



The Advantages of Tree-Lined Development

Exploring the Benefits of Including Trees in an Urban Development Project

Overview

Perhaps the most recognized and impressive denizens of the outdoors are trees. Trees are shown to have positive effects on the environment, but for some people, they signal costly maintenance and unnecessary expenses. Not only do trees increase the desirability of a building, but they can save owners money too; however, the majority of new development projects neglect to include treelines as a potential feature of their property. While it is true that tree debris cleanup takes time and fallen limbs or whole trees present additional removal and repair costs, the benefits of trees outweigh the drawbacks.

Added Income

Trees are the largest indicator of a residence's attractiveness to potential buyers or renters¹, and they dramatically increase the public desirability of a building. In addition to providing people with safer walking environments and general serenity, trees can reduce the noise on a property by 3-5db while distracting from other less attractive site characteristics. For this reason, property values for buildings with trees can jump by as much as 15%² while landlords see an increase in rent. Shops and offices on tree-lined streets tend to pay 7% higher rent than the market average, adding up to around an extra month of rental income each year.³

Low Principle

It's commonly thought that trees are too expensive to be a worthwhile project investment; however, tree expenses are more than reasonable when considering most projects' budgets with the additional 7% rent or 15% higher sale price. The average cost to plant a young tree, labor included, is around \$400.⁴ For urban or suburban projects, the costs of planting a treeline are offset by the increased rent from their developments in under a year. Trees typically pay their sticker price and easily offset their added planning cost over time. Trees also fit nicely on required setbacks for buildings, adding aesthetic and financial upside to land that would otherwise sit idle.

Savings

The most obvious cost savings provided by trees is in climate control. Tree shade significantly contributes to reduced energy costs during warmer months – to the tune of up to 35% in hot months and an average of about 7% over the course of a year.^{5, 6} Other benefits include extended exterior material life and stormwater management. Materials shaded by tree canopies experience less severe freeze/thaw cycles than those left in the sun. For example, one California study found that parking lot surfaces with tree cover lasted 65% longer than those without.⁷ Trees also

reduce stormwater runoff and the risk of flooding by absorbing approximately 30% or precipitation through their leaves and another 30% through their roots.⁷

Drawbacks

On the other hand, the arguments against trees have merit. Trees – even newly planted young trees – take up space on property that can be used for other buildings or parking, which can mean less investment opportunity for developers. As trees grow, nearby streets, curbs, and sidewalks may need to be repaved to accommodate the size, or the trees may need to be removed altogether. Older trees should be evaluated for dead or rotting limbs that can cause damage during high winds and storms. The subsequent removal of trees and debris can be costly, especially in terms of property damage that may not be covered by insurance.

Businesses located on tree-lined streets can generate up to 20% more income than ones located elsewhere.⁶

Summary

The cost of planting and maintaining trees provides savings that should have owners and developers incorporating treelines into their development plans. While trees can increase a building's lifespan, reduce strain on HVAC and water systems, and increase property and rental values, trees also help people feel less stressed and depressed.⁸

Citations

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