URBAN FORESTRY: ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR EQUITABLE MUNICIPAL TREE CANOPY

Session: In-Person

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Municipal urban forestry programs are an essential sector of city governments as they are responsible for a city’s maintenance and planting of public trees, as well as enforcing tree ordinances. Especially in urban areas, dense tree canopy holds important tools to address public health concerns of urban heat islands, respiratory disease, and mental health. The purpose of this study is to pin-point the prominent barriers and enabling conditions to successful preservation and expansion of urban tree canopy. I conducted case studies on three canopy-diverse municipalities: Ithaca, NY, Renton, WA, and Spokane, WA. I had interviews with these urban foresters to understand the barriers to their work and the enabling conditions to what allows them to pursue equitable maintenance, preservation, and expansion of their city’s tree canopy. Topics covered in these interviews included forestry authority, educational initiatives, tree ordinance enforcement and focus, acknowledgement of redlining, and tree canopy distribution. These findings led me to the culmination of a policy report with five main recommendations for policymakers to address. Areas policy must address for equitable, sustainable urban forestry reforms includes expansion of staff, establishing neighborhood council systems, directing city council members and departments to aid in tree ordinance reforms, ensure forestry programs can enforce their own ordinances, and allocate resources for equitable tree planting and maintenance in historically redlined Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. This report serves to guide the advocacy efforts of The Nature Conservancy and forestry experts to work with policymakers and address the shortcomings at hand.