



AGENDA REPORT


TO: Jestin D. Johnson
City Administrator

FROM: Joe DeVries
Deputy City Administrator/
Chief Resilience Officer

SUBJECT: Accepting a Forest Service Inflation
Reduction Act Grant Award

DATE: April 3, 2024

City Administrator Approval


Jestin Johnson (Apr 11, 2024 21:42 PDT)

Date: Apr 11, 2024

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt A Resolution: (A) Authorizing The City Administrator To:

- 1. Apply For, Accept, And Appropriate Eight Million Dollars (\$8,000,000) From The United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service Inflation Reduction Act Grant Program For Tree Planting, Public Tree Maintenance, And Public Engagement In Oakland's Frontline Communities For A Period Of Five Years;**
- 2. Award Two Sub-Grants In The Amount Of One Million, Eight Hundred And Thirty Thousand Dollars (\$1,830,000) Each To Common Vision And Oakland Parks & Recreation Foundation To Manage Tree Planting Activities And Community Engagement For The Duration Of This Grant Award;**
- 3. Add One Full-Time Limited Duration Arboricultural Inspector Position In Oakland Public Works To Implement The Project For The Duration Of This Grant Award;**
And

(B) Adopting Appropriate California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Findings.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2023, The City applied for and received Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) grant funding from the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service) in the amount of \$8,000,000 for a project entitled the Oakland Tree Equity Project, (Tree Equity Project) to 1) prune and maintain public trees in Oakland's highest-need census tracts per the Oakland Department of Transportation's (OakDOT) Geographic Equity Toolbox, and 2) to partner with two local non-profit organizations, Common Vision and Oakland Parks & Recreation Foundation (OPRF), to conduct community engagement and plant trees on public and private property in Oakland's frontline communities. Each partner will be allocated \$1,830,000 of the grant award to implement these activities.

The Tree Equity Project is a four-part program that aims to actively improve environmental justice for underserved frontline communities in Oakland through urban forestry by 1) equitably increasing the tree canopy on public and private land, 2) preserving the current tree canopy by addressing deferred maintenance, 3) increasing engagement through public outreach, and 4) providing job opportunities to increase the green sector workforce. These actions meet goals in the forthcoming Oakland Urban Forest Plan.

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

The Tree Equity Project addresses urban forest needs related to equitable tree planting and maintenance identified in Oakland's forthcoming Urban Forest Plan. Oakland's 2021 tree inventory identified over 19,000 vacant street tree locations in Oakland's disadvantaged communities where canopy coverage can be as low as 1.3% (in comparison, the canopy percentage is as high as 68% in parts of the Oakland Hills). These communities are more susceptible to the effects of climate change and planting and caring for trees now will help to reduce climate inequities in the future. Trees lower ambient temperatures and mitigate impacts of the urban heat island effect by shading asphalt and buildings, reduce air pollution by capturing particulate matter on their leaves, and reduce flooding by slowing stormwater runoff which reduces peak flows during rain events and facilitates absorption. This project will address these climate inequities by planting 1,300 trees in Oakland's disadvantaged communities.

Additionally, re-establishing tree maintenance services for approximately 9,000 street trees in frontline communities (16% of the city's total street tree inventory) will increase tree longevity and the many benefits that the community's current trees provide. The existing street and park trees in these neighborhoods have not had routine pruning since fiscal year 2008-2009 or earlier. Larger, mature trees provide more benefits than smaller, younger trees, so it is imperative to not only plant new trees but to also preserve the existing canopy.

