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City's towering canopies can be preserved (knock on wood)

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Walking around downtown Franklin can be a shady venture.

Up and down the city's streets, majestic maples, stately oaks and ashes form a canopy of lush green.

Keeping the trees healthy is of critical importance to Mayor Fred Paris. That's why the city has hired Arbor Experts to examine the trees on public property, mapping which ones are healthy and which need help.

The campaign is part of city leaders' efforts to ensure the city is properly maintaining its arbor resources.

"You look at other communities, and then you drive through Franklin and see we have trees everywhere," Paris said. "One of our obligations is to keep it looking that way."

For the past two months, Arbor Experts has been plotting out the trees on public land. Owner and certified arborist John Hawkins has a log book in which he marks each type of tree and the condition it is in.

The company also is looking for possible hazards such as branches that could fall in the future, hurting pedestrians or damaging property.

Too many people think a tree should be cut down if a branch or two are missing or if it's hanging precariously over a yard or house.

Hawkins said with the help of a cable, a tree can be safely braced to prevent breakage.

Arbor work could bring grants

Franklin is looking to change its name to Tree City USA.

Mayor Fred Paris said one of his goals is to return the distinction to the city, taking a crucial step in Franklin's beautification efforts.

The moniker of Tree City USA is bestowed by the national Arbor Day Foundation to communities for having a viable tree management plan and program.

To be a Tree City, Franklin must meet four criteria: form a tree board, enact a tree care ordinance, spend money on a community forestry program and commemorate Arbor Day.

Paris said he would like to prevent the needless cutting or topping of city trees.

He hopes that by taking inventory of trees throughout the city, Hawkins can help save trees that are ailing. If certain trees do need to be removed, Hawkins will help specify which species to put back and where to plant them.

Franklin parks and recreation director Chip Orner said an investigation into some of the trees in Province Park, for example, found certain stands that were in distress.

Though they had to be cut down, Orner said park officials will plant another 24 trees to replace them.

Arbor Experts was hired in March to assess the city's trees. Paris had allotted \$1,500 for the work, with Hawkins' rate going at \$50 per hour.

So far, the company has progressed along Jefferson and Edwards streets, moving east to west. Hawkins estimated they will continue working throughout the summer and possibly beyond before the work is finished.

Franklin earned the distinction in the 1980s and '90s, but Paris said city leaders had lessened the priority in the past years.

The city already spends the required amount of money, \$2 per person, on its tree care program, Paris said, and celebrates Arbor Day each year.

He is working to re-form a tree board. Those who would like to volunteer for the board, which would handle the planning of maintenance, removal and planting of trees in the city, should call the mayor's office at 736-3602.

A tree board would help to shape an ordinance, which would then qualify Franklin for Tree City status.

Becoming a Tree City would help Franklin's public image, as well as make the city eligible for federal grants for forestry programs, Paris said.
