THE CITY OF
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TO: Mayor and Councilmembers
FROM: Adam Swanepoel, Assistant Public Works Director
AGENDA ITEM: **Washington County Conservation District Tree Stewards Program**
REVIEWED BY: Marty Powers, Public Works Director

CORE STRATEGIES:

☒ Vibrant, inclusive, connected community   ☐ Efficient, reliable, innovative services
☐ Responsive, transparent, adaptive governance   ☐ Balanced Finances now and future
☐ Managed Growth   ☐ Resilient Infrastructure

BACKGROND: The Tree Steward Program is a community-based program where city/county staff or representatives request bringing in Tree Steward education. This education allows residents to get involved with caring for their community's public urban and community trees through volunteerism. Essentially, Tree Steward volunteers act as leaders in their community and act as a second pair of eyes within their community. In addition, the program is designed for people who love trees, enjoy being outdoors, and want to volunteer with their community. Through a partnership with the Washington Conservation District (WCD) and University of Minnesota, volunteers will learn how to care for young and newly planted trees in public spaces of Washington County. After completing the training and short assessment, they will become a certified Tree Steward Volunteer who can participate in activities under the guidance of WCD/host site or Forestry staff.

ISSUE BEFORE COUNCIL: Should the Council approve a partnership with the Washington County Conservation District Tree Steward Program?

PROPOSAL DETAILS/ANALYSIS: Washington County Conservation District and the Tree Stewards Program has asked for the city to become a partner in the program. Volunteers from the community attend a training conducted by WCD in April. Tree Stewards will be trained in: basic tree biology and identification, best practices for planting, mulching, watering, staking, fertilizing, trunk protection, developmental pruning of young trees, pruning suckers and sprouts, and common tree disease, pests, and defects.

The city, as a host, provides a staff representative who works with the WCD to offer up opportunities for volunteer participation. The representative would be the person of contact for the

volunteers for city assignments or projects. To be a partner in the program the city is asked to provide 25 hours of volunteer work per year in the program.

Being part of the Tree Steward Program assists the city in community connectedness and meets a Gold Leaf Action. This Gold Leaf challenge encourages participants to connect their actions to goals through the integration of local community-specific goals and/or statewide climate goals.

FISCAL IMPACT: There are no financial obligations required from the city to be part of the Tree Stewart Program. A city staff member is assigned as the coordinator for the cities program.

OPTIONS: Approve or deny the cities participation in the program.

RECOMMENDATION:
Motion to approve participation in the Washington County Tree Stewards Program.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Washington County Tree Stewards Program Responsibilities
- Gold Leaf Recognition Tree Steward Community

CC8 - Tree Steward Community

Gold Leaf Challenge Award	Gold Leaf Challenge Action	Leaf Recognition Criteria
Leaf (Action completed)	**Tree Steward Community:** Participate in the Tree Steward Program	Per annual documentation (1+/lifetime); 1/year
Gold Leaf (Goal met)	**Gold Leaf Award Goals from the [Minnesota Climate Action Framework](#):** ● By 2035, increase by 25% the amount of carbon sequestered and stored annually in natural and working lands, compared to 2014-2018 average levels. (MN CAF, pg 33.) ● Achieve 30% overall tree canopy cover in Minnesota communities by 2030 and 40% by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 42.) ● By 2030, reduce the age- adjusted rate of heat- related ER visits to 10 per 100,000. (MN CAF, pg 57.) ● Increase jobs in all sectors of the clean economy, including new and emerging sectors such as land management, transportation, long-lived wood products, etc. (MN CAF, pg 63.) **Gold Leaf Award Goals from Your Community:** Find your community/ organization's sustainability goals relevant to this action. Check the [Welcome Guide's](#) section on Integrated Goals for more information. You can track these goals on your work plan.

Related Actions	● **GreenStep Cities & Tribal Nations BPA [16.6](#):** Build community capacity to protect existing trees by one or more of:
	  ○ Having trained tree specialists.
	  ○ Supporting volunteer forestry efforts.
	  ○ Adopting an EAB management plan/climate adaptation plan for the urban forest.

