

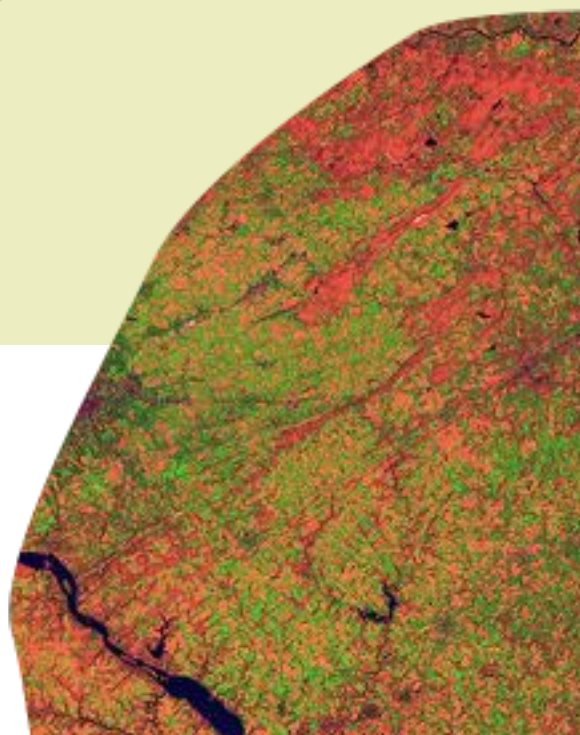
Title:

Author:

**Occupy Climate
Change (OCC!)**
*Grassroots initiatives
entry*



FORMAS



Trees Atlanta

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Where is this grassroots initiative implemented?

Throughout metropolitan Atlanta. This area includes downtown Atlanta, as well as the surrounding counties of Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, Dekalb, Douglas, Gwinnett, Henry, Fayette, & Fulton. The initiative has expanded to include the partner cities of Avondale Estates, Brookhaven, Chamblee, Decatur, Doraville, Dunwoody, East Point, Hapeville, Lawrenceville, and Sandy Springs (Trees Atlanta, Annual Report, 2020).

Who are the promoters? Who are the actors involved? What is their background?

The grassroots initiative is called Trees Atlanta. It was founded in 1985 by a group of largely middle-class citizens who joined with other non-profit organizations, such as the Junior League of Atlanta, Central Atlanta Progress, as well as municipal agencies like the Commissioner of Parks to address growing concerns over urban deforestation (Trees Atlanta, Who We Are, 2022). Since its founding, Trees Atlanta has worked to improve Atlanta's urban environment by planting and conserving trees along streets and in other public areas throughout the city.

In the years since it was founded, the organization has worked to build partnerships with local government officials and businesses. As the initiative has grown in recent years, it has been supported by large financial contributions from corporate sponsors such as Georgia Power, The Home Depot Foundation, UPS Foundation, Bank of America, AT&T, and Microsoft. It has also received financial support from national non-profit organizations like the Arbor Day Foundation, Southeastern Nurseryman's Association, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (Trees Atlanta, Sponsors 2022).

The organization hired its first executive director, Marcia Bansley, in 1985. Bansley served as executive director of the organization until 2011. Though Trees Atlanta started as a grassroots

organization, it has grown significantly and now boasts a forty-six member staff (Trees Atlanta, Staff & Board, 2022).

How this initiative engages with climate? Does it tackle mitigation, adaptation, both or other dimensions of climate change?

Trees Atlanta engages with climate change by tackling mitigation. In 1986, Trees Atlanta planted 46 trees in the city (Trees Atlanta, History, 2022). The initiative has expanded and in 2020 reported that it planted 7,063 throughout metropolitan Atlanta. The initiative's tree planting campaign helps mitigate rising urban heat factors with rising summer temperatures. The initiative also promotes its tree planting campaign as a way to mitigate air pollution.

What are the main objectives? What are the main values?

The initiative's main objects are to promote and conserve Atlanta's urban forest and to educate the public regarding the benefits of the urban forest. The initiative is primarily focused on promoting and protecting the reputation of Atlanta as the "city in the forest."

