



Legislation Text

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TO: Mayor and Commissioners
FROM: Kent Edwards, Sustainability Officer
THROUGH: Terrence R. Moore, ICMA-CM
DATE: July 9, 2024

TREE PLANTING PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT

Recommended Action:

Consider report and provide comments.

Background:

Trees are critical green infrastructure that provide benefits including storm water management, reduction of the urban heat island effect, wildlife habitat, reduced air pollution, and increased property values. To help quantify these benefits and to assess the need for additional tree plantings, the City conducted a Tree Canopy Assessment in 2019.

The Tree Canopy Assessment determined that overall, Delray Beach has an average of 23% canopy coverage. Some parts of the City had up to 29% canopy and others were as low as 15%. The report recommended planting 10,000 new trees in five years to raise the average canopy to 28%. The report also recommended reducing the disparity between neighborhoods, and maintaining the health of the existing urban forest through proactive maintenance and increased training of City staff.

The City adopted the "10,000 Trees by Year 2025" goal in 2020. By the end of 2021, 996 trees had been planted in Year 1 of the program, including 300 trees in parks, 250 at local schools, and 200 in right-of-ways, and an additional 1,000 trees were given away to residents. Trees that were planted and given away included a diverse variety of 30 different native species and several varieties that provide edible fruit.

Monitoring of the Year 1 tree plantings was performed in May and June of 2023. Of the 996 trees planted, 753 planting locations were visited. The other 243 trees could not be assessed as the site (Pine Grove Elementary) was under construction and access was restricted. Overall results were very good compared to other tree planting programs, with more than 96% survival. It was also observed that 5% of the trees were damaged. Monitoring of a selection of Year 1 plantings is currently underway but has not been completed as of this writing.

The Agreement for Year 2 of the Tree Planting Program was executed in June of 2022. This Agreement included a provision for 3 annual renewals, which potentially allowed for completion of the Tree Planting Program. During Year 2 of the program, which wrapped up in June 2023, a total of 1208 trees were planted, and 800 trees were given away to residents.

Planting Sites for Year 2 included 4 schools, 6 City Parks, 6 retention areas, and other City properties

and partner sites. Development of planting plans for each of these sites entailed coordination to ensure that there were no conflicts with utilities, site functions, or future site plans. After a site was found to be acceptable for tree plantings, tree species were selected with consideration of soils, sun exposure, surrounding habitat, and hydrology. A large variety of trees, including 45 different species, were planted and given away during Year 2. Along with expanding tree canopy coverage, planting a diversity of largely native trees also provides greater environmental function. Trees which produce edible fruit were popular at tree giveaways, and were also planted in a few selected areas, providing fresh fruit to the communities.

In 2023 during the development of planting plans, it was discovered that there were internal concerns that resources and funding were not sufficient to allow for maintenance of additional tree plantings on some City properties. This is an important consideration as the program goes forward.

Under the Agreement, Community Greening has been responsible for tree maintenance for one year after planting. Before the end of the one-year post-planting period for the Year 2 plantings, the condition of trees was observed. In addition, during early June of 2024, after trees planted on City property completed their one-year post-planting period, a monitoring event was performed, as was done last year for the Year 1 plantings.

All of the 378 tree plantings on City property during Year 2 of the program were assessed. Of these, 362 or 95.8% were located and in reasonably good condition. Sixteen trees or 4.2% were dead or could not be found. Other observations included 50 trees (13.2%) that needed water, and 17 trees (4.5%) that were damaged. Overall 41 species of trees were planted. Several points can be taken from the monitoring event. Compared to other tree planting programs, the overall survival rate for Delray Beach remains high, and the diversity of tree species planted continues to be high. The 17.7% of trees that needed water or were damaged is consistent with concerns voiced regarding additional resources needed for tree plantings on City properties. Though the overall statistics for Year 1 & 2 plantings are good compared to reports from other tree planting programs, monitoring and assessment will continue, looking for ways to improve planting design and project management.

Year 3 of the Tree Planting Program ended on June 14, 2024, with a total spending for the year of \$306,201.00. The total numbers for the year entailed 2063 overall trees, including 1316 giveaway trees, 214 city property plantings, 51 private/partner plantings, and 482 drop-off trees for private/partner locations.

The tree drop-off program was found to perform well in Year 3, with benefits including, not adding more maintenance work for City staff, and allowing more focus on lower canopy areas of the City. Making the drop-off program a larger part of the tree planting program is a consideration for the coming year, working in cooperation with property owners and associations that desire more tree canopy in their communities. These plantings could be in community common areas, or private property adjacent to right-of-way. With planting sites on City property becoming fewer and with concerns for maintenance, the drop-off program could provide more sites where larger trees could be planted along roadways throughout the City. The drop-off trees are 15-gallon size and cost more than giveaway trees which are 3-gallon.

The Agreement for Year 4 of the Tree Planting Program is in preparation. As of June 25, 2024, the balance of the Tree Trust Fund was \$273,925.05, and this is the maximum amount for which the Agreement can be written. The above balance does not include \$19,569.35 which was encumbered but not spent last year. It should also be noted that additional deposits to the Tree Trust Fund could potentially occur, and the Amendment could be revised to incorporate these funds.

City Attorney Review:

NA

Funding Source/Financial Impact:

The financial impact of the Tree Planting Program is addressed during the budget process. Thus far, funding for the Tree Planting Program has come exclusively from the Tree Trust Fund.

Timing of Request:

Not time sensitive.