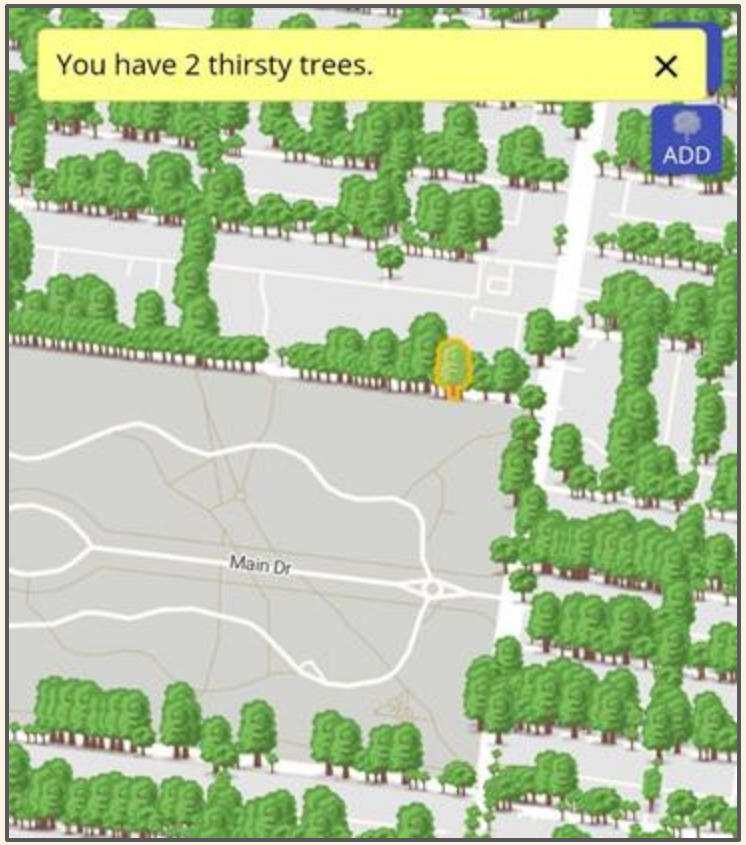
Tech-Enabled Neighborhood Volunteer Tree Care



PRESENTED BY

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Our Brief History

- 2019 - Consulted professionals, organized first events
- 2020 - Covid pause
- 2021 - Incorporated as 501(c)(3)
- 2022 - Pilot project, MetroTreeLC development
- 2023 - Additional neighborhoods join, MetroTreeLC goes live
- 2024 - First MO Dept. of Conservation grant, 1st AmeriCorps VISTA member.
- 2025 - 3 more AmeriCorps VISTA members, effort to formalize program begins
- 2026 - New local partnerships established, funding secured to improve MetroTreeLC!



