

# DEC's advice for NYS Tree City applicants

(Last updated July 2023)

**APPLICATION DEADLINE IS DECEMBER 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2023**

*This document is meant to respond to a lot of the common questions and errors that we see in Tree City applications. These are our thoughts based on our experience working with the Arbor Day Foundation. ADF sometimes changes their interpretations of their requirements and such, so just keep in mind that this document is not authoritative or exhaustive.*

ADF will often return a satisfactory application for edits simply because they didn't find what they needed to see. They are reading through thousands of applications between all their programs, and they don't have nearly enough staff to handle it, so you can make the process go more smoothly for them and for you by making the information they need very easy to find.

*(The Tree City program is a collaborative effort between states and the Arbor Day Foundation. The applications are first reviewed by a regional DEC representative, then a state-level DEC representative, and finally by someone with the Arbor Day Foundation.)*

*We recommend you keep this document open while you fill out your Tree City application to help the process go as smoothly as possible. As always, you can reach out to your local DEC regional forester (listed on the DEC Tree City webpage), or you can contact Matt Viglucci at [matthew.viglucci@dec.ny.gov](mailto:matthew.viglucci@dec.ny.gov) or 518-402-9416.*

**Please be mindful that this is the first year the Arbor Day Foundation will be using their new application portal, so things will look different and we will all be learning together. Give yourselves extra time to complete the application in case things go wrong. If you're having technical difficulties, try to send us a few screenshots when you reach out, and hopefully we will be able to figure out what is going on promptly.**

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## Signing in to the application portal

Since the portal will be new to everyone this year, make sure you write down any passwords and such, and that anyone else who works on the application with you also has the credentials. I assume it will still be fairly simple for a new individual with a municipality to reset the password, but we don't know exactly what it will look like, so just keep track of everything to be prepared. It could also benefit your successors if your position or responsibilities change.

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## Standard 1: Tree Board or Department

To fulfill Standard 1, you have to demonstrate to ADF and DEC that you have a board or department who is responsible for trees in your municipality. You only need one for the purposes of Tree City, **but we still want to know about both if you have them**. The information benefits our program to understand what kind of structures municipalities have around the state.

**Make sure all the contact information is up to date and accurate!!!!** We use this info to publicize our workshops, events, and grant opportunities, which we want all of you to have access to. And make sure the info goes in the right place. **We want the full picture of how trees are managed by whom in your community, no matter how complex or simple the structure may be.**

**Tree board** = *elected or appointed board* which is in charge of trees in the municipality. It might not be called a tree board for you (e.g. conservation board, planning board...)

**Tree department** = a *municipal staff department*, most commonly the Dept of Public Works. Even if you have a tree board who are the first point of contact about tree issues in your community, it still helps us to know the information of who in your community manages/physically performs the work on trees (even if they're not making the decisions). Some municipalities have a Dept of Forestry, for others this might be their planning department or something else.

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## Standard 2: Tree Ordinance

This is the big one, make sure you get this part right! Again, we don't know what exactly the portal will look like this year so give yourselves plenty of time to complete the application.

ADF doesn't require a municipality have a singular centralized tree ordinance. **As long as we can easily see the laws which fulfill the requirements, it doesn't matter if they come from different portions of your municipality's code.** DEC benefits from knowing the whole structure of your community's tree management, so the more exhaustive your documentation is, the better.

Last year, ADF added fields where folks could **paste relevant portions of their community's tree ordinance for us to see without having to dig through your entire ordinance**. This is the best way to show us exactly how your ordinance fulfills the requirements of Standard 2. We still like to have all code relevant to trees uploaded to your application, but you can make it easy for us to see whether or not you pass the requirement using these fields. We then look at ordinances more exhaustively later, to see trends in tree ordinances and try to advise communities accordingly.

Use those fields to show us language from your ordinance which:

- **Designates or establishes the body (or bodies) in charge of trees** in the municipality (it must be explicit)

- Provides **clear guidance** for planting/removing/maintaining **public** trees.
    - o These are municipal-wide laws, as opposed to a policy which applies to one park or one zone, for example.
    - o And this is **not something temporary**, or even something which is decided annually like an “annual tree care plan” passed by the tree board each year. Standard 2 specifically requires that your permanent municipal code contains legal tree care guidance. This may include prohibitions on harming trees, requirements of how public trees must be planted/removed/maintained, etc.
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### **Standard 3: \$2 per capita committed to trees**

This is self-reported so we rely on you all to provide accurate information. We use this information to understand where municipalities’ strengths and needs are across the state, so please do your best to provide the most thorough yet relevant information to us.

When inputting the dollar amounts into the application, just watch everything to make sure your math is right, and if you have it, upload the supporting documentation which shows us where that spending came from in your municipal budget. Again, that is extremely valuable information to us, to see what ways municipalities have managed to get trees into their budget so that we can reevaluate our programming.

If you’re not sure what exactly constitutes a “tree expenditure”, just take a look at ADF’s [document of what counts on their website](#). There is a pretty wide variety on there, so if you think you’re cutting it close to the \$2 per capita, you might want to look at that document to see if there is anything else you weren’t counting.

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### **Standard 4: Arbor Day celebration and proclamation**

Really make sure your documentation is right on this one. Some quick reminders first of all:

- **This is asking about the Arbor Day you held in the current calendar year, not the one you are planning for next year!!!!** If the date is wrong, we will have to ask you for edits, which can delay or prevent the acceptance of your application.
- You must fulfill both portions of this requirement **every year** you apply for Tree City.

#### **Celebration notes:**

ADF wants to see how you celebrated Arbor Day in your community. They are flexible about what that looks like. For example, they accept social media campaigns, public tree plantings, volunteer days, tree giveaways, and more.

They are not flexible, however, about it being specifically focused on trees. **AN EARTH DAY CELEBRATION DOES NOT COUNT**, as far as ADF is concerned. You must show exactly how you celebrated Arbor Day and trees. They will reject applications for this. *(they're the Arbor Day Foundation, their goal is to promote Arbor Day, so they rarely budge on this)*

In your application, make sure we can see exactly how and when your community celebrated Arbor Day in the last year. **Provide a description**, either in a word document or directly in the application, and **then separately upload pictures, a program, screenshots, a news article, or whatever** you have that reiterates your description to ADF.

### **Proclamation notes:**

This is a semi-legal document that a municipal govt establishes, to formally declare a certain date as Arbor Day in the community. Sometimes the mayor signs it and publicizes it, sometimes a town board might vote on a proclamation in a board meeting because they like the public statement. Sometimes, the Town Clerk might just take care of it and get the mayor's signature. However your municipality does it, make sure that:

- It is **signed** by the appropriate official(s)
- It is **dated** with the correct date, within the current calendar year
- The date matches the date of your celebration (or at least mention in your description why they don't match)

**A missing signature or a wrong date is by far the most common mistake on Tree City applications.**

Don't let this simple piece of paperwork be the reason your application is delayed or rejected!!!!!!!!!!!!!!