

Legislation Text

File #: 24-0075, **Version:** 1

Item Description:

Agmt CON000000001096 with the U.S. DOA to accept grant for the removal and replacement of trees on behalf of residents with lower incomes, 01/01/24-06/01/29, (recv \$10,000,000; supp app of \$2,000,000 to 2024 Environment and Energy budget)

Resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED, that the County Administrator be authorized to negotiate Agreement CON000000001096 with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service to accept the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Urban and Community Forest grant for the removal and replacement of diseased, infested, or dangerous trees on residential lots of property owners with lower incomes, during the period January 1, 2024 through June 1, 2029, in the receivable amount of \$10,000,000; that following review and approval by the County Attorney's Office the Chair of the Board be authorized to sign the Agreement on behalf of Hennepin County; and that the Controller be authorized to accept and disburse funds as directed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Environment and Energy Department 2024 revenue and expenditure budget be increased by \$2,000,000 for grant related activities and 3.0 grant funded, limited duration, full-time employees for the IRA Urban and Community Forestry grant; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the sponsorship and acceptance of grant funding for this program by the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners does not imply a continued funding commitment by the county for this program when grant funds are no longer available.

Background:

Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) has now been infesting trees within Hennepin County since 2010. EAB is expected to kill one million ash trees - approximately 15% of the County's tree canopy - and many of these trees are located on residential property. Ash trees, once infested, decline and die rapidly, creating risks to human health and property. The cost to remove these trees is a significant financial burden for residential property owners with lower incomes. Without assistance, these residents are not likely to replace the tree. If the tree removal costs are added as special assessments to their property taxes, this could add a significant financial burden and could result in tax forfeiture and someone losing their home. Hennepin County has some of the most severe racial disparities in health, housing and economic outcomes in the nation as well as some of the lowest rates of home ownership by persons of color.

Trees provide many benefits, including improving air quality by absorbing fine particulate matter and other pollutants and intercepting stormwater runoff. Trees also provide shade, reduce the urban heat island effect, reduce stress, and increase property values. Countywide data analysis has found a correlation between areas with less tree canopy and areas with health and income disparities. Without action, the loss of trees due to EAB will exacerbate existing disparities and cause the tree canopy to decline even further in these areas. These areas also represent the portions of Hennepin County most adversely impacted by climate change and the urban heat island effect.

The IRA Urban and Community Forest grant will help mitigate these impacts from EAB and other tree pests by funding the removal of condemnable trees, which are trees that are diseased, infested, and dangerous, and replacement on behalf of residential property owners with lower incomes. For the purposes of this grant

program, lower income is defined as 80% or less of the area median income as determined through a simple means test. While the grant program will place special emphasis on reducing disparities and improving the tree canopy in disparity areas, such as federally designated disadvantaged communities as identified by the federal Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool and Opportunity Zones census tracts, funding will be available to assist residential property owners with lower incomes throughout Hennepin County. There is no federal match requirement.

Current Request:

This request seeks authorization for the County Administrator to negotiate Agreement CON000000001096 with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service to accept the IRA Urban and Community Forest grant for the removal and replacement of diseased, infested, or dangerous trees on residential lots of residential property owners with lower incomes, during the period January 1, 2024 through June 1, 2029, in the total receivable amount of \$10,000,000.

This request also seeks approval of supplemental appropriation to the 2024 Environment and Energy budget by \$2,000,000 for grant related activities and 3.0 grant-funded, limited duration FTE for the IRA Urban and Community Forestry grant.

This request also seeks that the county board declare that the sponsorship and acceptance of grant funding for this program by the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners does not imply a continued funding commitment by the county for this program when grant funds are no longer available.

Impact/Outcomes:

In accepting the IRA Urban and Community Forest grant, Hennepin County will assist residents with lower incomes by removing and replacing approximately 2,250 diseased trees countywide and planting an additional 2,250 trees in federally designated disadvantaged communities census tracts, which also are most affected by the urban heat island, with a total of 4,500 trees planted countywide. It is estimated at least 2,000 residential property owners will benefit from this program. The county will maximize this investment by planting climate-adaptive replacement trees, educating the residents about the care and benefits of trees, contracting with disadvantaged tree removal businesses, and expanding county and community-based workforce development programs to employ youth and young adults to plant and maintain the trees.

The grant will:

- Fund the removal and replacement of trees on residential property.
- Mitigate the effects of tree pests and pathogens by improving municipal forestry capacity.
- Create green jobs programming based on the care, maintenance, and removal of trees.
- Educate residents on the benefits of trees and engage them in planting efforts.
- Improve livability and reduce disparities by planting trees in neighborhoods throughout the county experiencing disproportionate economic, environmental, and health outcomes.
- Mitigate the impacts of climate change through trees' ability to reduce air pollution and stormwater runoff and counteract the urban heat island effect.

Recommendation from County Administrator: Recommend Approval