

## **Contracting Tree Maintenance Services**

Information provided by Gerry Bates, Community Forestry Assistant

How a community implements its tree maintenance program depends on many factors. Many small communities simply don't have the budget or the tree work necessary to justify employing a full time arborist. Larger communities may require the services of a professional arborist because of emergencies such as storm damage, or perhaps a large project that surpasses the capabilities of the city staff. For cities that do not have their own tree care staff, contracting with local arborists is a better alternative than giving an untrained employee the responsibility for the care of publicly owned trees. Contracting may also lower tree care costs by eliminating expenses such as salary, benefits, insurance, and tree care training for employees. It will also reduce equipment cost for vehicles and tree trimming equipment.

Bidding procedures and requirements should be clearly stated. Bid specifications may be written so loosely that poor quality work meets contract specifications, or they may be written so restrictively that no one will bid on the contract. Determine the exact quantity of work to be done. Be sure to state the deadline for receiving bids, the date, time and place of bid opening, and whether or not a performance bond will be required. Insist that a contractor provide certificates for workman's compensation, general liability, and accident insurance coverage. In some circumstances, a community can be financially responsible if an uninsured worker is hurt on city property, or if damage is done to a residents property. Many cities require that tree work be performed only by a certified arborist to insure that only accepted practices will be performed. Always ask for at least three references of work performed locally and take time to check the references. Consider holding a pre-bid meeting. This will provide city representatives and contractors an opportunity to discuss the work to be done and eliminate any misunderstandings. It is a good idea to show prospective bidders examples of acceptable and unacceptable work at this time. Contractors who are well informed about the job will be more competitive in their bids and do a better job.

Once bid specifications are prepared, a request for bids is advertised in the community's newspaper. This is a legal requirement. Don't rely on this media source as the only form of advertising to attract qualified bidders. Contact other cities and ask who has done good work for them. Look in the yellow pages for tree care providers who advertise themselves as *ISA Certified Arborists* and call them. Advertise as early as possible to allow contractors time to review the bid specifications and submit competitive bids.

The purpose of a contract is to get a qualified contractor to do quality work at the lowest price. Examine the low bid to be sure the contractor is responsive to the bid specifications. Does he have the crew and equipment necessary to do the job? The contract should state that all costs incurred in the performance of the contract are the contractor's responsibility. The contractor should also be responsible for all safety conditions involved on the job. He should be responsible for locating and notifying all utilities of work to be done. It is very important for the contractor to restore the work area to its pre-work condition, including soil and grass over removed stumps, damage to sprinklers, shrubbery, and property. He must also possess any licenses and permits required by state, county, or city governments. Successful contracting requires supervision of the contractor, giving feedback to him, and documentation to allow for the modification of future contracts. Be willing to understand the contractor's point of view and give him the chance to correct deficiencies. Complete a written assessment of the contractor's performance upon completion of the contract and share it with him.

If a dispute does arise, be prepared to ask an expert to determine the quality of work before you pay the bill. This person could be a consulting arborist, an urban forester from another city, a park or utility arborist, or similar specialist who is not in competition with the contractor hired to do the job. Trees are an important asset to the community and their proper care and maintenance are vital to their health, beauty and longer life.

Worthy Quote: "Experience is what you get when you don't get what you wanted".

"People may forget how fast you did a job, but they will remember how well you did it."