



**TO:** Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Keith Abraham, Parks and Recreation Director  
**DATE:** 10/17/2023  
**RE:** USDA Forest Service Inflation Reduction Act – Urban & Community Forestry Grant

On April 12, 2023, the USDA Forest Service announced a grant opportunity utilizing Inflation Reduction Act funding. The grant opportunity sought to provide multiyear, programmatic, competitive grants for tree planting and related activities, with a priority for projects that benefit underserved populations and areas. Grant funds were available to municipalities and non-profit organizations and required a dollar-for-dollar match to be eligible for funding. Applicants who qualified as “Disadvantaged” in the federal Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) tool, or other federal tools, were able to request a match waiver for their proposal. Applications were accepted until June 1, 2023.

The City of Ames submitted a grant proposal requesting \$810,500 from the USDA Forest Service with \$813,181 submitted as potential match dollars from City of Ames. The proposal included funding for various projects to benefit Ames residents and the growing Ames urban tree canopy. A listing of proposal components is below:

- Hire an additional two-three forestry seasonal employees with one employee being dedicated to watering newly planted trees throughout the growing season.
- Plant additional trees across Ames annually by doubling the funding dedicated to planting.
- Acquire additional modified slow-drain watering systems made from 5-gallon buckets with informative, educational labels.
- Establish a gravel bed nursery system allowing the City to grow bare root tree stock for one season before planting, producing trees of similar size that are lower-cost and have a higher-quality root system than what is currently purchased.
- Contract with the Conservation Corps of Iowa to have a six-person team work in Ames for several weeks in three consecutive years focusing on invasive species removal throughout the urban woodland network including Munn Woods, Emma McCarthy Lee Park, Brookside Park, and East River Valley Park.
- Hire a contractor to conduct a complete update of Ames’ Urban Tree Inventory.
- Complete the City’s Emerald Ash Borer Response Plan earlier than planned. Current plan is scheduled to conclude with all public ash trees removed and replaced by 2033. This funding would allow the plan to be completed within five years from today.
- Fund education/training for the City’s Parks staff related to proper tree care, pruning, removal, and equipment use.

**On September 14, 2023, the USDA Forest Service announced 385 grant recipients from the 842 applicants. The City of Ames grant proposal was selected for funding at the full \$810,500 amount requested. The City does not qualify as disadvantaged using the CEJST tool, but did meet disadvantaged eligibility using other federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tools. After reviewing the application material, the Forest Service determined that the City qualified as a disadvantaged community and met match-waiver requirements. Therefore, the USDA Forest Service awarded the full grant request of \$810,500 with no match required from the City of Ames.**

Due to the high number of grants awarded, the USDA Forest Service is partnering with several pass-through groups to help facilitate some of the grant projects. The City of Ames grant will be facilitated through The Arbor Day Foundation. City staff will work directly with The Arbor Day Foundation on grant management, fund allocation, and required reporting. Once a full grant agreement is signed and in place between the City and The Arbor Day Foundation, the City will have five years to complete the grant proposal with semi-annual grant reporting requirements.

**The USDA Forest Service required acceptance of this grant funding no later than Friday, October 20. Due to the quick response needed, staff submitted a letter of acceptance of this grant funding subject to City Council approving the agreement with The Arbor Day Foundation once it is received, and that there is no match requirement for the City. This agreement will be brought before City Council at a future date.**