Related Goals & Metrics	N/A
Potential Outcomes and	● **Pollutants Reduced:** ○ **Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduced:** Trees serve as carbon sinks.

Co-Benefits	● **Environmental Benefits:**
	   ○ **Habitat**: Healthy trees can increase and protect the biodiversity of species in your community.
	   ○ **Water Quality and Management:** Trees store and filter more than half of the water supply in the United States.Trees can help reduce stormwater runoff and some species can thrive in flood-prone areas. Other species are drought tolerant and reduce the need for irrigation.
	   ○ **Tree Canopy:** Increased tree canopy decreases heat islands.
	● **Physical Health:** There are many [Human Benefits of Green Spaces](#), for both physical and mental health.
	● **Jobs** - While this program focuses on utilizing volunteers, you may be supporting job development skills for residents.
	● **Time Saving** - Volunteers hours can offset the time needed for staff or contractors to plant and maintain trees. Trees that are well taken care of also require less time in ongoing maintenance or removal and replacements.
	● **Financial Benefit:** Trees and other natural infrastructure provide quantifiable savings to communities.
	   ○ For example, according to the [National Tree Benefit Calculator](#), a 20-inch diameter ash tree near a residence provides benefits worth $197/yr. When these benefits are weighed against the cost to purchase, plant, prune, protect, and eventually remove a tree, the benefits outweigh the costs by a margin of about three to one. The dollars spent to remove and replace one average-sized urban ash tree could instead be used to preserve, for over 20 years, 2 ash trees that will provide four times the tree benefits of the one replacement tree.
	   ○ Read about numerous other financial benefits on the [GreenStep Best Practice #16: Community forests and soils](#) page.
	● **Community:**
	   ○ **Equity & Environmental Justice:** Greenspace is often lacking in areas of environmental justice concern and low-moderate income neighborhoods. Projects can be prioritized in these areas, creating access to and restoring the places that are unique to the community.
	   ○ **Community Resilience:** Ecosystem restoration teaches local community members how to care for land in a sustainable way and to pay attention to how their individual actions impact the local environment. Greenspace can provide substantial [heat relief](#).
	   ○ **Property Values** - Large trees in yards along streets can increase a home's property value from 3-15%. Access to nearby public spaces with trees can also increase property values.
	   ○ **Community Asset** - Communities often highlight their parks and greenspaces as community assets. Trees create attractive neighborhoods that increase the desirability of living in a community, which can help attract and retain workers.
	   ○ **Community Connection:** Create community connection through volunteer organization and grow community knowledge about tree care.

Estimated Project Implementation Details	● **Time:** Determining a project, finding a project partner and recruiting community volunteers takes time. You may need to plan for, advertise and run events, interview and place volunteers where their skills are best utilized, and recognize volunteers through special events or other follow up. Many communities may utilize a volunteer coordinator in a part-time capacity. ● **Cost:** The cost of tools and supplies for the project will depend on the project and how large it is. There are some grants that fund these types of projects in communities. If you can't find one, reach out to GreenStep staff for help!

	● **Pre-conditions & Considerations:** Once the volunteer project is completed, the land will likely still need to be maintained in some way. Make sure there is a plan in place for how to do this. Staff or volunteers may also need to be retrained to take care of trees.

