



*A Phased Demolition, Planting and Growing Project*

By the City of Utica Parks Department  
in partnership with  
The Elm Research Institute



City of Utica Parks Department  
New York State Urban and Forestry Council, ReLeaf Region 6  
Elm Research Institute

**Lost Pride**



1431 Genesee Street looking north.

Like in many older cities across the United States, Utica’s main street, Genesee Street, once proudly displayed a dense canopy of American Elm, *Ulmus americana*. This native tree was favored for its fast growth and vase-like branching habit, which allowed for optimal shaping within an aerial utility environment. Unfortunately, an outbreak of Dutch Elm Disease took tree after tree, destroying this urban forest and the street’s appearance. It seems this event also came to symbolize the decay of the city and its loss of economic vigor.

No tree replacement candidate was promoted by the greater landscape industry, because it was unable to recommend a single species that cities could significantly invest in like the elm. As a result, many different tree species were planted with little knowledge of their street tree suitability. This left today’s Genesee Street with a chaotic appearance, having trees of all different forms, heights and character.

**Evolution of Liberty’s For Genesee Project**

The Liberty’s For Genesee Project had its genesis in 2002, when the Elm Research Institute (ERI) of Keene, New Hampshire contacted David Short, City of Utica Parks Commissioner. ERI previously donated what they observed to be disease-resistant American Liberty Elm (*Ulmus americana libertas*) seedlings to a Utica Boy Scout Troop in 1984. This troop was participating in ERI’s Johnny Elmseed Project in an effort to reintroduce elms to the urban landscape. ERI contacted Commissioner Short to get an evaluation of the surviving elms eighteen years after planting.

Commissioner Short enlisted the help of Jim Chanatry, RLA, a landscape architect with significant streetscape project experience, in conducting the evaluation. Both were excited by the vigor of the remaining elms and believed the trees success in Utica was the evidence they needed to champion an effort to restore the Genesee Street’s elegant landscape and “pumprime” the city’s reinvestment in its urban forest.

In the spring of 2003, Commissioner Short and Mr. Chanatry traveled to Keene, New Hampshire to see the ERI nursery. They toured the facility and saw how the American Liberty Elms were propagated.



1420 Genesee Street looking north.

That day, the city purchased six of these disease-resistant trees. Funds came from the Parks Department’s operational budget. Later that spring, they were planted on Genesee Street in South Utica. The site was chosen because there were no existing street trees to remove and there were few physical conflicts. The trees were containerized, which allowed for greater ease in transportation and installation. This initial planting was a test to see how well the trees would grow and to measure public support. The trees did very well and the planting was considered a success. All six trees remained vigorous and undamaged by the end of the first year.

The great success of this planting gave the city the confidence to plant six more trees the following year, which became Phase II of the Liberty’s For Genesee Project. Site selection criteria remained the same as for the previous planting. Once again, funds to purchase the trees came from the Parks Department’s operational budget. Citizens began to notice and inquire about the new trees. They were very pleased with the project as many remembered the beauty of Genesee Street when the elms were abundant. Like the Phase I planting, these trees remain healthy and undamaged.

Phase III began in the fall of 2005 with the planting of fifteen additional trees. These trees were purchased through a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Urban and Community Forestry Program grant. More difficult site conditions for this planting warranted larger, heartier trees. The American Liberty Elms selected for this phase were field-grown trees later containerized at the ERI nursery. The future of these trees remains uncertain; while they were healthy at the time of purchase, they lacked the desired form and root-ball size. At this time, all trees from Phases I and II remain very healthy and undamaged; the Phase III planting has yet to grow on-site for a full growing season and cannot yet be evaluated for its success.

**A Phased Approach**

With realized success and public support, the City of Utica decided to formalize the Liberty’s For Genesee Project into a ten-year phased project.

PHASE	YEAR	SITE	PLAN
IV	2007	1600 Block of Elm Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop nursery</li> <li>▪ Purchase 35 √ ERI seedlings</li> </ul>
V	2008	Woodlawn Avenue to North of Beverly Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Purchase and plant 35 √ contract-grown trees</li> </ul>
VI	2009	North of Beverly Place to Amy Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Purchase and plant 35 √ contract-grown trees</li> </ul>
VII	2010	Amy Avenue to Emerson Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Purchase and plant 35 √ contract-grown trees</li> </ul>
VIII	2011	Clinton Place to Oneida Square	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Purchase and plant 35 √ contract-grown trees</li> </ul>
IX	2012	Emerson Avenue to Springate Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Purchase and plant 35 √ contract-grown trees</li> </ul>
X	2013	Springate Street to Clinton Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Purchase and plant 35 √ contract-grown trees</li> <li>▪ Plant seedlings</li> <li>▪ Cap project</li> </ul>



conflict with utility poles or on narrow stretches of lawn. Other factors in the assessment included budget, transportability and transplantability.

