

DATE: August 19, 2019

ISSUE: 2020 Gulf Coast Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) Grant Program Application for Gulf Shores Tree Planting Program - **“Small Town, Big Trees”**

RECOMMENDATION: Authorize staff to pursue grant funding in an amount not to exceed \$15,000 from RC&D for the establishment of a tree planting program in partnership with City Schools, the Gulf Coast Center for Ecotourism & Sustainability (GCCES), and the Beautification Board.

BACKGROUND: The Vision for 2025 Plan for Sustainability identifies environmental stewardship as a key strategy for a sustainable future. Since the BP Oil Spill in 2010, the City has pursued funding for many projects to protect and enhance the environment, including the Gulf Coast Center for Ecotourism & Sustainability, the Little Lagoon Restoration Project, the Oyster Bay/Bon Secour Wetland Project, and the Laguna Cove conservation project. The City fully understands the importance of a clean, healthy environment to our economy and quality of life, and has taken many steps make our community more sustainable including the establishment of a City Recycling Center and the Leave Only Footprints Program.

As a coastal community, Gulf Shores is particularly vulnerable to potential impacts from climate change, including rising sea levels and intense tropical storm events. Recently, the science community has identified planting trees as a powerful tool to combat the negative impacts of climate change. It is estimated that planting one trillion trees worldwide by 2050 would remove two-thirds of anthropogenic carbon from the atmosphere, and is by far the most effective and cost-efficient solution proposed to date to address this issue (<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/365/6448/76>).

As the Gulf Shores area continues to grow during the coming decades, sustaining healthy community forests is integral to the quality of life that residents experience. Trees protect us from the elements, clean the water we drink and the air we breathe, and form a connection to earlier generations who planted and tended these trees. Urban forests and greenspace enhance the environment, increase community attractiveness and livability, and foster a sense of civic pride. Trees also reduce stormwater runoff, energy use, air pollution, and greenhouse gases.

In an effort to promote tree planting efforts in the City, staff would like to work with City Schools, GCCES, and the Beautification Board to establish a tree planting program called “Small Town, Big Trees”. The long-term goal of the program is to dramatically increase the number of trees planted in the Gulf Shores area through community-based efforts including restoration projects, school programs, public outreach, partnering with public and private entities, volunteer plantings, and enhancing existing planting efforts (i.e.



Arbor Day, street trees, city landscaping) in the area. This program will enhance existing tree planting efforts and establish new ones by providing native trees for restoration projects, shade trees for public and private uses, and street trees for suitable public spaces.

This program will begin the initial steps toward updating the City's street tree planting plan, as stakeholders gain a better understanding of the most viable native tree species to use in different locations. The program will coordinate with and empower the current Beautification Board to expand tree plantings city-wide. The program will also work to establish partnerships between the City Schools, City Landscaping Division, GCCES, Auburn Extension Service, Alabama Forestry Commission, and the Alabama Urban Forestry Association. City staff will work to secure grant funding to expand the program going forward.

Initial Project Components:

- A small nursery will be established near schools to provide rotating stock of tree saplings for project.
- Students will work to cultivate seedlings from seed (or transplants) in school greenhouse.
- Seedlings will be transplanted to 3 gallon trade containers and grown out in the nursery.
- Once sufficient stock has been grown out, saplings will be made available to the public in various ways.

The RC&D grant funding will be used for startup costs of materials including the irrigation system, soil, fertilizer, potting supplies, fencing, landscaping, etc. City staff will work with school officials to determine the location of the nursery, and facilitate installation. Gulf Shores High School's Environmental Science Academy and horticulture program will operate the nursery with oversight and assistance from the City's Landscape Division, the Beautification Board, and the Center for Ecotourism.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION: Vision 2025 Plan for Sustainability, Strategic Plan 2015-2019, Annual Arbor Day Celebration

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS: Grant funds not to exceed \$15,000 are 100% reimbursable.

RELATED ISSUES: None

ATTACHMENTS: None

DEPARTMENT: Executive

STAFF CONTACT: Dan Bond