



FROM WASTE TO WEALTH:

CREATING JOBS, CAPTURING CARBON, AND BUILDING AN URBAN WOOD MARKETPLACE

Memphis Unleashed

All eyes could soon be on Memphis (the hardwood tree capital of the U.S.) as it kicks off a biomass campus that salvages tons of wood. Memphis Urban Wood will reclaim some of this wood “waste” from all corners of the urban area.

Some Background: Tennessee’s mild climate is ideal for shade trees such as oaks, maple, poplar, pecan and more. Memphis and Shelby County’s combined tree canopy is significant; however, when trees in urban areas, or the intersection of rural and urban areas, are damaged and lose their structural integrity (i.e., become dangerous due to storms or disease) they must be removed. Trees in urbanized areas like Memphis are also removed because of utility line clearance, competition for sunlight, construction and more.

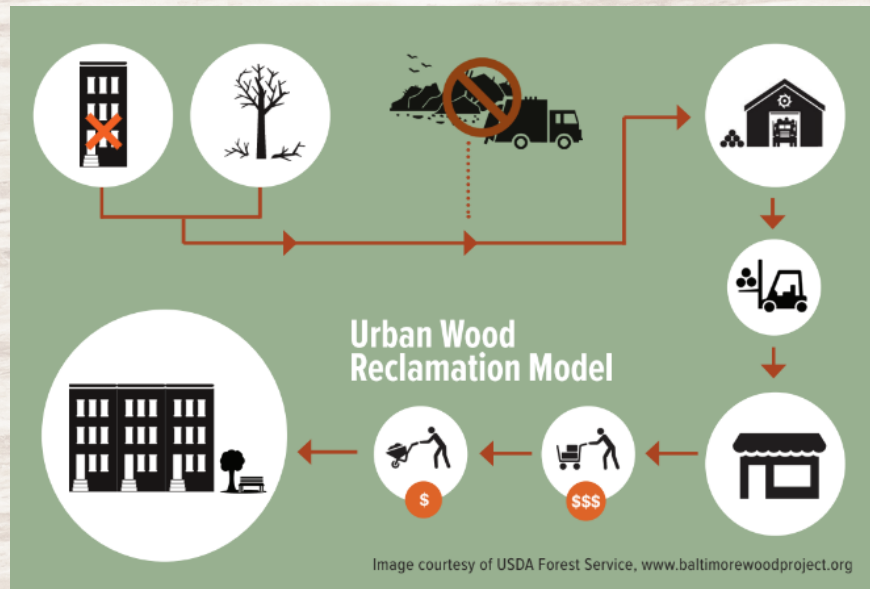
Most of these downed trees, many with large diameter trunks, currently go to the Shelby County landfills. As they rot, they release carbon, a greenhouse gas contributing to climate change, back into the atmosphere. Memphis Urban Wood, co-led by the local Memphis community development organization, The Works, Inc. and Urban Wood Economy (a national nonprofit), redirects trees and tree debris from local landfills into a circular business model turning “waste” into valuable lumber and other carbon capturing products at our zero waste facility.



“This is a time for us to move beyond sustainability and build systems that are regenerative. We need to take our cue from Mother Nature and ensure we leave no waste. We need to leave things better than we found them.”

—JEFF CARROLL, CEO OF URBAN WOOD ECONOMY





Memphis Connections & Benefits

- Creating an urban wood reutilization model that transforms fallen urban and suburban trees into wood flooring, bookcases—or even guitars—requires building connections between local Memphis tree care companies, sawmills, and regional or even national buyers.
- With commitment from local businesses as well as state and federal partners, this urban wood reutilization project will also help with tree management at the intersection of forests and urbanized areas (wildland urban interface) where fallen trees can be a fire hazard.
- Even the tons of branch and leaf materials not suitable for lumber will be used for biochar production* resulting in a near-zero wood waste stream.
- The increase in catastrophic weather events impacting towns and cities means more trees are coming down, making an efficient urban wood utilization program even more important.
- Closing the circular economy, revenue created by reclaimed urban wood will fund new native tree plantings and tree maintenance in communities across Shelby County.

*Biochar is the production of charcoal-like substance made in this case from “waste” woody tree debris (by a baking process without oxygen called pyrolysis). Biochar has many positive uses including soil amendments, water filtration and more.

SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL & ECONOMIC IMPACTS FOR MEMPHIS INCLUDE:

- A reduced carbon footprint by storing carbon in durable products such as furniture, flooring or guitars
- An urban wood economic engine that creates jobs for Memphis residents (with wrap-around workplace training), especially those from the most disenfranchised neighborhoods
- A revenue stream to fund tree planting and maintenance in marginalized neighborhoods, improving health and equity outcomes for all residents; recent Memphis tree canopy assessments show a decline that negatively impacts public health



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