

ITEM #: 36
DATE: 03-26-24
DEPT: ADMIN

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT TO POLK COUNTY, IA FOR US EPA CPRG PHASE II IMPLEMENTATION GRANT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$49,999,999

BACKGROUND:

In August 2023, Polk County accepted a planning grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG), committing to work with surrounding geographical areas in a climate action planning process for central Iowans. The CPRG planning area uses 2020 US Census data for metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) to identify metropolitan areas eligible for funding. The Des Moines-West Des Moines MSA includes Guthrie, Dallas, Polk, Jasper, Madison, and Warren counties. **Due to the interconnectedness of the region, Story County and the City of Ames was invited to join the central Iowa's CPRG planning efforts.**

After receiving the planning grant, Polk County created the Polk County Sustainability Team (Sustainability Team). The Sustainability Team leads the regional CPRG effort, and team members have spent a significant amount of time over the last six months meeting and collaborating with over 90 regional partners, including the City of Ames, to identify common climate action goals, interests, and priorities.

The extensive engagement process revealed that the most common and action-ready opportunity across the regional partners lies within the residential energy space. The opportunities for reducing carbon emissions in the residential energy sector are a common and action-ready theme across central Iowa. Furthermore, low-income residential housing requires unprecedented investments to reduce emissions, maintain affordability for low and fixed-income households, and enhance the efficiency and resiliency of homes, neighborhoods, and communities.

The CPRG planning process revealed that weatherization assistance programs are presently underfunded or inaccessible, leaving thousands waitlisted for programs that serve only a few hundred households each year. Since existing rebate and cost-share programs are often out of reach for low-income and disadvantaged households due to significant upfront costs, this unmet need means thousands of vulnerable families are missing out on significant savings and improved health and home safety.

With this knowledge, the Sustainability Team submitted central Iowa's Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP - attached) to the US EPA Region 7 on March 1, 2024, on behalf of the seven counties, highlighting the carbon reduction opportunity in the residential housing sector—specifically, low-income, owner-occupied households' energy efficiency and capacity. **The submission of the PCAP enables central Iowa to be eligible to apply for the EPA Phase II CPRG Implementation Grant. The grant application deadline is April 1, 2024.**

Because the Polk County Sustainability Team leads the CPRG planning efforts, Polk County will submit the grant proposal on behalf of the regional partners. The application being prepared by the Polk County Sustainability Team seeks \$49,999,999. If funded by the EPA, the implementation grant request includes the following strategies:

1. Expand existing energy audit and weatherization programs to increase low-income households served and provide additional incentives for energy efficiency, electrification, renewable energy, and ecosystem services offerings. This can include energy-efficiency measures such as installing energy efficiency appliances, insulation, windows, smart technology and HVAC systems. It can also include capacity advancement offerings such as electric panel upgrades, residential electric vehicle infrastructure, solar tubes and passive lighting.
2. Fund energy auditor and contractor training and certification programs, including outreach to recruit prospective contractors.
3. Conduct neighborhood assessments of Low Income/Disadvantaged Communities and plant diverse native trees and shrubs to sequester carbon and reduce heat island effects.
4. Partner with workforce organizations and institutions of higher learning on training programs for energy audits and follow-up services.

The proposal aims to serve more than 1,600 low-income household within the region over the five-year grant expenditure period, enabling the homeowners to reduce their energy consumption. It will also support a robust workforce development effort resulting in qualified energy efficiency contractors and energy auditors, incentivizing the creation of new, well-paying energy jobs.

Staff is requesting that the City Council authorize the Mayor to sign a letter of support to Polk County in support of the Polk County CPRG grant application (attached). If approved, staff will also engage with state representatives to also consider submitting letters of support after the grant application has been submitted.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Authorize the Mayor to sign a Letter of Support to Polk County, Iowa for the Central Iowa Priority Climate Action Plan Implementation funding through Phase II of the US Environmental Protection Agency Carbon Pollution Reduction Grant in the amount of \$49,999,999.
2. Do not authorize the Mayor to sign the Letter of Support.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The regional CPRG Implementation Grant proposal supports the City Council's values of a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community and environmental sustainability. If awarded, the region will benefit from investing in carbon reduction efforts for low-income residential households, expanding energy auditor programs, and increasing contractor capacity for implementing carbon reduction measures. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1, as described above.

ATTACHMENT(S):

[CPRG Phase II Support - City of Ames.docx](#)

[Central Iowa Priority Climate Action Plan - CPRG.pdf](#)