Atlanta gained its reputation as the city in the forest in part because of its history of development. Before the land was ceded to the United States government by the indigenous Creek nation in 1821, the area that became Atlanta was virgin old-growth forest. Though much of the land was eventually clear cut by white settlers to build the city and plant cash crops like cotton, portions of the old-growth forest remained untouched by urban and agricultural development in the late twentieth century. Since its founding, Trees Atlanta, in partnership with other environmental organizations like EcoAddendum and the Old Growth Forest Network, have worked to preserve these pockets of old growth forest and promote the expansion of new urban forests (Seabrook, 2017).

It accomplishes its mission through a number of programs including youth and adult urban forestry education programs, tree planting throughout the city, and the facilitation of community tree care to help maintain the urban forest (Trees Atlanta, Our Programs, 2022). Trees Atlanta also works

to clear the urban forest of invasive species like English ivy and kudzu that threaten the health of native trees (Atlanta Magazine, 2019).

Trees Atlanta coordinates a number of programs to accomplish its goals. It currently manages 85 acres of greenspace along the Atlanta Beltline corridor. This urban forested space is known as the Atlanta Beltline Arboretum. The site serves as an ecological corridor, providing habitat for wildlife and pollution reduction for areas adjacent to the highway. It also serves as a site for community science programs. Trees Atlanta frequently hosts educational urban forest protection and revitalization programs for youth and adults in the arboretum (Trees Atlanta, Atlanta Beltline Arboretum, 2022).

The program also lobbies the municipal city government to make zoning laws that protect and encourage the development of urban forest (Nobles 2021).

Increasingly, Trees Atlanta has worked to highlight the lack of urban forest in communities of color and is working to build urban forest in communities of color. In particular, Trees Atlanta has used data from the Tree Equity Score to show that communities in Atlanta with fewer trees have more heat-related deaths, more air pollution, and property values are lower (Hutchins 2021).

Which limits does it encounter?

In the past, the Trees Atlanta has encounter problems with the city's zoning laws protecting the city's urban forest. Much of Atlanta's tree canopy is unprotected because it is privately owned. (Saporta, 2020).

Trees Atlanta also frequently has to navigate the challenges of working with private property owners of single-family residential land. Seventy-seven percent of the city's urban forest is located on private property, and the city's zoning ordinances make it easy for property owners to take down trees. (Atlanta Magazine, 2019).

Are any shortcomings or critical points visible? What other problematic issues can arise from its implementation?

The initiative's focus on beautification proves to be a shortcoming as it can potentially distract from the problems of climate change it seeks to address in communities of color. Because much of the initiative's rhetoric centers around the issue of protecting the city's reputation as the "city in the forest," and educating citizens about the importance of urban forest, it potentially misses the opportunity to address other connected issues that contribute to climate change might affect the regions communities (Trees Atlanta, 2016).

How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?

Trees Atlanta's urban forest conservation and protection agenda could be potentially replicated in other urban settings. The initiative could be replicated in other settings should citizens start to build a coalition with other local organizations and municipal governments to coordinate with citizen volunteers to plant trees through the city and maintain urban forests. Other initiatives can also follow Trees Atlanta's example by working to educate private property owners on the importance of urban forest and working with them to preserve and care for urban forest in their possession.

In other cities, initiatives could work with urban planners, as Trees Atlanta did in 2020, to help develop city-wide urban planning initiatives like *Atlanta City Design: Nature* that are structured around protecting the city's ecology by expanding tree canopies in publicly owned spaces. Future initiatives can help ensure trees are planted near waterways that run through the city to act as vegetative buffer zone, providing "greater flood protection, wildlife habitat, and pollution reduction." (Saporta, 2020).

Is this initiative conducive to broader changes (law, institutional arrangements, long-term sustainability or community preparedness, etc.)? If yes, which?

This initiative is conducive to broader changes through the advocacy work it does to protect and create urban forest in the municipal government. Trees Atlanta has lobbied the City of Atlanta to protect the city's tree canopy through zoning ordinances since its founding in the 1980s. These zoning ordinances have protected the city's urban forest from being overdeveloped and have created strict ordinances ensuring that developers cannot remove too many trees throughout the city (Usdansky, 1988).

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