



West Lafayette Tree Friends Strategic Plan 2021-2026

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Background

When the town of Chauncey, the predecessor of West Lafayette, was platted in 1860, all land south of State Street and east of Salisbury Street consisted of forestland. The growth of West Lafayette and Purdue University has tamed the wilderness and what remains is now called an urban forest. Even in the earliest days, our community was purposefully planting street trees to regain some of what had been lost.

The West Lafayette Tree Fund was established in 1981. The governmental non-profit organization formed for the purpose of planting and maintaining trees on West Lafayette public streets. Its mission is to create and sustain economic, environmental, health, and aesthetic benefits in the West Lafayette community through planting and nurturing trees in public rights-of-way.

To increase the size and quality of our urban forest, a tree ordinance began taking shape in September of 1983. After receiving numerous complaints from concerned citizens regarding development practices in the City, the Tree Friends helped the City develop a landscape ordinance. Concerns included cutting down large, existing trees and providing little landscaping, traffic circulation in parking lots, and concerns about landscape maintenance negligence including trimming of low limbs or shrubs interfering with safe sidewalk passage.

In early 1984, the City adopted the original West Lafayette landscape ordinance. The tree and landscape requirements have been reviewed by the Engineering Department and Department of Development since the ordinance was enacted. In 1997, the position of Greenspace Administrator was created to oversee the landscape requirements of new developments and care and planting of city street trees, which was occurring in the Parks and Recreation Department with limited planning and resources. The position moved to the Department of Development to strengthen the planning and review process.

The West Lafayette Tree Fund has always had a devoted core of volunteers but none as committed as Helen Lillich. In 1982, she formed “Trees of Sagamore” and wrote letters to everyone she knew. Donations poured in and Sagamore Parkway was planted with trees. Her annual letters brought in about \$20,000 each year, which



Figure 1: Pictured Helen Lillich (left) and volunteer performing winter pruning

provided funding for the Tree Fund. She eventually became a part-time city employee to supervise work groups including people with community service hours and volunteers. Lillich received a Take Pride in America Award at the White House in 1987 and the George Award from our local newspaper. Lillich passed away in 2010 but the Tree Fund and its efforts continue today. Shortly after Lillich's passing, the Tree Fund took on their new name, The West Lafayette Tree Friends.

In 2019, the West Lafayette Tree Friends mourned the passing of Tree Friends members John and JoAnn MacDonald. John had been very active in the organization, was a part of the Emergency Tree Squad (E.T. Squad), volunteered during seasonal pruning session, as well as other special educational events to support West Lafayette's urban forest.

In their passing, the MacDonalds chose to invest in the work of the organization with a gift in their wills. The fact that John and Joann chose to support the work of the organization with such a significant legacy gift was truly touching. The West Lafayette Tree Friends discussed how to honor their gift to launch the West Lafayette Tree Friends Endowment, officially established in September 2020.



Figure 2: WLTF members, Jo and John MacDonald

Benefits of Trees

West Lafayette's urban forest plays a key role in supporting and improving the community's quality of life. With proper maintenance, trees provide many environmental, economic, and social benefits that far exceed the time and investment in planting, pruning, and removals. Trees growing along the public streets constitute a valuable community resource. They provide numerous tangible and intangible benefits such as pollution control, energy reduction, stormwater management, property value increases, wildlife habitat, education, and aesthetics. The services and benefits of trees in the urban and suburban setting were once considered unquantifiable. However, by using extensive scientific studies and practical research, these benefits can now be confidently calculated using tree inventory information. The following infographics break down the environmental, economical, and social benefits of our urban forest.

