



Staff Report

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Date: 5/22/2023

Item #:

TO: Mayor and City Council
THROUGH: Keith Stahley, City Manager
FROM: Brian D. Martin, PE, Acting Public Works Director

SUBJECT:

Application for a grant with the USDA Forest Service Urban & Community Forestry Grants Program to build a more resilient and equitable tree canopy in Salem.

Ward(s): 1, 2, 3, 5, 6

Councilor(s): Stapleton, Nishioka, Phillips, Gonzalez, Hoy

Neighborhood(s): Northgate, Highland, NOLA, ELNA, NESCA, NEN, Grant, SESNA, Morningside, SEMCA, West Salem

Result Area(s): Natural Environment Stewardship; Welcoming and Livable Community

SUMMARY:

The USDA Forest Service is providing up to \$1 billion in grant funding to urban communities to provide multiyear, programmatic, competitive grants for tree planting and related activities. Staff are developing a grant proposal to fund a tree equity and resilience program with two interrelated program components that collectively serve to support and enhance existing plans and programs. These program components include: 1) a community institution and school planting program, and 2) an urban and community forestry (UCF) apprenticeship program. Staff further propose that these programs will be focused 100 percent in disadvantaged communities, as mapped using specified tools in the grant guidance documents, which would qualify the proposal for a full waiver of match requirements.

ISSUE:

Shall City Council authorize the City Manager to apply for and, if successful, enter into agreements with USDA Forest Service and accept an Urban and Community Forestry Grant for an amount up to \$9,000,000 to develop programs that help to build a more resilient and equitable tree canopy in Salem?

RECOMMENDATION:

Authorize the City Manager to apply for and, if successful, enter into agreements with USDA Forest Service and accept an Urban and Community Forestry Grant for an amount up to \$9,000,000 to develop programs that help to build a more resilient and equitable tree canopy in Salem.

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program (UCF Program) is soliciting applications from eligible entities that are working to provide equitable access to trees and green spaces and the benefits they provide. Under the Inflation Reduction Act, this federal program will support urban tree planting, urban forest planning and management, and related activities. Through a competitive grant process, communities and organizations across the nation can obtain funding for tree-related programs in urban areas that benefit underserved populations, increase equitable access to urban tree canopy and associated benefits, broaden engagement in local urban forest planning, and improve resilience to climate change, pests, and extreme weather events. The minimum funding request through this program is \$100,000 and the maximum is \$50 million.

The UCF Program prioritizes funding for proposals that benefit disadvantaged communities by offering a match waiver for proposals that deliver 100 percent of the funding and program benefits to disadvantaged communities. The standard match requirement without a waiver is one-to-one (or dollar for dollar). Staff are pursuing the match waiver by focusing the new programs 100 percent in disadvantaged communities, as mapped using specified tools in the grant guidance documents.

All grants awarded will have a five-year term and will need to demonstrate substantial progress within the first year. Grant proposals are due by June 1, 2023. Award notifications are anticipated to occur in late summer/early fall. Timing of distribution of fund for successful proposals is uncertain, and it may be necessary to return to Council with a mid-budget-year project request if the grant is awarded.

Staff is recommending submitting one grant application for building a more resilient and equitable tree canopy in Salem that includes two interrelated program components. These program components build on and fill gaps in our existing urban and community forestry program and address goals and strategies in both Salem's Community Forestry Strategic Plan and Climate Action Plan. Each of these program components are described below:

Community Institutions & School Planting Program

This new program would focus on providing assistance to schools, churches, and similar property owners in low income and low canopy areas in Salem to preserve and increase tree canopy cover on their properties. The grant would subsidize the cost of a Program Coordinator. The Program Coordinator would work with trained apprentices (see "Urban and Community Forestry Apprenticeship Program" below) to collaborate with property owners and caretakers to identify planting locations, hire private contractors to address problematic or hazardous trees, acquire and plant new trees, and assist with maintenance and monitoring tree health. This program will require substantial targeted outreach to identify willing

participants, develop the UCF Apprenticeship Program, and manage agreements with local nurseries and contractors. The Program Coordinator would create curriculum for schools and work closely with schools such as Salem Keizer Public Schools to implement this material in conjunction with implementation of tree planting and maintenance. The anticipated 5-year cost of this component of the proposal is \$5,500,000.

Urban and Community Forestry Apprenticeship Program

The Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Apprenticeship program would recruit candidates from local schools and other community partners to work for the City under the guidance of the Salem Urban Forestry Division and Parks & Natural Resources Planning. Through this program, apprentices would learn all facets of arboriculture and urban forestry and work with staff to increase their knowledge over the course of the internship, with a goal to become ISA Certified Arborists. Apprentices would work to identify and overcome barriers to establishing and maintaining tree canopy in disadvantaged communities with low canopy, engage with local residents and private property owners, and provide support to the City's Yard Tree Pilot Program. The anticipated cost for this component of the proposal is \$3,500,000 to fund 5 apprenticeship positions for 5 years.

Staff are recommending that these programs focus exclusively in Salem's disadvantaged communities, which overlap with most of the City's lowest canopy areas. Government sources to be used for identifying disadvantaged communities and areas include the White House Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), EPA Environmental Justice and Screening Mapping Tool (EJScreen), EPA EnviroAtlas Interactive Map, Opportunity Zones, or other government sponsored tools referenced in the grant program materials. On initial review of these sources, disadvantaged communities are primarily located in Wards 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6.

The proposed enhancement program is consistent with goals and actions described in Salem's Community Forestry Strategic Plan (Goals 1, 2, and 4) and Climate Action Plan (Strategies NR-10, NR-13, and NR-16), as well as the Clean Streams Initiative, Stormwater Management Plan, and Temperature Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Implementation Plan since trees and tree canopy are directly correlated with stormwater management, water quality, and stream flows.

BACKGROUND:

The City conducts an urban tree canopy assessment every 10 years to calculate percent tree canopy cover, identify low canopy areas, and set new canopy goals. Natural Resources and Urban Forestry staff utilize the tree canopy assessment data and the City's tree inventory to coordinate locations for each planting season and direct staff and contractors to plant in sites within low canopy areas and underserved neighborhoods to assist with meeting canopy goals.

The City currently has a number of tree planting programs, some of which focus on streamside canopy and are part of the City's Total Maximum Daily Load implementation plan for temperature, and others that focus more broadly on low canopy areas. The latter includes our Neighborhood Trees Program (via contract with Friends of Trees) and the Urban Forestry Division's tree planting efforts

(including both in-house planting and planting accomplished through a contract with Treecology). These programs all focus on planting trees in readily available planting areas in City parks, street rights-of-ways, and private residences meeting specific criteria. When planning planting locations, staff references the urban tree canopy assessment to select candidate locations and the American Forests' Tree Equity Score mapping to verify potential benefit to socioeconomically disadvantaged areas of the city. These current programs provide a good framework from which to build a larger program that can address barriers to tree planting and provide assistance to institutions with large properties such as churches and schools.

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Assistant Public Works Director

Attachments: None