

STAFF REPORT

Date: January 17, 2024

To: Mayor and City Council

Thru: Doug Thornley, City Manager

Subject: Staff Report (For Possible Action): Acceptance of a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service for the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) – Urban & Community Forestry City of Reno program, to plant trees along Airway Drive, in the amount of \$500,000, and approval for the City Manager to sign required grant forms and agreements.

From: Suzanne Groneman

Department: City Manager's Office

Summary:

The City of Reno was awarded \$500,000 from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). This project has two primary objectives:

1. Reimagine Airway Drive from Neil Road to Longley Lane through some removal of existing material and planting of trees. City Staff coordinated tree selection with the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority (RTAA). Trees will be a) propagated from seed, cuttings, and liners by the City of Reno Horticulturist. Selection will include factors such as soil type the species will thrive in, sun exposure, wind exposure, height (lower heights are needed near the runway approach), and prey attraction. The City of Reno will avoid the trees on the Unacceptable List provided by the RTAA. Acceptable and planned species will be drought tolerant and provide shade but are lower in height. For example, elm trees which are already common in the area; and b) procured (seedlings and other trees), as necessary.
2. Utilize the City of Reno Greenhouse, shadehouse, and tree yard (collectively “Greenhouse”) to produce enough trees to reimagine the landscape in the proposed project area. The area is an approximately one-mile-long stretch of road between the Reno-Tahoe International Airport (RTIA) and homes and businesses. Species will be grown which are suitable for the difficult site (high pH, high salinity, and drought tolerant) and climate-resilient.

Consent Review	Yes	No
1. Is this item an annual or standard item that comes before Council for regular approval?		X
2. Is this item an agreement required based on an item previously approved by Council?		X
3. Is this item included in the current budget approved and adopted by Council?		X
Other Considerations		
What percent of the total City budget does this item represent?	.00058072%	

Alignment with Strategic Plan:

Infrastructure, Climate Change, and Environmental Sustainability

Previous Council Action:

There is no recent Council Action related to this item.

Background:

The City applied for a grant of \$600,000 to the USDA Forest Service in May 2023 for a project called “Filling the GAPP – Green Airway Planting Project.” Ultimately, the City was awarded \$500,000 with no match requirement because the project lies within a disadvantaged community.

For the past several decades, urban and community forests in Nevada have experienced a steady decline in the number of trees and overall canopy cover. The west was in severe drought from 2013 through 2017, and many community trees in Nevada died from lack of adequate water. Communities have not fully mitigated these effects. Some communities are just beginning to replace dead trees. In general, Nevada has experienced a trend of declining tree cover in the urban environment. Using trees as a tool for heat mitigation and quality of life improvement can address many social and environmental issues if implemented effectively, meeting the goals of local and national governments, and social and environmental organizations. This program works to address specifically the following values:

- Improving human health and quality of life by installing trees along neighborhoods adjacent to the RTIA, buffering the neighborhood from airport influences, and providing a better quality of life when walking along the streetscape.
- Municipal investments improving quality of life and boosting Local Economies through green infrastructure support.
- Increasing ecosystem benefits from urban trees.
- Improving urban forest maintenance and management.
- Increasing public valuation of urban trees through increasing access to trees and green space benefits in communities with low tree equity.

Discussion:

With current climate trends and increasing urban sprawl, community and urban forests are more important now than ever. In Nevada, the places needing the benefits and services of trees and

forests most are often the places where it is the most challenging to grow them. Urban forests play a vital role in addressing biodiversity in several ways. By offering a variety of tree species, understory vegetation, and diverse microhabitats, urban forests create niches for different organisms to thrive, contributing to local biodiversity. This project will promote ecological interactions and enhance ecosystem functions. Trees and vegetation attract pollinators such as bees and butterflies, facilitating the pollination of plants within the urban environment. This supports the reproduction of plant species and promotes the growth of urban gardens and green spaces. The trees also act as natural filters, absorbing and filtering rainwater; thereby reducing stormwater runoff and improving water quality in urban areas.