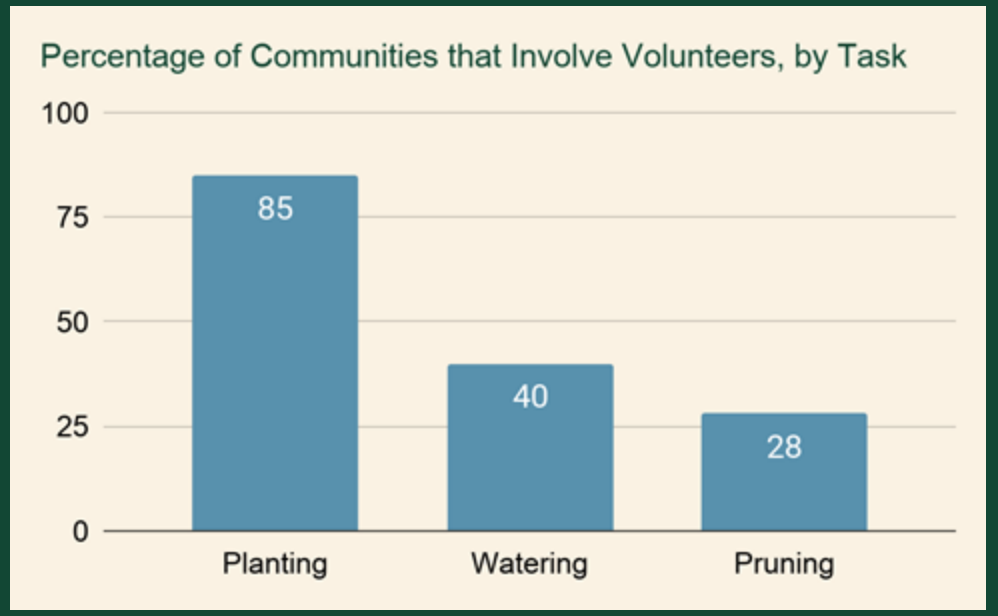


Volunteer Programs

65%

of communities involved volunteers in tree activities

Routine care is key to reducing urban tree mortality rates, and volunteers can help, but most municipalities surveyed did not engage volunteers beyond tree planting.



Hauer RJ, Timilsina N, Vogt J, Fischer BC, Wirtz Z. 2018. A volunteer and partnership baseline for municipal forestry activity in the United States. Arboriculture & Urban Forestry. 44(2):87–100. https://doi.org/10.48044/jauf.2018.008

Some Cities Have (A Version of) The Answer

Tree Tenders - Philadelphia Horticultural Society (1993), Trees Atlanta (1985), Casey Trees (2001), Tree People (1973), Openlands (1963), Trees NYC (1976), etc.

Most Cities Don’t

- Staffing community forestry programs, especially organizing volunteers, can be prohibitively expensive.
- Municipal budgets and external funding sources for urban forestry are highly variable.
- Developing institutional knowledge and capacity within a new NPO takes a long time.
- Primary volunteer activity in many cities remains tree planting.

Trees Are A Mystery

Even for Most People Who Love Trees

- What is “normal”, “natural” for a tree?
- Counter intuitive tree biology - beloved, “healthy” tree suddenly dies
- Impacts of care/neglect aren’t visible in short-term
- Assumption that trees take care of themselves!

Residents need **Key Knowledge** about trees and **Support** to provide proper care.



Tree Tech is Out There

for People Who Already Love Trees

Healthy Trees Healthy Cities (HTHC), iTree, My City's Trees, TreePlotter, etc have **important functionality.**

With staff support and trainings, they are great tools!

