Agenda Report

MEETING DATE: Tuesday, April 23, 2024

TO: City Council

FROM: PARKS & COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTOR CALUBAQUIB
PARKS SUPERINTENDENT MEDINA

THROUGH: CITY MANAGER MENDES

SUBJECT: RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE CITY OF WATSONVILLE URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024

RECOMMENDED ACTION:
Staff recommends that the City Council adopt a resolution adopting the City of Watsonville Urban Forest Management Plan 2024.

BACKGROUND:
The City Council authorized the application for CAL FIRE Urban Forestry Program grant funds on April 14, 2020, by Resolution No. 46-20 (CM). Following the application, the City was awarded a $700,000 grant from The CAL FIRE Urban & Community Forestry Program in August 2020.

The program's goals were to optimize the benefits of trees and related vegetation through multiple objective projects as specified in the California Urban Forestry Act of 1978 (Public Resources Code §§ 4799.06-4799.12). This grant program uses funds provided by Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) for California Climate Investments (CCI) and projects that further the goals of the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32), resulting in a net greenhouse gas (GHG) benefit, and providing environmental services and cost-effective solutions to the needs of urban communities and local agencies. Co-benefits of the projects include increased water supply, clean air and water, reduced energy use, flood and storm water management, recreation, urban revitalization, improved public health, and producing useful products such as bio-fuel, clean energy, and high-quality wood. Urban and Community Forestry efforts play a significant role in meeting the State's GHG emission reduction targets. Cal Fire encourages resident participation in the development and implementation of each project.

Expansion and improved management of urban forests is greatly needed in the City of Watsonville. The City is significantly deficient in urban forest resources, with a current 9.4% canopy coverage. This severe lack of urban trees directly impacts the City's public health and well-being and the freshwater wetlands that underlie the City. Watsonville is a predominately

low-income community, where among the approximately 20,000 students in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District, over 75% qualify for free and reduced lunch and unemployment rates are the highest in Santa Cruz County. The entire City qualifies as either SB 535 or AB 1550 under the CA ARB designation and has a combination of high pollution burden and low income. Watsonville exemplifies the type of community in California that will benefit most from urban forest development.

The City of Watsonville and Watsonville Wetlands Watch collaborated on the Urban and Community Forestry grant, which installed 300 trees throughout the City's highest need areas before the end of 2021. This very successful project represents the first major collaboration in urban forest expansion and to date has supported over 1,500 youth and family volunteer hours in tree plantings and care.

The awarded Watsonville Community Forestry Project has developed and implemented comprehensive urban forest management activities designed to evaluate current urban forest resources, identify locations, opportunities, and needs for urban forest expansion activities, develop appropriate policies to sustain and enhance urban forest resources within the City of Watsonville over time, and implement urban forest expansion activities in a way that advances these efforts. This project is consistent with past planning efforts such as the Urban Greening Plan (2012), the Climate Action Plan (2015) and the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan (2023). The Parks and Community Services Department worked with local residents, City departments, community partners, Watsonville Wetlands Watch, and consultants to achieve project objectives. Specific project accomplishments include:

1. Development of an urban forest inventory for the City of Watsonville
2. Development of an urban forest management plan, per CalFire guidelines
3. Development of project designs and plans for at least 30 future street, neighborhood, and school tree plantings that can be implemented following the urban forest management plan creation
4. Development of a City of Watsonville tree preservation ordinance
5. Completion of a resident survey to support the urban forest management plan and ordinance development
6. Establishment of a tree canopy cover goal for the City
7. In partnership with Watsonville Wetlands Watch, installation of 260 trees on City streets, parks, and neighborhoods during 20 public and local student education and outreach events that also included surveying of residents
8. In partnership with Watsonville Wetlands Watch, piloted resident neighborhood tree planting events and an adopt-a-tree tree stewardship program to engage City residents in urban forest stewardship and foster public interest and appreciation for urban forest expansion

In order to meet objectives 1-6, the City put out a Request for Proposal (RFP) for consultant services in January of 2021. The consultant proposals were scored, and the top firms interviewed. Through this competitive process, City staff determined that Davey Resource Group's proposal best met the needs of the City. Their scope of work included, but is not limited to, the following:

- The development of a City Tree Inventory of up to 6,000 trees
- i-Tree Eco Sample Inventory of private property and wetland trees
- Urban Tree Canopy and Land Cover Assessment
- Urban Tree Canopy Mapping and Analysis including a Priority Planting Index and Canopy Goal Identification
- 50 Year Urban Forest Management Plan
- Tree Protection Ordinance
- Approved Tree Species List
- Project Specific Website
- Monthly Status Updates (calls)
- Operations Review
- Robust Community Engagement
- Community Survey
- Data Management and Delivery
- Other urban forestry consultant services according to CAL FIRE grant requirements

Through this agreement, Watsonville Wetlands Watch supported the City in meeting objectives 7 and 8 along with supporting development of the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) (Objective 2) and design of future street, neighborhood, and school tree plantings (Objective 3). Additionally, they provided grant administration and reporting services. Watsonville Wetlands Watch was selected for this project because it is uniquely positioned to support long-term Watsonville urban forest expansion and stewardship and has a demonstrated commitment to community-based non-profit environmental education and stewardship in the community.