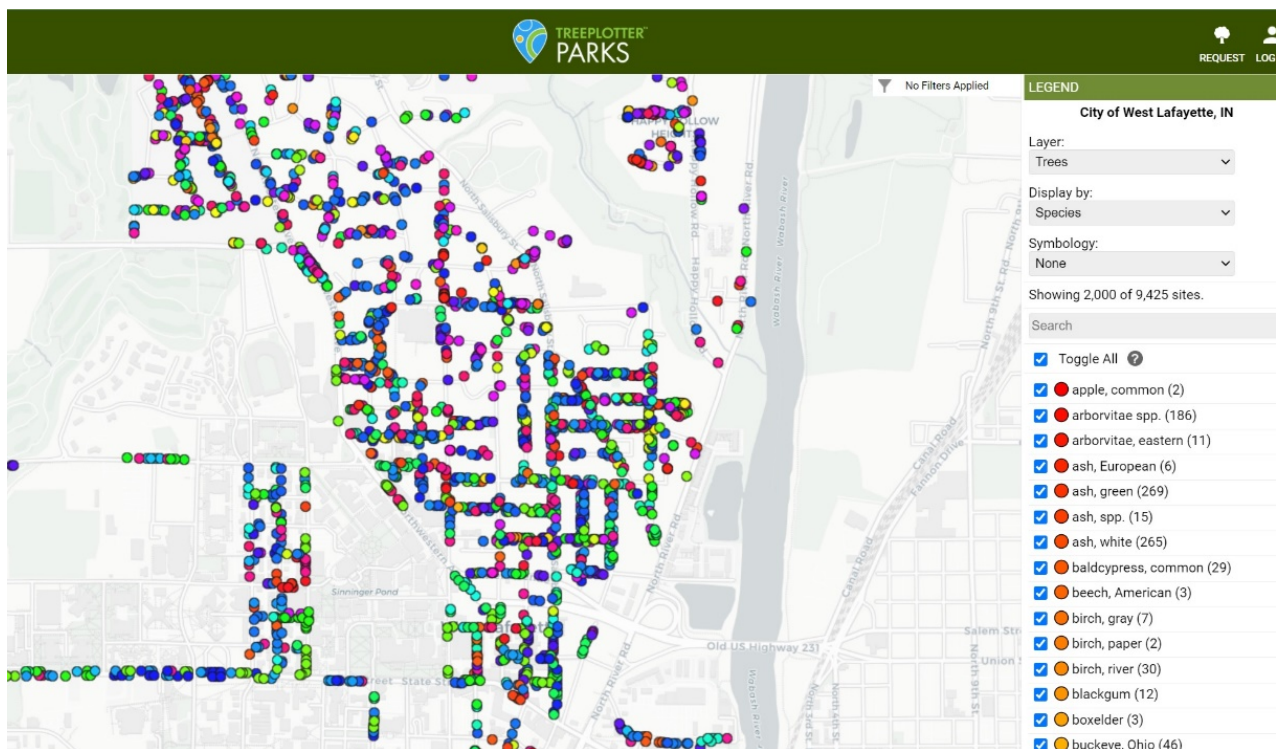


Figure 3 Photo of TreePlotter PARKS

Goals and Objectives

Similar to the mighty oak, West Lafayette Tree Friends has grown into establishment since Lillich's efforts back in 1981. With the growth of membership, replacement of ash trees well underway, and the launch of the West Lafayette Tree Friends Endowment, WLTF began the process of their first strategic plan. The purpose of the strategic plan is to help guide the Tree Friends to better manage the resources they have developed over the years, as well as guide the organization forward as the City of West Lafayette restructures its community forestry program.

The Executive Committee, which comprises of the Chair, Vice-chair, Secretary, Treasurer, past chair, and city staff met in October of 2020 to kick off the planning session. From their efforts, the Committee endorse the following goals and objectives which, when realized, will achieve the vision of a greener future in West Lafayette:

1. Strengthen West Lafayette Tree Friends Organizational Structure
 - a. Objective: Add more definition and structure to the make-up of WLTF to build capacity for more sustainable future

2. Develop "financial roadmap" to increase donations and grow the endowment
 - a. Objective: Build upon existing fundraising efforts to support the initiatives, as well as develop new initiatives as WLTF members expand their impact
 - b. Objective: Ensure funding is available to meeting the primary role of WLTF, which is to support tree planting initiatives within public right of ways and public spaces
 - c. Objective: Develop a strong relationship with local businesses, schools, and other community partners to share resources, initiatives, and common goals that align with WLTF mission
 - d. Objective: Strengthen the Tribute Tree Program to support fundraising efforts and plant more trees

3. Increase volunteerism to support WLTF mission and our urban forest

- a. Objective: Grow both membership and volunteer base to continue WLTF mission, tree planting, pruning, and care within West Lafayette
- b. Objective: Foster skills and talent within the community to support WLTF mission and existing programs
- c. Objective: Develop a volunteer base to strengthen relationships with community partners
- d. Objective: Develop programming to best utilize volunteers, while working with City Staff to ensure both city and WLTF greenspace goals remain aligned