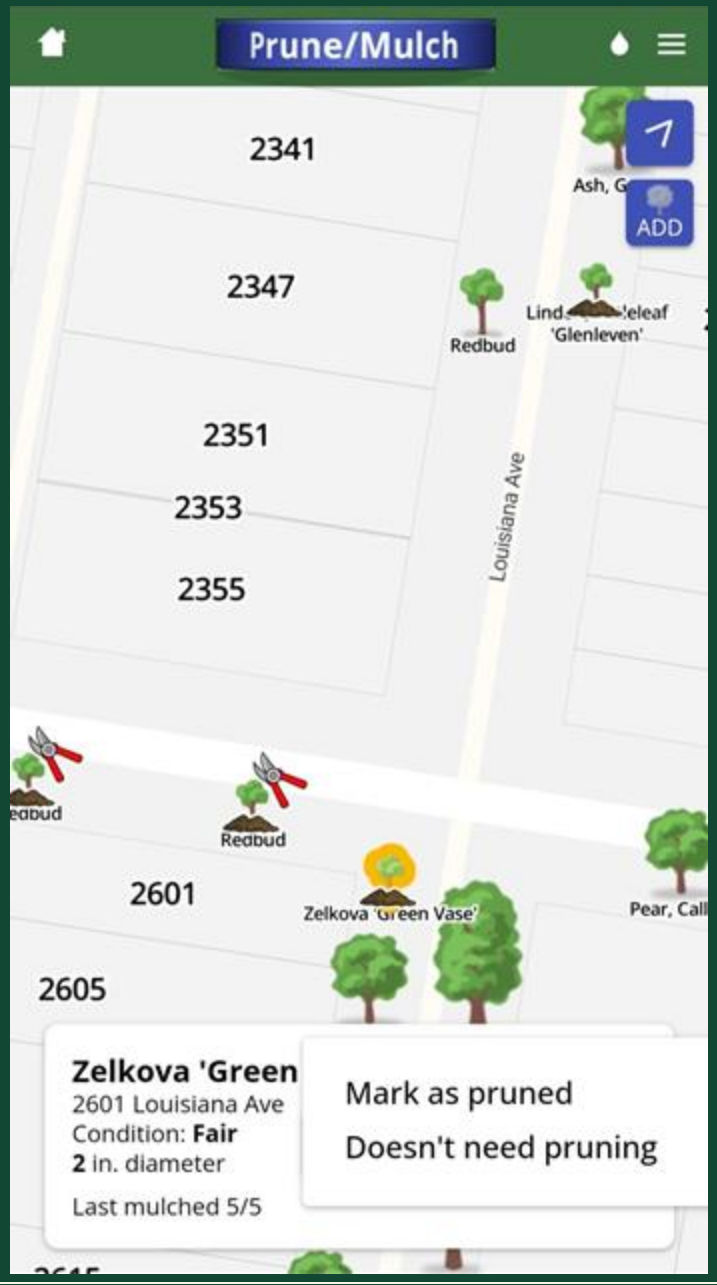
Unfortunately, They Don’t

- Provide a supportive, guided experience
- Prioritize intuitive/engaging interfaces
- Encourage continued use, skill building

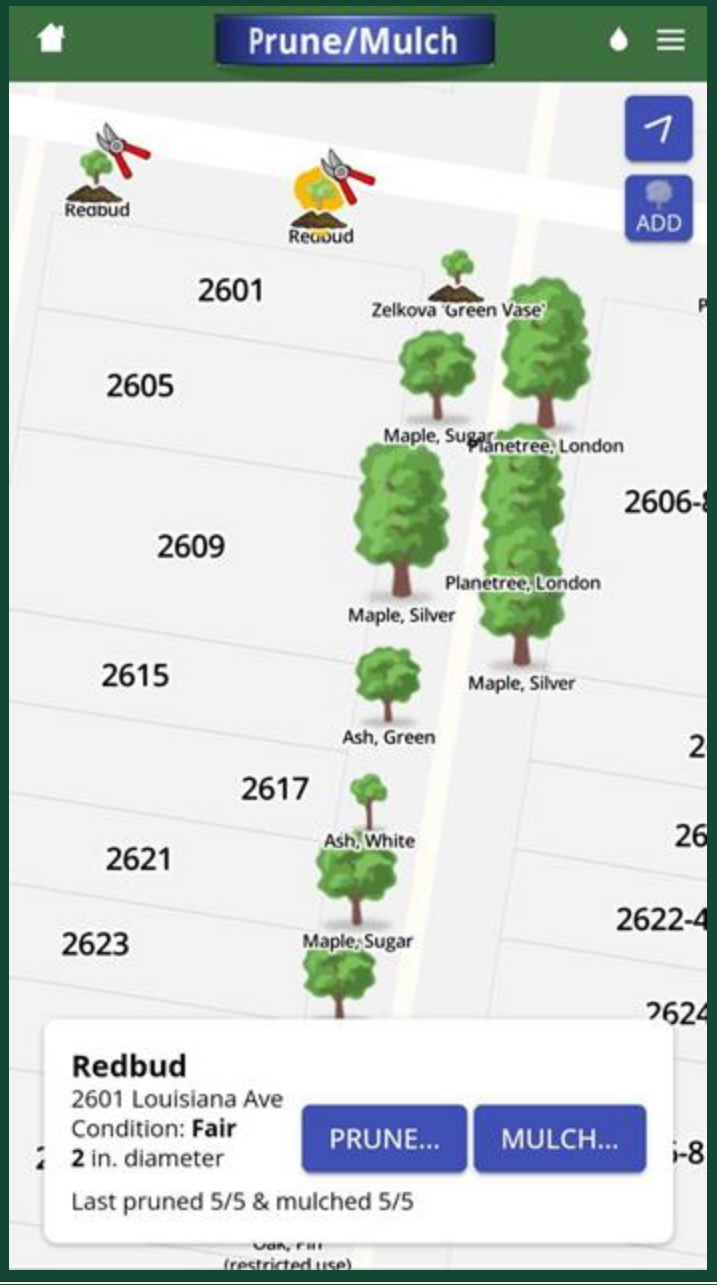
We need **key functionality** tied together for users into a **clear, enjoyable learning path** with **goals and metrics to motivate them**.