Trees will be monitored periodically for survival, growth rates, and condition. Additionally, evaluating the project's success will include assessing the ecological benefits provided by the trees, such as air quality improvement, carbon sequestration, and habitat enhancement. The City will use the iTree or other available tool to analyze these benefits. Community feedback and engagement will be solicited to gauge satisfaction and assess the project's social impact. By collecting and analyzing data on these aspects, the effectiveness can be evaluated, lessons can be learned for future projects, and necessary adjustments can be made to ensure the sustained success of the tree-planting efforts. The evaluation of the success of the Greenhouse project will be evaluated by the overall success of the tree-growing portion of the project.

Year 1 (2023/2024)

Convene project teams. Design scope of work for the contractor. Design and purchase greenhouse improvements. Design tree layout at the planting site. Seek necessary City approvals for the grant. Evaluate existing tree inventory against the planned site. Engage with the RTAA regarding a draft planting plan. Provide updates to the RTAA Sustainability Committee. Purchase liners (baby trees). Irrigation design at the planting site.

Year 2 (2025)

Remove 2,200 cubic yards of existing material. Deliver soil. Perform final Greenhouse improvements. Create a project plan for community feedback and design the communication strategy. Determine the date to begin planting. Provide updates to the RTAA Sustainability Committee. Refine planting maps. Hold contractor kick-off calls for site work. Initial tree planting (seasonal). Irrigation upgrades.

Year 3 (2026)

Tree planting (seasonal). Prior year planting tree inspection. Provide updates to the RTAA Sustainability Committee. Create project site signage explaining the source of funds and benefits to the community. Refine Project Plan.

Year 4 (2027)

Tree planting (seasonal). Prior year planting tree inspection. Provide updates to the RTAA Sustainability Committee. Perform a community survey. Project closeout and final reporting.

Alignment with Disadvantaged Communities:

Trees provide numerous benefits to disadvantaged communities and play a crucial role in enhancing overall well-being. Trees contribute to improved air quality by absorbing harmful pollutants and releasing oxygen, creating healthier environments for residents. This is significant in underserved areas that suffer from higher pollution levels.

EJ Screen Demographic Index: EJScreen Report (Version 2.11); 1 mile Ring Centered at 39.481382,-119.773101; NEVADA, EPA Region 9; Approximate Population: 11,826; Input Area (sq. miles): 3.14. According to the EJ Screen tool, the project area is in the 90th to 100th percentile for ozone (Map #5). Ozone can damage the tissue of the respiratory system, causing symptoms such as coughing, chest tightness, and worsening asthma. Neighborhoods with tree canopy can experience reduced rates of asthma and other respiratory illness by 20 to 30%. 47% of households within a one-mile radius of the project area are considered low-income, compared to the state average of 32% and the national average of 30%.

Greenlink Equity Map: The City subscribes to an Equity Map through Greenlink. According to the Greenlink Equity Map tool, (Map #6) 1,897 households near the project area have an Urban Heat Index of 8.4% (high) and an Energy Burden of 5.66% (moderate to high). Another 1,392 households (Map #7) near the project area have an Urban Heat Index of 8.3% (high) and an Energy Burden of 4.77% (moderate).

The grant is an interdepartmental success story. Staff from Parks and Recreation and the City Manager's Office collaborated on this application.

Financial Implications:

The City will receive \$500,000. No full-time equivalents (FTEs) are being added under this grant.

Legal Implications:

Legal review completed for compliance with City procedures and Nevada law.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends Council accept the grant from the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service for the Inflation Reduction Act – Urban & Community Forestry City of Reno program, to plant trees along Airway Drive, in the amount of \$500,000, and approve the City Manager to sign required grant forms and agreements.

Proposed Motion:

I move to approve staff recommendation to accept the grant from the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service for the Inflation Reduction Act – Urban & Community Forestry City of Reno program, to plant trees along Airway Drive, in the amount of \$500,000, and approve the City Manager to sign required grant forms and agreements.

Attachments:

City of Reno IRA UCF Notification of Funding Letter

Map #5

Map #6

Map #7