

5.1 City of San José Community Forest Investment Project.

Recommendation:

(a) Accept and receive United States Forest Service funds awarded for the Community Forest Investment Project.

(b) Adopt a resolution authorizing the City Manager or her designee to negotiate and execute a grant agreement with the United States Forest Service for an amount not to exceed \$5,644,300 as part of the Community Forest Investment Project via the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

CEQA: Categorically Exempt, File No. ER23-151, CEQA Guidelines Section 15301(h), Existing Facilities. (Transportation)



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: John Ristow

SUBJECT: CITY OF SAN JOSE COMMUNITY
FOREST INVESTMENT PROJECT

DATE: March 18, 2024

Approved 

Date
3/28/24

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) Accept and receive United States Forest Service funds awarded for the Community Forest Investment Project.
- (b) Adopt a resolution authorizing the City Manager or her designee to enter into a grant agreement with the United States Forest Service for an amount not to exceed \$5,644,300 as part of the Community Forest Investment Project via the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

SUMMARY AND OUTCOME

Execution of this grant agreement will enable the City of San José’s (City) Department of Transportation (DOT) to improve its tree condition data, plant 2,800 new street trees, prune 5,000 street trees, and lead to the employment of local youth.

BACKGROUND

On August 16, 2022, President Joe Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act, marking the most significant action taken on climate change in the nation’s history. The United States Forest Service received \$1.5 billion to grant to communities for tree planting and related activities that align with the goals of the White House’s “Justice40 Initiative,” administered by the United States Government Council on Environmental Quality, which sets a federal government-wide goal that 40% of the overall benefit of certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities. Funds distributed via grants to local agencies do not require any matching funds if the work happens in the census tracts identified as disadvantaged by an economic and climate screening tools outlined in the application process and shown in the **Attachment**.

Applications for the grant required demonstration of how the proposed projects align with the Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council's 10-year action plan and the State of California's Urban and Community Forest Program goals. City staff crafted a project and application to align with those federal and state plans, as well as the San José Community Forest Management Plan. In September of 2023, the City was notified it had been awarded \$6.6 million in grant funds, with \$5.6 million awarded to DOT and \$1 million awarded to the Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services Department (PRNS). The Director of PRNS has been delegated contract authority by the City Council to negotiate and execute grant revenue agreements that support the goals and objectives of PRNS for up to \$1 million per agreement. PRNS will recommend necessary budget changes once its contract is executed.

ANALYSIS

The alignment between the scope of the grant and key tenets of the Justice40 Initiative, which resulted in the award of the grant to San José, are highlighted below.

Environmental Justice: Urban tree planting contributes to environmental justice by addressing the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. Low-income communities and communities of color often face higher levels of pollution, heat island effects, and limited access to green spaces. Planting 2,800 trees in the identified areas helps to mitigate these disparities by improving air quality, reducing heat, and providing natural spaces for well-being.

Health Equity: Urban tree planting promotes health equity by improving the physical and mental well-being of historically disenfranchised communities. These communities will have direct access to trees that help filter pollutants from the air, reducing respiratory illnesses.

Economic Opportunities: Tree planting initiatives can create economic opportunities for disadvantaged communities. The proposed project provides training and employment in urban forestry by partnering with San José Conservation Corps and Charter School and Our City Forest, among other nonprofit groups. By engaging local youth, this project can contribute to the economic revitalization of marginalized communities.

Energy Efficiency: Trees play a crucial role in enhancing energy efficiency. When strategically planted, trees provide shade and reduce the need for air conditioning during hot summers, thereby lowering energy consumption and utility costs. By reducing energy demands, urban tree planting helps alleviate the financial burden on low-income households and supports energy justice objectives. In addition to planting trees, this project proposes to care for 5,000 existing trees to improve the ability for them to grow larger to provide even more shade.

Broaden Community Engagement: Urban tree planting encourages community engagement and participation, empowering residents to shape their local environment. The youth of the San José Conservation Corps and Charter School are from and live in the targeted tracts. Including corps members fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that the planting efforts address the specific needs and preferences of the community.

The grant application focused on updating San José’s street tree inventory, performing community outreach, developing a work force, pruning trees, planting trees, and performing after-care for new trees. Upon receipt of the grant funding, staff will start the process of securing agreements with consultants to perform a street tree inventory of identified areas as shown in the attachment. As tree deficiencies are identified, appropriate maintenance and pruning will be provided to street trees in the identified areas, free of charge to residents. This will allow DOT to build capacity and identify needs to scale a similar program citywide should funding become available.

Climate Smart San José Analysis

This grant will facilitate a reduction of energy consumption as the tree canopy expands and the impacts of urban heat are mitigated. The award of this grant will also facilitate job creation as additional members of the workforce gain knowledge and skills to pursue careers in forestry.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

DOT provides an ongoing evaluation of the City’s street tree network and canopy and provides annual reports on this topic to the Transportation and Environmental Committee. DOT will add updates pertaining to the grant execution during annual committee presentations.

COST SUMMARY/IMPLICATIONS

Acceptance of the \$5,644,300 grant will allow DOT to implement the scope of its grant application with no required local match. Any additional staff needed as part of this grant will be brought forward for City Council consideration in the 2024-2025 Proposed Budget, as appropriate. There may be ongoing maintenance cost implications for newly planted trees after the three-year establishment period has ended which has yet to be identified. That analysis will be performed in 2024-2025, once the project period has started. A schedule of expenditures is shown in the table below. The recognition of grant revenue and corresponding expenditures for 2024-2025 will be brought forward as part of the 2024-2025 Proposed Budget.

Estimated Expenditures by Fiscal Year

Grant Project	FY 2024-2025	FY 2025-2026	FY 2026-2027	FY 2027-2028	Total
Community Forest Investment Project	\$526,500	\$1,835,466	\$1,959,167	\$1,323,167	\$5,644,300
Revenue	\$526,500	\$1,835,466	\$1,959,167	\$1,323,167	\$5,644,300

COORDINATION

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Attorney's Office, City Manager's Budget Office, PRNS, and the Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement Department.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This memorandum will be posted on the City's Council Agenda website for the April 9, 2024 City Council meeting.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION AND INPUT

No commission recommendation or input is associated with this action.

CEQA

Categorically Exempt, File No. ER23-151, CEQA Guidelines Section 15301(h), Existing Facilities.

PUBLIC SUBSIDY REPORTING

This item does not include a public subsidy as defined in section 53083 or 53083.1 of the California Government Code or the City's Open Government Resolution.

/s/
JOHN RISTOW
Director, Department of Transportation

For questions, please contact Rick Scott, Assistant Director, at (408) 794-1925.

Attachment: City of San José Justice40 Census Tracts

City of San José Justice40 Census Tracts

