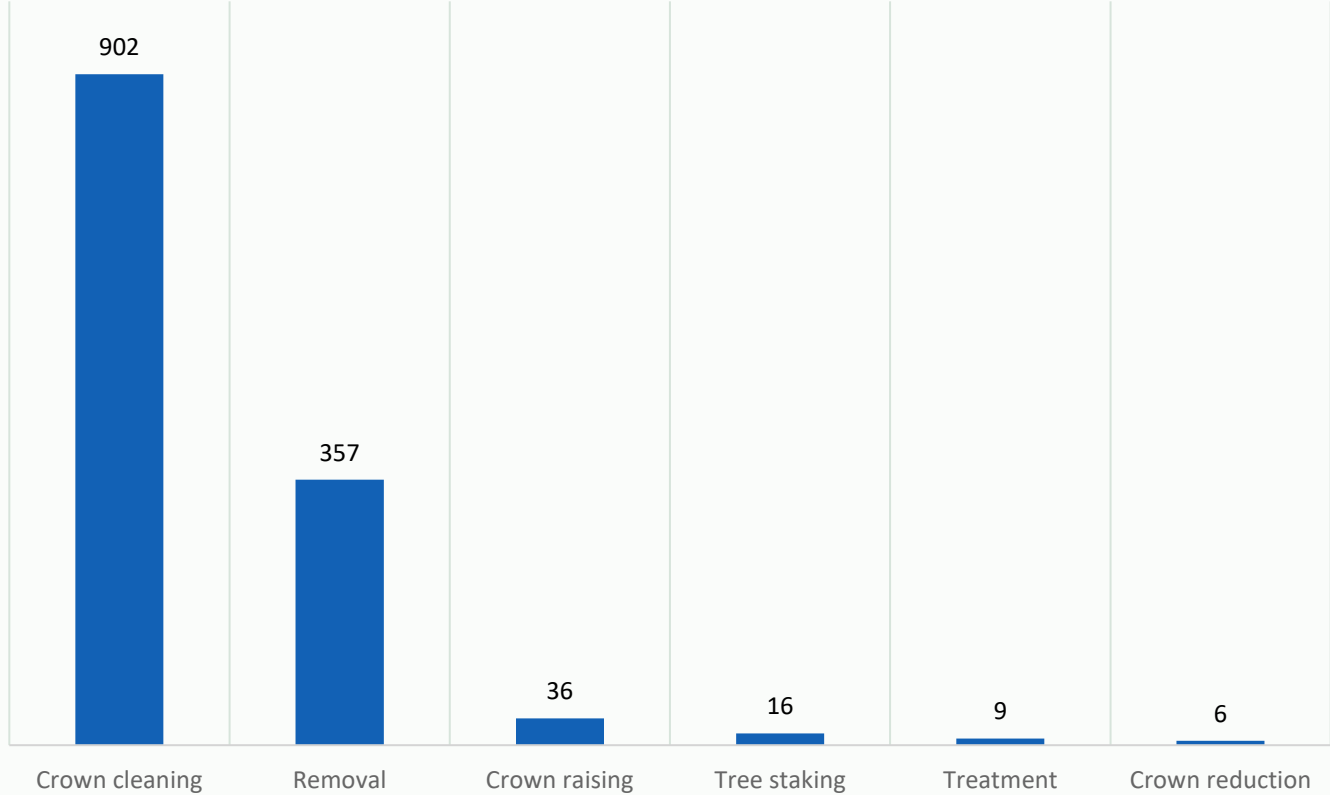
What this finding means

- Plant every year—not only after emergencies.
- Favor long-lived species that diversify the canopy.
- Plan for continuing removal and replacement costs.

Maintenance demand is significant



Approximately 35% of inventoried trees need some type of management.



CURRENT CONDITION

84% of foliage is fair or good
86% of wood condition is fair or good

Routine care extends tree life and reduces future emergency work.

Risk management begins with hazardous trees



City ownership and field conditions should be verified before any removal.

357

Trees identified for eventual removal

96

Dead or dying trees needing immediate attention

65

Dead or dying trees over 18 inches in diameter

1–2

Recommended new trees for each tree removed

First priority: address dead, dying and hazardous trees—then phase remaining removals through annual work plans.

Emerald ash borer requires proactive monitoring and replacement



Hazardous trees come first, followed by ash trees showing symptoms or poor condition.



339

Ash trees in the public inventory

124

Ash trees showing possible EAB symptoms

103

Ash trees among recommended removals

Annual monitoring helps Columbus replace canopy deliberately instead of reacting after widespread loss.

New planting must improve canopy diversity

Choose long-lived, site-appropriate trees and avoid increasing already overrepresented species.

PRIORITIZE

- Long-lived, site-appropriate species
- Genera and species currently underrepresented
- One to two trees for each removal
- Annual planting and monitoring

AVOID INCREASING

Cottonwood • hackberry • ash
Poplars • non-approved elms • box elder
Willow • pear • mulberry • tree of heaven
Other nuisance species restricted by ordinance



Adoption establishes a repeatable management cycle



Annual budgets will determine the pace; the plan provides a shared framework for staff and policymakers.