4. Cultivate relationships with Greater Lafayette businesses

- a. Objective: Develop programs for collaboration opportunities to raise awareness of WLTF, its initiatives, goals, and mission to grow the urban forest and greenspaces

5. Assess, sustain, and strengthen street tree pruning program

- a. Objective: Assist city programs that support both growth and health of West Lafayette's urban forest
- b. Objective: Maintain commitment to newly installed street trees, funded with WLTF funds

6. Increase annual number of trees planted

- a. Objective: Identify and prioritize growth of the urban forest responsibly with support from City Staff
- b. Objective: Replace trees removed by City to ensure a continual aging urban canopy is in place
- c. Objective: Utilize urban forest as green infrastructure in response to climate change

7. Develop communications strategies that the volunteer organization can sustain long-term
 - a. Objective: Support efforts for all listed goals, develop effective methods of communication within WLTF and its committees, City Staff, and Greater Lafayette community

Implementation

Consistent with the mission of WLTF, the following implementation strategy tables offer direction to achieve the identified goals and objectives, along with approximate time frames, subject to budgets, city support, and WLTF membership approval:

- Short-Term Opportunities—Immediate to 18 months following the Strategic Plan’s adoption
- Mid-Term Opportunities—2 to 3 years
- Long-Term Opportunities—3 to 7 years

Priority levels are generalized in terms of low, medium, and high. These levels represent a general order of importance relative to fulfilling the identified goals and objectives. Below is a list of suggested entities to take responsibility for the following strategies include:

- CFAC = Community Forestry Advisory Committee
- City = City Staff
- COM = Communications Committee
- ETS = Emergency Tree Squad
- EXC = Executive Committee
- FC = Fundraising Committee
- TS = Tree Scouts
- ULN = Urban Leaves Newsletter Committee
- WLTF = Tree Friends Member
- YBC = Tree Sweater Initiative

Goal 1: Strengthen West Lafayette Tree Friends Organizational Structure

Current Conditions: WLTF membership is one of welcome and casual structure. Since WLTF is a governmental non-profit, their monthly meetings are required to be open for the public to join per Indiana state code. When someone interested in attending a WLTF meeting, they are offered to become a member, as well as participate in discussions on the agenda that day. This method of membership has created a strong social network within the organization, however, limits capacity to maintain membership and engagement long-term.

1. Objective: Add more definition and structure to the make-up of WLTF to build capacity for more sustainable future

Objective	Strategy Description	Term	Priority	Responsibility
1	Clearly define member, volunteer, and donor	Short	high	City, EXC
1	Create/Formalize/Update WLTF bylaws	Short	High	EXC
1	Use working committees that cover both existing initiatives, and proposed initiatives within the strategic plan	Long	High	City, WLTF

Proposed Strategy 1:

The following are proposed classifications of participation within the West Lafayette Tree Friends (WLTF), which will reflect in the existing by-laws once approved:

Members: Individuals that attend at least 6 monthly meetings annually, including any committee meetings. Members provide guidance on initiatives and financial allocations at their public, monthly meetings, and elect the Executive Committee bi-annually.

Volunteers: Individuals who attend workday events, such as pruning, planting, or other various activities organized by members or city staff.

Donors: Individuals who financially back WLTF by donations.

Working Committees: Committees, which are made of WLTF members and/or volunteers, meet outside the organization's monthly meeting. Chairs of committees must be members and report their efforts to the full membership and city staff during their monthly meetings.

Executive Committee: The Executive Committee is made of the following chair positions noted in the WLTF by-laws: Chair, Vice-chair, Secretary, Treasurer, City Staff to WLTF, and one member (at-large) elected by members of WLTF. This committee meets as needed between monthly meetings to conduct regular business on behalf of WLTF members and reports to the full membership during the following public, monthly meeting.

Fundraising Committee: The Fundraising Committee is a working group that meets to administer annual fundraisers and specialty fundraising projects.

Urban Leaves Newsletter Committee: The Urban Leaves Newsletter Committee develops the quarterly newsletter, along with City Staff.

Tree Scouts: The Tree Scouts work with City staff to “scout” for potential planting areas and pruning needs.