It was decided a tree specification would be written that would be given to the ERI Grower. This would ensure the city would be provided an affordable, transportable, transplantable tree with a great chance for vigorous survival. This “Grow to Order” specification is as follows:

Caliper:	2” measured at 6” above soil level
Height:	10’ – 12’
Trunk Clearance:	2008 crop - 3’ – 5’ of clear trunk, regular whorled branching 2009-2012 crops - 3’ of clear trunk
Container Size:	(18”x24”x18½”), 27.5 gallons
Grade:	1
Delivery Expectations:	April of each planting year

These trees, along with planting materials, will cost an average of \$190 per tree if purchased on a pre-pay “Grow to Order” schedule. After reviewing the construction suitability assessment and planting specification, it was determined that 205 trees would be planted at 50’ intervals. This means a total investment in trees and planting materials of \$38,950; this does not include transportation, labor and equipment costs. The financial support of local and state government and the continued partnership with ERI will be necessary for the successful completion of the project.

At this time, ERI is the sole source of the American Liberty Elm. Other communities might consider a different disease-resistant elm or a different grower. The City of Utica believes ERI’s American Liberty Elm to be the best choice, after observing first-hand ERI’s success cultivating the elm and the trees own success here in the city.

**Growing**

One of the unique benefits of doing business with ERI is their Matching Tree Grant Program. When you purchase trees from ERI, they provide a “dividend” in the form of free trees (for more information, please go to [www.libertyelm.com](http://www.libertyelm.com)). In Phase III, the City of Utica received a dividend of three seedlings for every 2” to 2¼” caliper-sized tree the city purchased. Because the city wishes to place trees of similar size and condition within the streetscape, do so within budgetary limitations and now has seedlings available for planting, it begs the development of a small city nursery.

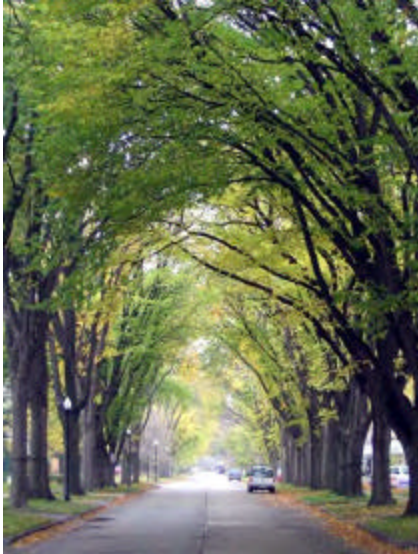
The perfect site for a nursery became available under some unusual circumstances. Property at 1620 Elm Street, already owned by the City of Utica Urban Renewal Agency, was destroyed by arson. The site was cleared and is now vacant land. The Elm Street Nursery would be aptly named and in an ideal location; it would sit directly across the street from Watson-Williams Elementary School. As children are “seedlings” themselves, it seems only appropriate to locate a tree nursery in this spot. It will serve an additional purpose as an educational resource for the area’s schoolchildren.

Construction began in 2005, but was halted due to legal issues; the completion of the Liberty's For Genesee Project is dependant upon the nursery's success. In the final phase of the project, the trees cultivated in the nursery will be the last trees planted at no additional cost to the city.

**Hope for the Future**

Once upon a time, Utica was known for its beautiful parks and tree-lined streets. The elm tree was an icon of elegance, grace and strength. When the city was thriving, the elms were thriving – or was it the other way around?

According to the New York State Urban Forestry Council, the positive effects trees have on human health and well-being are numerous. Studies have found that exposure to trees reduces the symptoms of stress and depression, can aid in recovery from surgery, and reduce the incidence of domestic violence. People are more likely to exercise if parks are nearby. When people utilize parks and shady, tree-lined streets, they are more likely to meet and establish bonds with their neighbors, and create a sense of community. When people enjoy spending time in their neighborhoods, they develop pride and a sense of ownership in their communities. Studies also show that trees improve air and water quality, reduce flooding, reduce cooling and heating energy needs, increase property values and improve the quality of life for people around them.



Elm tree-lined street in Fargo, North Dakota.

It is our great hope this project will restore the majesty and dignity the elms give to the city and in turn, bring back a sense of community, high quality of life and a pride lost long ago.

**Public Involvement Process**

Beginning April 1, 2007, the Liberty's For Genesee Project plans and written details will be on display in the Utica Public Library's 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Gallery for 30 days. It is hoped that the public will embrace the vision offered by the Liberty's For Genesee Project, which our city richly deserves. All city residents are encouraged to review the project and provide comments while it's on display.

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For in the true nature of things, if we rightly consider, every green tree is far more glorious than if it were made of gold and silver.

~Martin Luther