

Regular Meeting Public Hearing Action Item Consent Item Resolution Ordinance
 Presentation Other:

EDA Meeting Action Item Resolution Other:

Study Session Discussion Item Written Report Other:

TITLE:

Urban Reforestation Program Policy.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff recommends approving the Urban Reforestation Program and Policy using the land sale proceeds to pay for the cost of implementing the program.

POLICY CONSIDERATION:

Is the proposed policy in keeping with the City Council's intent and direction from the July 13th Study Session relating to the use of land sale proceeds for a more aggressive urban reforestation program?

BACKGROUND:

At the March 23rd Study Session, three ideas for the use of the excess land sale proceeds were discussed. The options were identified based on a desire to use the funds for something of lasting impact, to address unmet needs, and to be consistent with the city's Vision. From this discussion the Council asked that staff survey the community via the city's website for ideas and reactions. On July 13th staff presented the findings of the survey and recommended the city use the excess land sale proceeds for a boulevard tree replacement program. The Council reacted favorably to this recommendation and staff was asked to bring back a more specific policy for Council consideration.

On September 14th staff provided a draft of an Urban Reforestation Program Policy to the Council as a Study Session Report.

Attached is a proposed final draft of the policy regarding the use of the excess land sale proceeds for an Urban Reforestation Program.

FINANCIAL OR BUDGET CONSIDERATION:**Cost of Program Implementation**

Currently the city has \$428,000 from the sale of property. With the receipt of the city's share of revenue from Hennepin County for the tax forfeited property, the total land sale proceeds will be \$565,526. This proposed program would use land sale proceeds to primarily replace boulevard trees, although trees in parks and public areas would qualify. The intent is that this program would supplement funds already budgeted for tree planting versus replacing what we already spend. Using this money allows the City of St. Louis Park to be more aggressive in its urban reforestation program. We are currently falling behind on replacing trees that have to be removed. Utilizing this money would allow the city to catch up with the trees that have been removed and not replaced.

Over the last 10 to 12 years on an annual average, 340 boulevard trees have been removed and 225 boulevard trees replaced. The incidence of Dutch Elm Disease (DED) has been very high, as well as an increase in non-DED removals due to drought and insects. Trees are also being removed that pose hazards. We have approximately 1,150-1,380 fewer trees on public property in the city than we did 10 to 12 years ago.

In addition to our current deficit of trees being replanted, the city is faced with the imminent threat of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) which could potentially kill all 4,000 boulevard ash trees. Our ash trees are scattered for the most part, but there are several areas where it is strictly Green Ash planted one after the other so there will be pockets completely void of trees when EAB comes through the city.

The average cost of purchasing, transporting, planting and maintaining a tree today is \$300. We have proposed to continue spending \$60,000 from our Park Improvement Fund Capital Improvement Program (CIP). This allows us to plant about 200 trees each year. In addition to these funds, staff is proposing that funds from the excess land sale proceeds be put into a separate fund that is used to assist in covering the costs of maintaining our urban forest on public properties. We would like to replace all of the trees that have been lost in the previous years, as well as maintaining a program that guarantees a 1-to-1 replacement of trees. Rather than only being able to plant 200 trees a year, we propose planting 300 to 400 trees each year using the land sale proceeds to supplement our current spending from the CIP. Having said that, the Council would have the final say as to how much will be budgeted for tree replacement.

VISION CONSIDERATION:

This item falls in line with Vision: St. Louis Park as committed to being a leader in environmental stewardship. We will increase environmental consciousness and responsibility in all areas of city business.

Attachments: Urban Reforestation Program Policy

Prepared by: Cindy Walsh, Director of Parks and Recreation

Approved by: Tom Harmening, City Manager

St. Louis Park Urban Reforestation Program Policy

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the Urban Reforestation Policy is to provide a healthy and diverse tree population and support the City's vision regarding environmental stewardship.

DEFINITION:

Urban Reforestation is the continuation of planting and maintaining trees in our city.

USE OF FUNDS:

The goal of the City's Urban Reforestation Program is to provide a healthy and diverse tree population and support the City's Vision regarding environmental stewardship. The funds will be used as follows:

- a) To plant trees along boulevards, at the Nature Center and in parks to replace trees which have been removed and not replaced due to past budget constraints.
- b) To provide a one-for-one tree replacement which means that a tree is planted to replace every public tree that is lost (if feasible and possible).
- c) To fill the empty places along boulevards where trees had not been planted in the past.
- d) To maximize diversity of our urban forest by planting no more than 15% of one tree species. The greater the diversity of tree species, sizes and conditions, the healthier the community forest. This will also prevent future large-scale losses in trees due to infestation of pests. Species are typically rotated as much as possible per block trying to mix species so the same species are not adjacent to one another.
- e) To plant native trees where possible. This minimizes the detrimental effects of exotic species.
- f) To optimize natural aesthetic and wild life habitat.
- g) Primarily used for boulevard trees although trees in parks and public areas would qualify.
- h) Replace trees lost due to imminent diseases such as Emerald Ash Borer.

SOURCE OF FUNDS:

The money currently obtained from land sale proceeds and the money that is yet to come in as future sites are sold, will be put in a reforestation fund. This fund will be located within the Park Improvement Fund and will accrue interest on the amount not yet spent.

- a) As trees are removed from boulevards, parks or other City owned properties, the City Manager, or designee, may approve expending funds from this account for the purchase and planting of new trees within the parameters of the budget set by the City Council.
- b) If new programs aimed at providing funds for trees arise, the money from those programs will be put into this fund with the same guidelines attached.
- c) The use of these funds will supplement and not replace funds previously budgeted for tree planting on public property

A reforestation plan and budget will be established each year and approved by the City Council through the annual budget approval process.