



**Press Release – December 26, 2021**

**The CT Urban Forest Council Announces the Recipients of its Urban Forestry Climate Change Grants**

The Connecticut Urban Forest Council will be awarding funding to five applicants through its Urban Forestry Climate Change Grant program. This is the first ever funding to be provided through this grant program. The five recipients and the amount of funding to be awarded are:

- Groundwork Bridgeport - \$33,942
- The Greenwich Tree Conservancy - \$37,000
- The Urban Resources Initiative (New Haven) - \$37,000
- The Town of Stratford - \$37,000
- The Town of Windsor - \$34,720

The CUFC is also announcing that a second round of grants will be awarded, with the due date for applications being February 2, 2022. Information on this second round of grants is available on the Council web site at: <https://cturbanforestcouncil.org/grants/climate-change-grants/>.

The Connecticut Urban Forest Council initiated the Urban Forestry Climate Change Grant Program in 2021 at the request of the Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. The purpose of the grant program is to fund urban forestry projects throughout Connecticut that improve the urban forest and increase local tree canopy cover. Projects must also have a role in mitigating the local impacts of climate change and addressing concerns relating to social equity and environmental justice. How well a proposal tackled all three of these concerns – urban forestry, climate change and social equity – was the main consideration in the evaluation of each application.

The applications received demonstrated the awareness that municipalities and non-profits have regarding the importance of urban trees. They see the influence of these trees on the quality of life for people in the state. In addition, the applications showed a detailed understanding of the connections between these trees and the effects of climate change, particularly as relates to local flooding and to the urban heat island effect. Public health considerations due to the tree's role in cleaning the air and in encouraging people to get outside were also frequently mentioned.

The application process also encouraged a recognition of the relationship between social inequities and unequal environmental burdens. Applicants were encouraged to make use of such resources as the Tree Equity Mapping Tool, produced by American Forests, to identify areas within their communities where tree canopy cover is low and indicators of social inequalities are high. The applications showed that, even in some of the state's presumably wealthiest communities, pockets of poverty and social disadvantage exist, including along interstate highways and in older industrial zones. The applications showed how the planting of trees can help communities deal with these sorts of local environmental disparities.

Funding for this Grant Program was provided by DEEP through the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. In establishing of this program, the Commissioner requested that the CUFC consider the recommendations of the Governor's Council on Climate Change and the 2020 Connecticut Forest Action Plan, developed by the Division of Forestry within DEEP.

The CUFC is excited at this opportunity to further its mission. As stated by Heather Dionne, City Forester for the City of Hartford and Chair of the CUFC, "This is major. Trees mean so much to a community when they are chosen well and planted right. This is especially true in those parts of our cities and towns where, in so many ways, the opportunities are just not the same as they are elsewhere. The cities, towns and non-profits within Connecticut are willing to address these issues. They just need the resources and maybe some technical advice to go along with it. We are glad for this chance to contribute."

The Connecticut Urban Forest Council is a 501(c)3 non-profit. Its membership includes individuals from throughout the state of Connecticut who are engaged in urban forestry in a variety of ways. Among its ranks are arborists, landscape architects, tree wardens, state and local public officials, representatives of various non-profit organizations, researchers, educators and general tree enthusiasts.

For further details regarding the Council or the Urban Forestry Climate Change Grant program, please visit the CUFC web site at <https://cturbanforestcouncil.org>. Council Chair Heather Dionne may also be contacted for further information either on the Council or the grant program by sending an email to Heather.Dionne@hartford.gov

A full list of the grant recipients with a summary of the projects proposed:

### **Groundwork Bridgeport - \$33,642**

The grant proposal, "Growing Our Forest Together," was selected to receive \$33,642 of funding. The proposal provided site plans for planting 60 trees from eight genera in three public parks in Bridgeport, engaging community volunteers to plant the trees and to maintain them through their Adopt-A-Tree Program. The locations for tree planting include Beardsley Park, Old Mill Green, and Seaside Park. Planting in these parks will recover some canopy lost due to emerald ash borer, may mitigate some risk related to stormwater runoff and urban flooding, and will be planted near urban neighborhoods affected by industrial pollution and with low tree equity scores. The parks are essential recreation areas for these neighborhoods.

### **Greenwich Tree Conservancy - \$37,000**

The grant proposal, "Adapting to Climate: Increasing the Urban Canopy in Greenwich's EJ Census Tracts," was selected to receive \$37,000 of funding. The proposal is to plant 51 trees from at least seven genera in Environmental Justice communities (Byram, Chickahominy, and Pemberwick neighborhoods), as identified as those census blocks with the highest minority population, highest proportion of the community living in poverty, and with low-ranking tree equity scores. An unusual aspect of this proposal was an effort to strategically remove concrete in locations to plant trees where they could provide the greatest benefit. Tree planting will be in spaces close to the living areas of communities, which has the greatest potential to alleviate urban heat island effects and to provide the most direct health and quality of life benefits to the neighborhoods. The proposal was strongly supported by letters

from elected representatives of the affected communities recognized the benefits that will accrue to their constituents from the planted trees.

### **Urban Resources Initiative, Inc. (New Haven) - \$37,000**

The grant proposal, “Solving Inequities in New Haven’s Tree Canopy Distribution,” or “Planting Trees for Cool Communities,” was selected to receive \$37,000 of funding. This multifaceted proposal involves planting 75 trees from approximately nine genera in areas of the city identified in 2016 through LIDAR assessment as having less than 20% tree canopy, and are identified as Environmental Justice communities, having high proportion minority populations living in poverty. The planting will involve training of high school students and formerly incarcerated persons, through the GreenSkills and EMERGE programs, respectively. A bilingual campaign for tree planting will take place in the targeted neighborhoods, to elicit requests from residents for trees to be planted on residents’ properties.

### **The Town of Stratford - \$37,000**

The grant proposal, “Street Tree Replanting,” was selected to receive \$37,000 of funding. The proposal aims to plant 100 trees in the two areas first identified as Environmental Justice Community census blocks, prior to the entire town being so designated. They have tree canopies of only 14 – 15%, and are adjacent to industrial areas. Locations within these census blocks suitable for tree planting having been identified by the Tree Warden, the trees of suitable species will be purchased through contracts, planted by the Public Works Department, and then maintained by the Town Gardener. Two community meetings will inform residents of the areas to be planted about tree biology and benefits, tree law, and to garner support for residents to help maintain the planted trees.

### **The Town of Windsor - \$34,720**

The grant proposal, “Taking Root in Windsor,” was selected to receive \$34,720 of funding. The proposal provided site plans for planting 91 trees and shrubs from fourteen genera in three public parks in the Deerfield and Wilson neighborhoods, ultimately improving shade, lowering urban heat island effects, and providing more livable space for recreation. These neighborhoods were selected based upon their high minority population (66 – 89%), proximity to interstate highways, high level of impervious surfaces, and overall poor health indicators as evident from the CDC Places Dataset. Town efforts in the STEP program supports training of local high school youth in tree care.