

## Tree Equity Working Group

July 8, 2025

### Member spotlight: Galewood Neighbors

- Galewood Neighbors recently completed all requirements of the Tree Ambassadors Program.
- Their website is a great resource to learn about their events, workshops, and initiatives: <https://galewoodneighbors.org/tree-program>.
- They are currently working to make Rutherford Sayre Park an accredited arboretum.

### Chicago tree updates

- The City has planted 4,940 trees so far this year (CDOT: 3,207, BOF: 1,733)
- Current work focusses on tree maintenance, warranty evaluation, and site selection for fall planting.
- If you have tree questions or need assistance with 311 requests, email Jared Patton ([jared.patton@cityofchicago.org](mailto:jared.patton@cityofchicago.org)) and he will connect you with a forester.

### Green Infrastructure Strategy

- Jackie Rigley (Chicago DOE) provided an introduction to green stormwater infrastructure (GSI), summarized the City's ongoing Green Infrastructure Strategy project, and led a discussion about the green stormwater infrastructure value of trees.
- GSI is an approach to managing stormwater that relies on natural systems, such as rain gardens, trees, bioswales, and natural spaces, rather than gray infrastructure, such as sewers and storm drains. Gray infrastructure typically seeks to move stormwater away from a site as quickly as possible, while green infrastructure encourages water to infiltrate into the ground where it falls.
- The City is currently developing a comprehensive strategy that will guide its approach to GSI. The plan will emphasize that green infrastructure is critical infrastructure that provides important benefits to the City. It will highlight strategies for maximizing these benefits and addressing Chicago's stormwater concerns in a way that is efficient and provides benefits to the City beyond stormwater management (heat island mitigation, beautification, etc.).
- The group was asked what tree-related messaging should be centered in the Green Infrastructure Strategy. The group emphasized the value that trees provide, not only for stormwater management, but also heat reduction, beautification, and mental

uplift. Attendees emphasized that tree planting is fast and cheap, especially compared to gray infrastructure approaches.

- The group was also asked to rate their understanding of the connection between trees and stormwater management, as well as their neighbors' understanding of the connection. Most respondents said they have a strong understanding of the connection, but their neighbors do not.

#### Urban Forestry Advisory Board

- The Board last met on June 5.
- The City Parkway Tree Inventory is moving forward. An RFP is expected later this year.
- Chicago experienced approximately 5,000 tree emergency this fall due to storms. Foresters are focusing on maintaining trees and following up on tree warranties.
- The Board discussed upcoming work on a heritage tree ordinance and decided to pursue an approach that focusses on preserving very large trees.
- The Board approved an update of their by-laws.
- The Board discussed the need for a tree inspection option in the 311 system. Currently, the closest option is a tree removal request.
- The Board's next meetings is October 2,

#### Tree Ambassador Program

- Melinda Escobar congratulated the cohort of Tree Ambassadors that recently completed their time in the program and announced that she will be leaving her position and moving to Los Angeles. She will be greatly missed!

#### Openlands

- Tom Ebeling announced that tonight is the first session of a Spanish-language TreeKeeper course offered in partnership with Latinos Progresando
- People and organizations interested in a tree planting grant should submit an application.

#### Discussion

- Meeting notes: Moving forward, Jared will assemble bullet points for the meeting which will be shared with both meeting attendees and City staff
- Website: The [TEWG website](#) now features links to join the meeting and past meeting materials.

- A TEWG member asked (before the meeting) to discuss vacant lots and trees/green infrastructure. This will be discussed at a future meeting.

#### Next meeting

- The next meeting will be August 12 at 9am and will feature a speaker from the Lincoln Park Zoo's Urban Wildlife Institute.
- The September meeting (Wednesday, September 10 at 10am) will be hybrid. The meeting location has not yet been determined.