



Community Forest Talking Points and Sample Script

Our community leaders have a lot on their plates, and their priorities are affected by what they hear from members of the community. You can help influence what they give their attention to by letting them know what's important to you. If the community forest is important to you, please let your leaders know.

Below are some talking points, separated by categories, that you may want to use when sharing your thoughts about the community forest. Pick and choose in any way that makes the most sense to you. At the end is a brief sample script that you are welcome to use.

Benefits...

- Community forests provide a long list of well-documented economic, social, and environmental benefits for the entire community.
- When full accounting is done, trees have a great return on investment and more than pay for themselves.
- Trees are a community asset that increase in value each year for decades (with proper care).
- Trees make a positive contribution to most aspects of a community, such as streets, stormwater management, pollution control, health care, energy use, community image, and quality of life.
- The community forest improves the well-being and quality of life of all residents and visitors.
- Specifically, trees provide all the following (and more!):
 - Increase energy savings (summer shade, winter wind reduction)
 - Reduce the heat island effect
 - Increase comfort
 - Improve physical and mental health
 - Moderate air, water, and noise pollution
 - Reduce erosion and flooding
 - Increase property values
 - Improve community image and appearance
 - Help mitigate and adapt to climate change
 - Provide habitat and food for wildlife

Challenges...

- The benefits of the community forest are often subtle, going unnoticed and underappreciated, causing many to consider trees a luxury rather than an essential component of community infrastructure.
- In the same way that some community forest benefits are not obvious, canopy loss also can go unnoticed. We're likely shocked by the loss of a great number of trees after a major storm, but a

gradual decline over years and decades goes undetected, yet the results can be the same—a dramatic decline in tree canopy and the many benefits that go with it.

- The community forest is facing increased threats from insects and disease such as Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), pine wilt, and Thousand Cankers in walnut. Lack of species diversity in a community forest makes it much more vulnerable to these threats.
- The community forest is facing increased threats from more extreme weather events. Over-mature and poorly cared for trees are especially vulnerable.
- General appreciation of trees has eroded, leading to less planting and poorer care.
- The increased focus on lawns is to the detriment of our trees. Over fertilization and over watering (both remarkably common) are not only wasteful, but also cause many trees to suffer and decline.
- The size, strength, and longevity of trees can give the inaccurate impression that they're invincible and eternal. Abuse and damage from mowers, string trimmers, construction, and other human activities contribute to canopy decline.
- Poor species selection, planting errors, and inadequate pruning are all too common, and can dramatically shorten the lifespan and benefits of trees.
- Budget restrictions may cause cuts to tree care, but there is a cost in not maintaining trees because it leads to less healthy trees, shorter tree lifespans, more damage during storms, lost benefits, and an increasingly negative public opinion toward trees.
- Because of all the above and more, Nebraska community forests have been in decline for decades, often dramatically.

The solutions...

- Increase planting, especially in street rights-of-way where trees provide the most benefits.
- Start with high quality stock and plant properly to give the tree the best start possible.
- Increase species diversity to increase resilience.
- Provide proper care for trees (watering, mulching, pruning) to increase their health and longevity.
- Educate others on the value of trees and best practices for species selection, planting, and care.
- Provide support and encourage others to be part of the solution for the benefit of all.

Sample script...

Our community forest is an incredible asset to [insert your community], yet it is facing serious challenges, including increased weather extremes, invasive insects and disease, and human abuse or neglect [or insert any from above that apply]. The biggest threat may simply be lack of attention. We are currently enjoying and benefiting from the wisdom and efforts of forward-thinking tree planters from several decades ago. But that wisdom and those efforts have faded, and sadly we are paying the price for not keeping up replanting and care as our aging forest declines.

I encourage you to support a return to forward-thinking community forest efforts. Proper care of the trees we have extends their life and the many benefits they provide. Investments in planting new trees will pay all of us back for decades to come. And education and encouragement of the public increases momentum and builds community. An investment in our community forest is simply a wise and logical choice, and one I encourage you to make.