DISCUSSION:

Currently, Watsonville has an average tree canopy of 9.4% (412 acres) comprised of both public and private trees (Watsonville Tree Canopy & Land Cover Assessment Summary Report, 2022). The potential for tree canopy may be as high as 30%. To date, this resource has stored 13,590 tons of carbon in woody and foliar biomass, valued at $2.3 million.

Public trees are the publicly owned subset of the urban forest. The city manages 4,504 inventoried public trees along streets, in parks, and at City facilities. In addition, while not yet included in the inventory, there are more public trees in wetlands, wetland buffers and other open space areas where the city provides minimal care in support of natural habitat. Annually, Watsonville's inventoried public trees provide quantifiable environmental benefits to the community valued at $22,810. Benefits include reducing stormwater runoff ($3,273), carbon sequestration ($5,368), and improvements to air quality ($14,169). This is a conservative estimate of the benefits from trees, as it does not account for socioeconomic and human health benefits.

The Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) is a roadmap for managing community trees and growing the urban forest and tree canopy over the next 50 years. It supports the community's desire for preserving and improving the health, value, and the environmental benefits of trees. and tree canopy. The development process for the UFMP included establishing a baseline for the structure and value of existing urban forest resources, including tree canopy and

inventoried community trees. The process also analyzed urban forest programming, including staffing, services, and funding. Urban forest managers, key partners, and community stakeholders were engaged to identify the challenges and opportunities facing Watsonville's urban forest and to explore possible solutions and objectives for the UFMP.

Watsonville's urban forestry program is fortunate to have the support of the community and local nonprofit organizations, including Watsonville Wetlands Watch. The group has been a leader in tree planting efforts across the community, planting nearly 500 trees over the last five years alone, and was instrumental in acquiring the grant funding from CAL FIRE that supported the development of the UFMP. Many communities with more established urban forestry programs strive to grow partnerships like the one the city has formed with Watsonville Wetlands Watch. In addition, City staff responsible for caring for community trees have worked for the city for their entire careers and have demonstrated a vested interest in nurturing the urban forest. Together, the city and its nonprofit partners have made important steps to develop an urban forestry program, with a strong focus on equity and enhancement of the urban forest and its associated benefits.

The Implementation Plan in the UFMP presents goals, objectives, and actions to grow the urban forestry program and enhance the services provided to the community. Since the UFMP is a long-term guiding document, regularly monitoring and reviewing progress towards goals and objectives will be important.

The UFMP identifies five goals and 49 objectives to manage and grow Watsonville's urban forest over the next 50 years. The UFMP goals reflect Watsonville's vision for the future of the urban forest and promote the preservation of health, value, services, and sustainability of this important resource. Each goal is supported by comprehensive objectives and actions and includes target dates and touchpoints to engage with the community. The timeline for accomplishing objectives is flexible and meant to be adjusted based on emerging opportunities and in response to changes in funding and staffing resources.

The Implementation Plan identifies specific actions for measuring progress and achievements. Ultimately, the success of the UFMP will be measured by the community's level of satisfaction with the services provided and the condition and contribution of the urban forest. If adopted the Urban Forest Management Plan will serve as a guiding document for City staff and the community.

STRATEGIC PLAN:
This project meets the Council Strategic Priorities of:
- 1- Economic Development through the increased value trees add to property and business.
- 2- Infrastructure & Environment through tree planting and long-term planning to improve the environment.
- 5- Public Safety by creating a specific management plan that provides for and promotes proper planning, planting, and maintenance practices that create a safer urban forest for the community.

- 6- Community Engagement & Well-Being through engaging the community in the development of the UFMP and participation in tree plantings throughout the City as well as the numerous health benefits that trees provide to the community.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:
There is no current financial impact from this recommendation. The consultant contract was funded entirely by the CAL-FIRE Urban Forestry Grant (337) Project #10070, with support of in-kind match in the form of staff time to support the project objectives and consultant scope of work. Future implementation of the goals and objectives outlined in this Plan require additional resources that could be acquired through City and/or future grant funds and through continued partnerships with organizations, such as Watsonville Wetlands Watch.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION:
The City Council may choose to:
1. Not adopt the Urban Forest Management Plan.
2. Adopt the Urban Forest Management Plan with edits.

ATTACHMENTS AND/OR REFERENCES (If any):
None.