Resources and Technical Assistance	● **Technical Advisor:** Valerie McClannahan, Community Forestry Coordinator, MN Department of Natural Resources:
	  ○ 651-259-5283, valerie.mcclannahan@state.mn.us
	  ○ www.dnr.state.mn.us/forestry/urban
	● The Tree Steward Program is a community-based program where city/county staff or representatives request bringing in Tree Steward education. This education allows residents to get involved with caring for their community's public urban and community trees through volunteerism. Essentially, Tree Steward volunteers act as leaders in their community and act as a second pair of eyes within their community.
	  ○ Tree Steward volunteers can be trained in a wide array of topics related to trees. This education can include, but is not limited to, the following topics:
	    ■ Properly planting trees and leading others at planting events
	    ■ Properly pruning young trees to improve the overall health and structure
	    ■ Pruning suckers and sprouts from young and mature trees to ensure safety and proper sightlines for the public
	    ■ Watering devices available for use and the benefits of utilizing watering devices for young and newly planted trees
	    ■ Installation of watering devices on public trees
	    ■ Identification of common tree diseases and pests
	    ■ How to identify trees of concern - we want to keep the public safe!
	    ■ How to report trees of concern to your community so action can be taken
	● The Minnesota Tree Care Advocate program has a helpline to help people help trees to help their communities! An individual program for Tree Care Advisors trains volunteers to serve as hubs of knowledge and teaching beyond their communities.
	● The Minnesota Certified Tree Inspector training is available for volunteers and staff. Related is the Minnesota Shade Tree Short Course.
	● The Minnesota Forest Pest First Detector training certifies volunteers or staff to identify and respond to tree pests.

Examples	● Almost every state has a tree steward community program. ● There is a map of participating communities on the Tree Steward Community website. ● Find examples of GreenStep Cities and Tribal Nations engaging volunteers in tree care at BPA 16.6, under "Who's doing it".
Reporting & Recognition (See reporting instructions in the Welcome Guide)	**Leaf Recognition Criteria:** 1 Leaf is awarded each year that you can document an active volunteer tree planting and maintenance program. This should include ongoing efforts and not just one-off events throughout the year. You can receive a leaf each additional year that a program is active. **Gold Leaf Goals:** Document the completion of one or more goals related to this action at any time. 1 Gold Leaf is awarded per goal met. *Alternative*: Have a member of your organization become a Tree Steward volunteer or

	Tree Care Advisor. Show how they have helped to take care of the trees on your privately owned property and the community. You can also show how volunteers from your community participate in this program.
FAQs	The Gold Leaf Challenge is open to many community types. Because of this, the actions are meant to be adjusted to ensure the program works for all participants. Please email us feedback or suggestions so we can continuously improve our Gold Leaf Challenge considerations. ——————————————— **What if our organization only owns private property or wants to conduct a project on private property?** Certain private property projects may be appropriate for this action. The goal of this action is to create community connectedness through volunteer tree care projects. If your project achieves that, then report it. **What if our community is mostly forest rather than urban trees?** Start with an inventory to identify which trees are in locations that may have trees that require maintenance like pruning or replacement. These are likely to be along roads, parking areas, and structures. Alternatively, you can work with the Minnesota DNR or University of Minnesota Extension to develop woodland management plans, become a Master Woodland Owner, and more.

Feedback or Questions? Contact GreenStep@state.mn.us

Date Updated: 1/25/2024

Washington County Tree Stewards Volunteer Program Responsibilities

Host Site Responsibilities:
1. Tree Steward Liability wavers (according to cities legal team).
2. Provide a supervisor for the Tree Stewards to receive assignments from and report to.
3. Self-identify high needs areas for Tree Steward maintenance.
4. Provide at least 25 hours of work/ community events per year for tree stewards to complete
    a. The hope is that tree stewards will continuously serve city when needed.

WCD Responsibilities:
1. Facilitate the training of Tree Steward through the U of M Extension.
2. Match the tree stewards with a city host site.
3. Collect data on hours served and work completed by Tree Stewards (from My Impact)
4. Provide tree stewards opportunities to network and get together as a cohort.
5. Provide future continuing education opportunities.

Tree Steward Responsibilities:
1. Report to city supervisor for assignments to complete.
2. Report hours and accomplishments on My Impact.com
3. Complete 25 hours of work per year in tree care maintenance or community events

Safety Expectations of Tree Stewards:
- Wear safety vests, protective eyewear, helmet,
- Wear closed shoes
- Prune branches within arm's reach both feet on the ground
- Pruned branches 2 inches or smaller
- Don't prune branches near power lines