



COMMISSION
AGENDA MEMORANDUM

Item No. 11b

BRIEFING ITEM

Date of Meeting April 13, 2021

DATE: April 5, 2021

TO: Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director

FROM: Andy Gregory, Sr. Program Manager, Environmental Engagement

SUBJECT: ACE Green Cities Program Update

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Port of Seattle contracted with non-profit Forterra in 2017 to launch Green City Partnership Programs in Burien, Des Moines and SeaTac as part of the Airport Community Ecology (ACE) Fund. Forterra conducted urban forest canopy assessments in the three cities to identify priorities for forest restoration and enhancement. Forterra then developed Urban Forest Stewardship Plans for each city to guide the work over the coming decades.

This year marks the close of the Port's contract with Forterra, set to expire in December. In this final year of implementation, the Port and Forterra are piloting a green jobs pathway program. This is a first for the entire network of 15 Green Cities and Counties. It leverages investments from the Port's Opportunity Motion and South King County Fund to create paid positions for immigrant youth through Partner in Employment (PIE). Additionally, Forterra will focus on supporting city parks staff to implement on-the-ground improvements including volunteer recruitment and management, tree planting, invasive species removal, and maintenance of restoration areas. Next steps beyond 2021 will depend on each city's ability to identify funding sources to build staff capacity to carry the work into the future.

BACKGROUND

In 2016, the Port of Seattle Commission allocated \$1 Million in funding to support environmental improvements in the near-airport cities of Burien, Des Moines and SeaTac. The funding was split between a Small Matching Grants Program (\$550,000) and a contract with non-profit Forterra to implement Green City Partnership (GCP) programs in each city (\$450,000). The Small Matching Grants Program has contracted with 42 recipients for a total of \$385,000. Collectively the recipients have planted 880 trees, recorded 21,567 volunteer hours, and accounted for \$2,507,305 in total matched funds- a value 6.5 times the Port's investment! As several projects are still under open contracts, these figures include both final reports and pre-project estimates.

The goals of the GCP program are to improve urban forest and natural area health, galvanize an informed and involved community, and ensure long-term sustainability. There are currently 15 Green Cities/Counties in the Puget sound region, serving more than 1.6 million people. Since

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2005, over 1.5 million volunteer hours have resulted in more than 3,360 acres restored and 1.5 million trees and shrubs planted across this network of Green Cities.

Previously formed Green City Partnerships traditionally focused on establishing community-based stewardship programs focused on restoring forested parks and natural areas. The Port funding provided an opportunity to replicate this model in SeaTac, Burien, and Des Moines, and do more. In addition to forested parks and natural areas the ACE funded Green Cities took a more comprehensive and inclusive approach by also looking at how to support and enhance urban tree canopy citywide across all public and private land. This included a forest health assessment of parks and natural areas and a land cover classification. The land cover classification and analysis identified and mapped where tree cover exists in relation to other socio-economic factors that highlight disparities in community access to green space. The results of these assessments along with community input were incorporated into an Urban Forest Management Plan, creating a framework and roadmap to accomplish forest restoration and canopy enhancement priorities over the coming decades.

RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Data from the Urban Forest Canopy Assessments shows Burien has 30% canopy cover, Des Moines has 29% canopy cover and SeaTac has 25% canopy cover excluding the area of SEA, (the city's canopy cover is 21% when the footprint of SEA is included). These data were then used to develop targeted goals and outcomes for increasing canopy, stewarding and maintaining urban forests, engaging the public through volunteer opportunities, and identifying long-term sources of funding.

Each city chose a document that was right for their goals and resources, with some choosing a plan and others a guide. This flexibility provided by Forterra allowed each city to right-size the document that fit their needs.

Building the Green City Partnership programs in Burien, Des Moines, and SeaTac is an investment in a long-term plan and framework to support healthy forested parks, natural areas and urban tree canopy. As the implementation phase began to ramp up, the global pandemic hit, and the programs had to adapt quickly to think of new methods for community engagement and getting the work done. Some program accomplishments include: training 10 Forest Stewards that have been working individually or in small teams; established relationships with more than 15 new partner organizations; the first of two tree distribution events aimed at increasing tree canopy; hosting several COVID-safe small volunteer events, with attendance by several City councilmembers; working with PIE to support a new paid youth training crew to do forest restoration work in local parks; ongoing program promotion and engagement through social media and monthly newsletters; and leveraging the Port's investment nearly 1:1 with several

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project grants, donations and including a partnership with WA State DNR, Forterra, Highline Public Schools to implement student-led canopy enhancement project on or near school grounds.