Community engagement, public outreach, and education are essential to this project's success. This work will be completed through project partners including Common Vision and OPRF, two local community-based nonprofits that already have established relationships with underserved neighbors in the communities served by this project. The immediate objective of engagement and education is to promote tree-planting opportunities as well as to provide notice of the long overdue tree-pruning activities. The ultimate goal for engagement is to increase awareness of tree planting and maintenance among underserved communities and to promote stewardship of the urban forest. This project will also support job creation in the green sector, as a new project manager will be responsible for coordinating all aspects of this project and will work directly with community members to meet the project's many goals. These goals are all in line with the recommendations of the forthcoming Urban Forest Plan.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The policy recommendation in this report advances the citywide priority of **vibrant, sustainable infrastructure** by adding and maintaining 1,300 young trees and pruning approximately 9,000 existing public trees in Oakland's highest-priority neighborhoods. Canopy coverage in these

communities is as low as 1.3%, which is less than the city's average of 21.5% and significantly lower than Oakland's more affluent communities where canopy cover is as high as 68%. This project not only advances citywide priorities but also addresses Oakland's racial equity goals by focusing solely on frontline communities where this work is needed most.

Additionally, the Tree Equity Project directly addresses goals in the forthcoming Urban Forest Plan by 1) equitably increasing the tree canopy on public and private land, (2) preserving the current canopy by addressing deferred maintenance, (3) increasing engagement through public outreach, and (4) providing job opportunities to increase the green sector workforce.

The Tree Equity Project outcomes include:

- 8,990 trees pruned in 22 disadvantaged census tracts.
- 1,300 trees planted in up to 54 disadvantaged census tracts.
- 5 new jobs created.
- Community engagement for tree planting and notification of tree pruning activities.

Tree Planting

1) OPRF:

OPRF will coordinate with the City and private property owners to collaboratively plant a variety of trees with volunteers, including community members, church/religious groups, schools, and corporate groups. OPRF will work with homeowners to recommend appropriate species based on climate suitability, climate resiliency goals (such as reducing urban heat island effect), arboricultural best practices, and the community members' needs and desires.

2) Common Vision:

Common Vision will coordinate with schools and private property owners to collaboratively plant a variety of trees with volunteers, including community members, church/religious groups, schools, and corporate groups. Common Vision will work with school administration and property owners/managers to recommend appropriate species based on climate suitability, climate resiliency goals (such as reducing urban heat island effect), arboricultural best practices, and the community members' needs and desires.

Tree Preservation:

Oakland Public Works overlaid the [2021 tree inventory map](#) onto OakDOT's Geographic Equity Toolbox map and identified 8,990 trees in the highest priority frontline communities that need maintenance pruning. The City will contract with a professional contractor to perform pruning in the designated neighborhoods to preserve the trees. Oakland Public Works staff funded by this project (Arboricultural Inspector) will manage the contractor and oversee the pruning process. Properly maintained trees live longer, are healthier, and provide more long-term benefits than if they continue to be neglected.

Oakland's routine tree pruning program was dissolved in the fiscal year 2008-2009 budget cuts, and street trees throughout Oakland are in dire need of attention. These public trees have not received routine pruning and maintenance since that time (or earlier). According to the community engagement surveys collected during the Urban Forest Plan process, many community members appreciate at least some aspects of trees but are disappointed in the

City's lack of services and have concerns about the maintenance burdens of existing street trees. Restoring this service in the grant project target area will serve the dual purpose of restoring some trust with community members.

Community Engagement and Education to Encourage Tree Appreciation and Stewardship: Common Vision and OPRF have deep roots with local communities and this funding will increase their environmental education, outreach, and tree-planting capacity. Community engagement for this project will focus solely on frontline communities identified to be part of this project and will be ongoing throughout the five-year grant period.

Common Vision works with Oakland Unified schools and will leverage these existing relationships to achieve the project goals. Using a district-wide approach to engage each of these schools, their teachers and students, Common Vision will forge relationships around planting trees with residents and school children.

OPRF has extensive experience working with the community through both its programming in parks and its role as fiscal sponsor to more than 100 community groups that perform a variety of environmental work throughout Oakland which benefits the city's parks and green spaces, including tree planting groups, churches, schools, and youth groups. These groups will be direct pathways for OPRF to reach frontline community members.