Tracking Tree Care

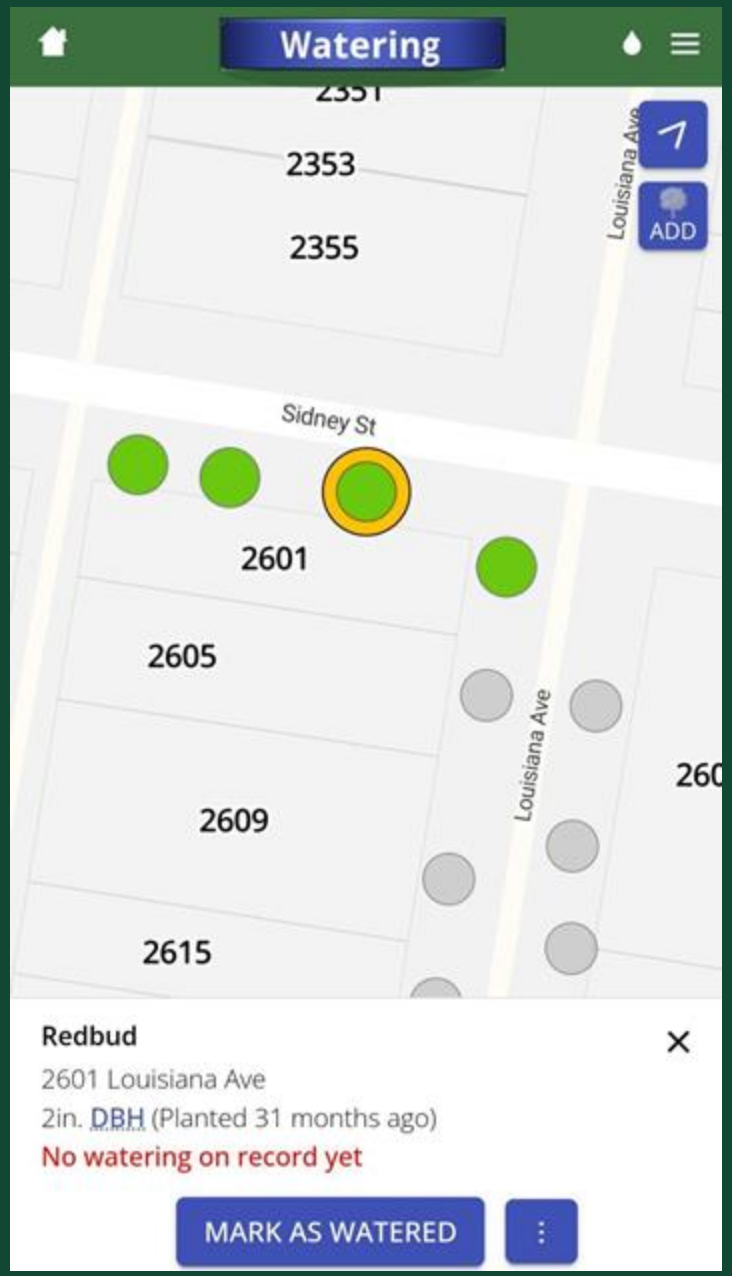






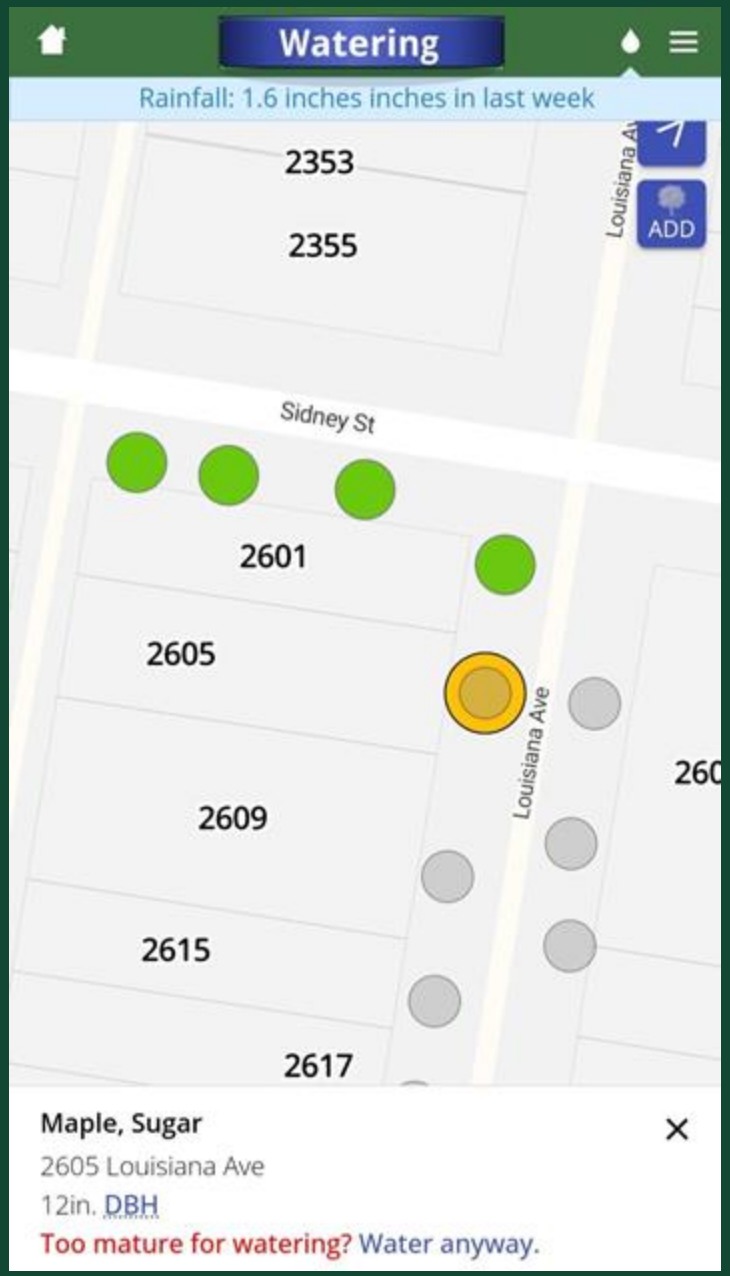
MetroTreeLC.org

More Visible Watering Needs





MetroTreeLC.org



Dream Volunteer Tree App

One integrated, enjoyable stewardship tool to support long-term volunteer development with the following

- Learning paths leading to organizational credentials and green job opportunities
- Automated reminders for routine care tasks
- Pruning guidance and best practice reminders including to assess and document CODIT progress
- Prominent, gamified metrics to encourage citizen science and refinement of volunteer practices
- Connection to city service request systems and municipal contacts

There is no reason this and more should be impossible; we just need the vision to invest in new ways of connecting.



Our Long-term Vision

With more volunteer-friendly technology to support engagement and learning, perhaps we could

- Get more volunteers to expand their involvement beyond just(!) tree planting
- Motivate residents in every neighborhood to
  - Provide some basic care
  - Know who/when to ask for help
  - Advocate for trees
- Normalize routine, basic tree care as a neighborhood volunteer activity much like litter cleanups and flower plantings



Key Takeaways

- Volunteers are needed in urban forestry, but building volunteers' tree care capacity is difficult.
- Volunteers need education and encouragement, but meaningful staff support is often prohibitively expensive.
- Appropriately designed software can help fill this need in order to grow volunteer impact. Let's get to it!





Thank you.

Connect to provide feedback or discuss collaborating on app development!

Please email me at erin@stlnf.org