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America is a culture of extremes in many ways; the biggest and the smallest, the best and the worst are all there, often side by side, and trees are not excluded from the mix. In February, David Cashman **MICFor** and I, both Directors of Barrell Tree Consultancy, delivered our first US workshop on using the TreeAZ method of tree assessment (www.TreeAZ.com) to the International Society of Arboriculture Ohio Tree Care Conference. During our stay, we explored the US approach to managing trees in the community and found some interesting contrasts to the UK.



Missed opportunities: US business is not taking tree planting seriously, evidenced by an abundance of dead and dying trees in the Columbus metropolitan area

Our most striking observation was the impact of the different planning philosophies of the two countries. As we all know, the UK is highly regulated with a national, plan-led approach to land management. We have a strong emphasis on balancing the interests of the individual against those of the wider community that, on the whole, controls

development in the best interest of the majority. This has prevented urban sprawl and provided a national focus on efficiently using land within urban boundaries. Sustainability is a thread of UK planning that was always present, but is rapidly gaining prominence as the reality of global warming sinks in.



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Street design in downtown Columbus, Ohio, includes new trees with below-ground preparation and enhanced rainwater buffering through the use of shrub planting (within the black railings)

In America, individuals' property rights seem to permeate and dominate the whole society. This mindset also extends to the business sector where profit has an obvious priority over sustainability. We noticed that big business has a powerful grip on development, with municipalities often struggling to exert sufficient influence in the best interests of the wider community.

We investigated whether these social inclinations had affected the distribution and quality of the tree cover in our host city by driving and walking the streets. A review on Google Earth confirmed a staggering contrast between public and privately

owned tree cover. The City of Columbus has a well-established street tree planting and maintenance plan; it really is taking green infrastructure seriously and investing in trees for the community. We saw whole streets being dug up and redesigned to incorporate sustainable urban drainage, with large trees as an integral component.

In stark contrast, there was car park after car park with vast expanses of surfacing and either no trees or trees that were as good as dead. Some were pay-to-park facilities and others were servicing commercial and retail premises. All were corporately owned and very few came close to matching



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the quality or quantity of the surrounding municipal urban tree resource. The strong cultural emphasis on putting self-interest ahead of community wellbeing and a dominant business philosophy of putting profits ahead of sustainability was obviously impacting on urban canopy cover.

Even more worrying was the willing platform given to the climate change sceptics and a general lack of awareness of the emerging peril.

Indeed, not one person we asked knew about Copenhagen or its implications for our consuming lifestyles. In the snow of Ohio, global warming seems a distant irrelevance and the wake-up call has not yet sounded.

Back in the UK, it is easy to complain of over-regulation and be anxious about the inevitable changes needed to survive. It's obviously going to be tough, but from what we've seen, the UK is in better shape than we thought.