Oakland Public Works' Parks & Tree Services Division conducted extensive outreach and engagement for the Urban Forest Plan with the assistance of OPRF and Common Vision and built many community ties through that process. The City will continue engaging members in disadvantaged communities for this project by both leveraging the recently built relationships and by contracting with local community groups that are already deeply rooted in disadvantaged communities. This was the model used for the Urban Forest Plan, and it was effective in reaching more people than typical City outreach via town halls and electronic campaigns.

Common Vision, OPRF, and Oakland Public Works will work together on educational opportunities to bring their constituents together for the common goals of this project, including tree-related education and training for community members who will help plant trees and receive trees for their homes.

Green Jobs:

The Tree Equity Project will require 5.33 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members (one for Oakland Public Works, two for OPRF, and 2.33 for Common Vision) to coordinate the work and manage the administrative tasks involved, including grant reporting, contract creation, and work on the ground with community members and nonprofit partners. Recruitment for this position will begin in Year 1 of the project. Common Vision and OPRF are expected to fill these positions within the first year, while the position within Oakland Public Works may not be filled until Year 2 due to the City's hiring timelines. Additionally, training and stipends will be available for community members to assist in tree-planting activities with OPRF and Common Vision.

Position Descriptions:

1. City:
 - a. Arboricultural Inspector (1 FTE) is responsible for identifying and managing tree work and managing and coordinating with contractors and possibly in-house staff to perform the work, including scoping out work, requesting quotes from tree contractors, and awarding contractors with work.
2. OPRF:
 - a. Program Manager (1 FTE) will manage tree planting operations, outreach, and the administrative tasks required for planting as well as reporting work to the City of Oakland for grant reporting and tracking.
 - b. Tree Coordinator (1 FTE) will assist the Program Manager and provide on-the-ground services to increase outreach and education capacity as well as perform utility inspections, purchase trees, and provide event support.
3. Common Vision:
 - a. Project Director (0.33 FTE) will oversee all project work, including managing and training all grant-funded staff.
 - b. Residential/School Tree Program Manager (1 FTE) will manage tree planting operations, outreach, and the administrative tasks required for planting as well as reporting work to the City for grant reporting and tracking.
 - c. Residential Tree Planting Coordinator (1 FTE) will assist the Program Manager and provide on-the-ground services to increase outreach and education capacity as well as perform utility inspections, purchase trees, and provide event support.

FISCAL IMPACT

All components of this project are funded by the Forest Service IRA grant (see **Tables 1** and **2** below). Because the project is focused solely on Oakland’s frontline communities, any match requirements were waived by the Forest Service.

Table 1: Funding Source and Total Amount

Forest Service Inflation Reduction Fund Grant	\$8,000,000
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Table 2: Project Budget Breakdown

Personnel (including benefits)	
- Arboricultural Inspector (1 FTE) – 4 years	\$ 1,145,193
Contractual	
- Tree pruning contract	\$3,152,775
- Community engagement	\$40,000
Supplies	
- Outreach materials (including translation)	\$2,032
Sub Grants	
- Common Vision	\$1,830,000
- OPRF	\$1,830,000
TOTAL	\$8,000,000

There is no impact on the City's budget, including the General Purpose Fund. The funds will be appropriated into Fund 2102 – Department of Agriculture, Organization 30654 – Tree Services, Program NB09 – Trees, in a project number to be established upon the execution of the agreement with the Forest Service

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

The results of the extensive and equitable outreach process conducted from April to August 2022 for the forthcoming Urban Forest Plan identified community desires and interests for more trees and increased tree care. The engagement was performed citywide, with special emphasis on frontline communities. The primary means of collecting community insight was through a survey that was available online and on paper in three languages. Twenty-five hundred (2,500) people responded to the survey.

Ninety-seven percent (97%) of respondents said they wished there were more trees in the City of Oakland and 82% agree that tree planting should be equitable by focusing on frontline communities where tree canopy cover is significantly less than the citywide average (21.5%). Additionally, only 51% of community members think the City is maintaining trees in parks and streets.