Community Forestry Advisory Committee (CFAC): This proposed board is to advise the Community Forestry and Greenspace Manager on planning, reviewing, and direction on West Lafayette’s community forestry program policies. This would include, but not limited to, large scale plantings, changes to Urban Forestry Management Plan updates, large scale maintenance policies, community forestry master planning, and a voice within local government that supports, promotes, and fosters a strong sense of community through urban forestry. This board would be made of no less than 7 but no more than 9 members, 5 are the WLTF Executive Committee or their appointees, and with the remainder being community members of urban forestry organizations.

Goal 2: Develop “financial roadmap” to increase donations and grow the endowment

Current Conditions: Fundraising to support the organization’s commitments shows that WLTF has the support of citizens of West Lafayette. There is an annual fund drive that begins in November. Letters are sent to current donors, as well as prospective donors, to provide updates on the year’s hard work and requests to support the upcoming year’s efforts. Periodically, emails are sent to donors to help increase donations.

1. Objective: Build upon existing fundraising efforts to support the initiatives, as well as develop new initiatives as WLTF members expand their impact.
2. Objective: Ensure funding is available to meeting the primary role of WLTF, which is to support tree planting initiatives within public right of ways and public spaces.
3. Objective: Develop a strong relationship with local businesses, schools, and other community partners to share resources, initiatives, and common goals that align with WLTF mission.
4. Objective: Strengthen the Tribute Tree Program to support fundraising efforts and develop long-term donors.

Objective	Strategy Description	Term	Priority	Responsibility
1	Develop strategies to increase number of individual donors by 5% annually	Mid	High	FC, EXC
1	Increase grant writing assistance for short, mid, and long-term projects.	Mid	Med	City, FC, COM
2	Develop Annual Financial Budget	Short	High	City, EXC
2	Commit to growing WLTF Endowment by at least 10% of funds received from annual fund drive. Leverage relationship with Greater Lafayette Community Foundation.	Long	Low	EXC, FC
2	Develop talking points for each committee to utilize that identifies WLTF mission and goals	Short	Med	EXC, WLTF
3	Develop Annual Financial Plan and Budget.	Short	Med	City, EXC, FC
3	Develop strategies for additional donor campaigns throughout the year to maintain engagement.	Long	Med	City, COM, FC
4	Review existing program policies and adjust donation amount to ensure some profit for maintenance needs.	Long	Med	City, FC

Goal 3: Increase volunteerism to support WLTF mission and our urban forest

Current Condition: WLTF currently has a strong spring/fall pruning program, which is one of the most visible programs that highlights the impact of WLTF volunteers within West Lafayette neighborhoods. Few businesses in the past have reached out to join pruning or to suggest a unique, one-day event to participate. Communication efforts, such as the Urban Leaves newsletter and social media help show what a volunteer can do.

1. Objective: Grow both membership and volunteer base to continue WLTF mission, tree planting, pruning, and care within West Lafayette.
2. Objective: Foster skills and talent within WLTF for initiatives identified.
3. Objective: Develop programing to best utilize volunteers, while working with City Staff to ensure both city and WLTF greenspace goals remain aligned.

Objective	Strategy Description	Term	Priority	Responsibility
1	Continue to grow presence of Urban Leaves newsletter	Long	Med	City, ULN
2	Strengthen communications between committees to better promote volunteer needs, fundraising initiatives, and social media posts.	Long	Med	City, EXC, WLTF
2	Develop list of skills/talent currently found within WLTF and areas that could use more expertise.	Short	Med	EXC
2	Increase educational and training opportunities for WLTF members and volunteers.	Long	Med	City, EXC
3	Work with City Staff to support contractor work for large-scale pruning, mulching, and watering needs.	Mid	Med	City, CFAC
3	Increase weekend pruning events as well as more diverse volunteer projects to increase participation.	Long	Med	City, ETS, TS, YBC

3	Increase number of pruning volunteers by 2-3 individuals annually.	Mid	High	WLTF, ULN
3	Reach out to Purdue University courses or clubs to participate in volunteer events.	Long	Med	EXC, City, ULN

Goal 4: Cultivate relationships with Greater Lafayette businesses

Current Condition: In the past, various companies have reached out for a special volunteer event. WLTF offers pruning program for local businesses as well to help prune young trees to help clear signs, parking lots, and line of sites. This is to help educate that trees/greenspace and business needs can work together.

- 1. Objective: Develop programs for collaboration opportunities to raise awareness of WLTF, its initiatives, goals, and mission to grow the urban forest and greenspaces.