Des Moines Memorial Drive

As part of the ACE Green Cities effort, the Port and Forterra have worked collaboratively with the Des Moines Memorial Drive Preservation Association to identify some tools and analysis that Forterra could provide to support the implementation of the Des Moines Memorial Drive Corridor Management Plan and the Association’s goals to plant more memorial elm trees and/or install plaques along the Drive. As part of this project, Forterra is working closely with the Association to create a mailer about the “living memorial” for the Association to use when reaching out to landowners along the drive. Forterra also used land cover data to estimate the amount of street-frontage area that is potentially suitable for planting commemorative elm trees or for installing a commemorative sidewalk plaque for each parcel along the drive. An interactive map with this data was created for the Association, City staff, partners and landowners to use when looking for possible planting areas along the drive.

NEXT STEPS

This is the final year for the Port’s contract with Forterra, with several exciting implementation tasks planned for the remainder of the year.

From Volunteers to Green Jobs Training

Volunteers have traditionally been the engine behind urban forest restoration, where cities work collaboratively with a network of community members to accomplish the hours and hours of time it takes to remove invasive species by hand and then plant and maintain restoration sites. Volunteerism is however, an inherently privileged activity which targets community members that have the time and resources to participate in unpaid labor. For many with these resources, it is a rewarding leisure-time activity. But for those who are resource or access limited, it widens the equity gap between those who can and cannot participate.

To reimagine this model, the Port worked with Forterra to develop a paid forest steward model, the first of its kind in the Green Cities network. By leveraging startup funding from the Opportunity Motion and South King County Fund, SeaTac-based non-profit Partner in Employment (PIE) is creating green jobs pathways for immigrant youth of color from the near-airport communities. Youth are paid as restoration crews making \$15 an hour and learning both hard and soft skills for future employment.

City Support and Transition Planning

The participating cities have noted that while they have begun to see changes both at the policy level and on the ground, additional resources are needed to normalize the work within their agency and to identify a sustainable path forward for the programs. With that in mind, the Port and Forterra shifted implementation resources in the final service directive to provide 100 additional hours of programmatic support and transition planning to each city. This time will go

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to support planting and maintenance activities as well as establishing systems for managing volunteers. This includes an online platform customized for Green City Partnerships called CEDAR. CEDAR is a one-stop shop to track volunteer events, registration, project tools and materials requests, and collect volunteer data and restoration project outcomes for reporting. Forterra will also compile a “toolbox” of best practices, marketing materials, and program management tools for the city staff to access as a resource for the future.

Sustainable Models for the Future

The ACE program was unique in that the Port provided startup funding for the three cities to get GCP programs off the ground. Now, as the contract with Forterra is set to expire, the question of long-term program sustainability comes to the fore.

Specific challenges to overcome include building staff capacity and stable city funding to sustain the Green City Partnership efforts long-term. As leaders of the GCP program regionally, Forterra has seen many different approaches to sustaining these programs that have worked with varying degrees of success over the years. Some cities can secure dedicated funding and staff to run their Green City program in-house. Others secure partial staff support and retain Forterra and other service providers to support the program.

While designed to leverage partner contributions, these programs cannot survive on piece meal project grants alone. They need a stable dedicated funding source in place to keep the program running. A stable funding source allows the program to maintain its core functions while adding capacity through different project grants and opportunities. Some examples of funding mechanisms that cities have used include general funds, stormwater/utility rates, levies, and special-purpose district tax. These possible funding sources all take time to establish and garner support.

The Port has proven itself a champion for regional forest enhancement in South King County and can play a role sustaining these commitments for the long run by continuing to support, promote and invest in program implementation to ensure success into the future.

ATTACHMENTS TO THIS BRIEFING

- (1) Presentation slides

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS OR BRIEFINGS

September 24, 2019 – The Commission was briefed on the status of the ACE program including the Forterra Work

June 13, 2017 – The Commission authorized a Sole Source Contract with Forterra

November 22, 2016 – The Commission created a \$1 million Airport Community Ecology Fund (ACE Fund) to support projects and programs that improve ecological and environmental attributes in airport-area communities of Sea-Tac, Burien, and Des Moines. 11/22/16