The Tree Equity Project directly addresses community concerns and recommendations in the Urban Forest Plan by planting 1,300 trees in frontline communities and pruning public trees in the highest-priority census tracts.

Additional public outreach, engagement, and the hiring of a cultural strategist are within the scope of this project and will be performed by Oakland Public Works, Common Vision, and OPRF related to tree planting and tree maintenance activities.

COORDINATION

The writing and submission of the grant proposal was a coordinated effort with the City Administrator's Office, Oakland Public Works, Common Vision, OPRF, and Townsend Public Affairs, Inc.

In addition, this report and the resolution have been reviewed by the Budget Bureau of the Finance Department and for form and legality by the Office of the City Attorney.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: Funding from the Forest Service IRA Program will fully cover the cost of all employees, materials, supplies, and contractual work over the five-year grant term. The funding will allow Oakland Public Works to increase its capacity to maintain trees and will allow Common Vision and OPRF the ability to expand their capacity to plant more trees. In total, this funding will create five full-time equivalent paid jobs and provide stipends and training for

community member participation for the duration of the grant agreement. Communities receiving trees will benefit economically by receiving trees at no charge. Community members will also receive additional benefits in the future when these trees have grown large enough to provide shade homes or other structures, which can lower energy use needed for cooling.

Environmental: Planting and maintaining trees are essential activities to grow a healthy urban forest and this project contributes towards the goals of the forthcoming Urban Forest Plan. Trees provide numerous environmental benefits that have a positive impact on people who live near them and on the wildlife that uses them for food and habitat. Trees help improve air quality by producing oxygen and reduce air pollution by collecting dust and particulate matter on leaf surfaces. They mitigate stormwater runoff which reduces water pollution and flooding. Their roots improve soil structure and reduce erosion. Trees are a powerful natural solution to combating climate change because they remove carbon dioxide from the air and store carbon. They are especially helpful in urban environments by providing visual screening, reducing noise, and lowering ambient temperatures – making them a valuable tool to lower energy use for heating and cooling homes as well as abating the heat island effect in cities. Healthy, mature trees provide the most benefits, so it is imperative to both take care of our current trees and plant new trees for future generations.

Race & Equity: A focus on equity is at the foundation of the Tree Equity Project. All work will focus on Oakland's frontline communities, as identified by OakDOT's Geographic Equity Toolbox, as well as the Biden-Harris Administration's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CJEST). The CJEST identifies overburdened and underserved communities through eight indicators: climate change, energy, health, housing, legacy pollution, transportation, water and wastewater, and workforce development. Planting new trees and pruning existing trees in Oakland's frontline communities will contribute towards increasing the tree canopy cover in these neighborhoods, which can be as low as 1.3% whereas the city average is 21.5% and canopy cover in the Oakland Hills can be as high as 68%.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)

The Tree Equity Project is exempt from CEQA, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304, Class 4 (Minor Alterations to Land) because the project involves minor public or private alterations to the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation that do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt A Resolution: (A) Authorizing The City Administrator To:

1. Apply For, Accept, And Appropriate Eight Million Dollars (\$8,000,000) From The United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service Inflation Reduction Act Grant Program For Tree Planting, Public Tree Maintenance, And Public Engagement In Oakland's Frontline Communities For A Period Of Five Years;
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 3. Add One Full-Time Limited Duration Arboricultural Inspector Position In Oakland Public Works To Implement The Project For The Duration Of This Grant Award; And
- (B) Adopting Appropriate California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Findings.

For questions regarding this report, please contact David Moore, Tree Supervisor II, Parks & Tree Division, at 510-615-5852.

Respectfully submitted,



JOE DEVRIES
Deputy City Administrator/Chief Resilience
Officer

Reviewed by:

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Attachments (1):

A: Forest Service IRA Grant Agreement