

REPORT
***Office of the Mayor and
Parks & Recreation Department***

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council **Date:** September 13, 2021

From: G. Dean Gibson **File:** 1918773
Director, Parks & Recreation

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Item #: 2021-345

Subject: Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) - COVID-19 Resilience
Infrastructure Stream (CVRIS) Grant Funding: Urban Reforestation and
Biodiversity Enhancement Initiative

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receive this report for information; and

THAT Council direct staff to proceed with next steps as outlined in this report.

PURPOSE

An informational report on grant funding, up to \$1,746,238, awarded to the City of New Westminster from the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program – COVID 19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream.

These funds will advance the city's climate action goals through a city-wide Urban Reforestation and Biodiversity Enhancement Initiative to plant 2,200 large trees in city's parks and open spaces by December 31, 2023.

BACKGROUND

On December 1, 2020, the Canadian and British Columbian governments committed up to \$80.29 million towards the intake of CVRIS to support cost-sharing of infrastructure projects in communities across the province. CVRIS is designed to target projects starting before September 30, 2021 and completing by December 31, 2023. Eligible projects will support public infrastructure, defined as a tangible capital asset primarily for public use and benefit. To be eligible, projects must meet at least one of the following outcomes specific to the CVRIS funding stream:

- 1) Retrofits, repairs and upgrades to local government and indigenous buildings, health infrastructure or educational infrastructure;
- 2) COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure;
- 3) Active Transportation Infrastructure; and
- 4) Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Infrastructure.

Under category 4 (Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Infrastructure), Infrastructure Canada has included natural infrastructure as means of utilizing naturally occurring resources (e.g. aquifer, wetland, forest, shoreline vegetation, etc.) or the engineered use of natural resources (e.g. green roofs, bioswales/rain gardens, tree-lined streets, etc.) to provide adaptation or mitigation services to the gradual and/or sudden impacts of climate change or natural hazards.

For local government projects, funding is available up to 100% of eligible costs. Municipalities were eligible to submit one application.

Canada and British Columbia governments are investing up to **\$80.29 million** towards this intake of CVRIS to support cost-sharing of infrastructure projects in communities across the province. Eligible applicants for this merit-based funding program will be Local Governments, Indigenous Ultimate Recipients and Not-for-Profit Projects.

EXISTING POLICY AND PRACTICE

Based on staff's evaluation and the significant alignment with Council's strategic direction and the climate targets of the Provincial and Federal Governments, the Urban Reforestation and Biodiversity Enhancement Initiative ("URBEI") was submitted January 2021 for the ICIP CVRIS grant funding opportunity. The city's application proposed to use the funds to accelerate the City's climate emergency response, as outlined in Bold Step #6 by planting 2,200 new trees by the end of 2023:

[ROBUST URBAN FOREST](#)

"New Westminster's Urban Forest Canopy cover will be increased to 27% by 2030 to support the removal of 4,050 tonnes of carbon pollution every year and increase our forest's carbon storage capacity by 50%".

ANALYSIS

The inventory and analysis conducted as part of the Urban Forest Management Strategy (2017), outlines an ambitious, yet achievable target of 27% canopy cover by 2035. Council recognized the urgency required to tackle the impacts of a changing climate and, therefore, **expedited the 27% canopy cover target to 2030** rather than 2035 (as originally targeted in the Urban Forest Management Strategy) with adoption of the 7 Bold Steps. To achieve 27% in given timeframe, the City is required to plant approx. 11,800 trees (2,200 new trees on City-owned parks and open spaces; 6,300 new trees in streets; and 3,300 new trees on private land). Over a three year period (2018-2020), approximately 1,605 trees were planted on both city-owned and private lands. As proposed, the URBEI would add 2,200 trees planted by 2023 to advance our total to ~3,805 trees planted (approx. 20% of the total # of trees to be planted by 2030).

The approved maximum federal/ provincial contribution of \$1,746,238 will support planting 2,000 large trees (4-6cm caliper in size), drip irrigation (only through establishment), 200 small trees (2 gallon size) and a diverse range of native planting (i.e. rewilding) within parks and open spaces to support city-wide biodiversity and advance the enhancement/ creation of habitat areas as per the City's Biodiversity Strategy.

Next Steps

The following work will commence in fall 2021 and will be complete by December 31, 2023:

- Planning/ mapping all locations for proposed tree planting with an interdepartmental staff team;
- Retaining a consultant to assist with mapping, project management and oversight;
- Preparation (i.e. soil preparation, clearing, digging and mulch) and planting ~2,000 new trees planted on city-owned lands (largely in parks and open spaces) and ~200 new small trees planted (in natural areas) utilizing external contractors and equipment;
- Installation of temporary drip irrigation for newly planted trees/planted areas within parks and open spaces; and
- Planting native species (i.e. rewilding) in select areas of parks and open spaces.

Staff will provide regular progress updates for the project to Council as well as the Environment and Climate Advisory Committee and Task Force.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The benefits of urban trees are many, including carbon sequestration, beautification, reduction of the urban heat island effect, reduction of storm water runoff, reduction of air pollution, reduction of energy costs through increased shade over buildings, enhancement of property values, improved wildlife habitat, and climate adaptation. The sooner new green areas and tree planting are initiated, the sooner the many benefits will be maximized for the community and future generations.

For the Metro Vancouver Region, climate change is projected to result in warmer, drier summers, reduced snow-packs, more frequent extreme rainfall events and rising sea levels. The management of the urban forest, creating structural and species diversity, is an important climate adaptation tool for New Westminster and cities across the region.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This funding will support the existing capital plan requirements and accelerate future capital plan requirements to support the accelerated climate action. The approved maximum federal/ provincial contribution of \$1,746,238 will assist the city in achieving its ambitious targets for growing robust urban forest (Bold Step #6). Staff estimate the ongoing operating cost impacts associated with the establishment of the new trees in their early years will be mitigated by installing temporary drip irrigation systems thereby eliminating the need for hand labour intensive watering..

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Interdepartmental liaison to date has included coordination with Parks & Recreation, Engineering Services, Finance Department and Office of the CAO.

OPTIONS

1. THAT Council receive this report for information; and
2. THAT Council direct staff to proceed with next steps as outlined in this report; or
3. THAT Council provide staff with alternate direction.

CONCLUSION

The Urban Reforestation and Biodiversity Enhancement Initiative will enable the City to meet the goal of the ICIP CVRIS funding program to utilize natural or green infrastructure to provide adaptation or mitigation services to the gradual and/or sudden impacts of climate change or natural hazards. The funding also helps achieve New Westminster's Urban Forest Canopy cover target of 27% by 2030 to support the removal of 4,050 tonnes of carbon pollution every year and increase our forest's carbon storage capacity by 50%. The approved maximum federal/ provincial contribution of \$1,746,238 will assist the city in meeting these targets.

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:

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