Objective	Strategy Description	Term	Priority	Responsibility
1	Strengthen Pruning Partners program.	Mid	Med	City, WLTF, TS
1	Identify potential partners for WLTF initiatives for short, mid, and long-term projects.	Long	Med	City, EXC, FC
1	Develop a sponsorship program to incentivize businesses to participate either financially, or with volunteer workdays.	Long	Low	City, FC, EXC, COM
1	Identify organizations that WLTF members can participate in/join	Long	Low	WLTF
1	Develop strategies for additional donor campaigns throughout the year to maintain engagement.	Mid	Med	City, FC

Goal 5: Assess, sustain, and strengthen street tree pruning program

Current Conditions: Currently, WLTF in partnership with City Staff, develop a spring and fall pruning schedule. For spring, pruning sessions typically from after the Arbor Day celebration until the beginning week(s) of June. Fall pruning begins late September or early October until Thanksgiving. This aligns with best timing for pruning young street trees. This program helps develop more robust and esthetically pleasing tree growth. It also keeps branches 15 feet above roadways and 8 feet above sidewalks per city ordinance. Most pruning sessions are within neighborhoods.

1. Objective: Maintain commitment to street trees from install to maturity at a government policy level.
2. Objective: Assist city programs that support both growth and health of West Lafayette’s urban forest.

Objective	Strategy Description	Term	Priority	Responsibility
1	Form a committee (CFAC) to work directly with City Staff to assess community forestry needs, future tree care policies within city operation.	Short	High	City, EXC
2	Tree Scouts Committee be trained on TreePlotter, city street tree inventory program, to collect data on tree growth, health, and pruning needs.	Mid	Med	City, TS
2	Tree Scouts to perform neighborhood reviews to prioritize WLTF pruning schedule.	Long	Med	City, TS
2	Expand spring and fall pruning events.	Mid	Med	City, WLTF

Goal 6: Increase annual number of trees planted

Current conditions: Trees are planted through the City, WLTF partnership known as Operation Releaf. This program is a 50/50 cost-share between both entities to provide street trees within public right of way and public spaces. Since 2008, costs of trees have increased significantly, reducing the number of trees being planted. In 2016, the average cost of a 2” caliper tree, ball and burlap, installed with a 1-year warranty and seasonal watering was \$267.00. In 2020, the average cost of a tree installed with the same requirements was \$438.50. This is over 60% increase of cost for the same number of trees and species type. Due to these increased costs, tree quantiles have slowly been reduced through Operation Releaf.

1. Objective: Identify and prioritize growth of the urban forest responsibly with support from City Staff.
2. Objective: Replace trees removed by City to ensure a continual aging urban canopy is in place.
3. Objective: Utilize urban forest as green infrastructure in response to climate change.

Objective	Strategy Description	Term	Priority	Responsibility
1	Institute weeding, mulching and watering programs of young trees after planting.	Long	Med	City, TS, ETS, CFAC
1	Develop a municipal nursery to grow trees to plant for Operation Releaf.	Long	High	City, EXC, FC
2	Work with neighborhood HOA’s and/or neighborhood leaderships to increase tree planting and care after planting.	Long	Med	City, TS, CFAC
2	Educate residents on increasing tree plantings where appropriate on private property, along with proper tree care.	Long	Low	COM, WLTF
3	Establish community forestry canopy goals to guide Operation Releaf plantings annually.	Mid	High	City, CFAC

3	Work with City to ensure trees are a cornerstone on its carbon-footprint and climate change response.	Long	High	City, CFAC
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Goal 7: Develop communications strategies that the volunteer organization can sustain long-term

Current conditions: WLTF works with City Staff to coordinate social media postings when needed. The most outwardly source of communication is the popular Urban Leaves newsletter. The newsletter is put together by the Newsletter Committee, who have continued to make changes to ensure messaging is standard and being posted on a regular basis. The newsletter is sent out quarterly via email.

1. Objective: Support efforts for all listed goals, develop effective methods of communication within WLTF and its committees, City Staff, and community.

Objective	Strategy Description	Term	Priority	Responsibility
1	Develop committee to create regular content for WLTF social media and website.	Long	Med	City, COM
1	Continue to support Urban Leaves newsletter and Committee.	Long	Med	EXC, ULN
1	Develop door hangers and other “leave behind” materials to raise awareness of WLTF efforts.	Short	Low	FC, COM
1	Work with City to post press releases on WLTF/City programs, events, and projects.	Long	Low	City, COM