

5/10/21

Land Use Working Group Proposal for Revision of Item 3, “Bold American Rescue Plan Act Ideas for the City of Milwaukee” (Preliminary Proposal for ARP Funding, adopted by the Task Force on 4/14/21)

REVISED PROPOSAL, Item 3

Build Tree Canopy, Native Landscaping and Green Infrastructure with a Diverse Green Workforce during this UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030

- **The City of Milwaukee should allocate ARP funds to achieve the [City’s goal of increasing tree canopy to 40% coverage](#).** Of the City of Milwaukee’s 96.80 square miles, only 26% has tree canopy coverage (WDNR, 2019). The remaining land cover in the City of Milwaukee is .76% water cover, .58% wetland cover, 21.95% grass/herbaceous cover, and 51.17% impervious surface (WDNR, 2019).
 - **Investments in Milwaukee’s tree canopy would provide multiple significant benefits to Milwaukee communities** in relation to water quality, flooding, air quality, public health (including positive impacts towards reducing cardiovascular disease, respiratory diseases such as asthma, skin cancer, childbirth outcomes, and mental health), economic stability, employment, heat vulnerability, especially due to the urban heat island effect, and other impacts of climate change, as well as mitigating climate change by removing carbon from the atmosphere. These benefits are further discussed and documented in the [Master Plan for the Branch Out Milwaukee Campaign](#), a collective action tree planting and maintenance program aimed at equitably growing Milwaukee’s tree canopy to maximize environmental and public health benefits. This campaign has been developed and endorsed by 30+ project collaborators including city, county and state agencies, local businesses and institutions, as well as community organizations and nonprofits. Branch Out Milwaukee is an initiative of Milwaukee Water Commons.
 - **Increase funding to the City’s DPW Forestry Department to achieve the City’s goal of increasing the tree canopy’s coverage to 40%.** Specifically, the City should first prioritize maintenance of the existing canopy and ensuring the establishment of new plantings, as recommended in the [Branch Out Milwaukee Master Plan](#). Further, the City should estimate the maximum viable scale by which Forestry Department’s tree planting schedule could be ramped up during the 2022 – 2024 spending period for ARP funds, and fully fund this ramp-up using ARP funds. In subsequent years, a portion of City Forestry’s budget allocation which would otherwise have been used for tree planting on the existing schedule can instead be allocated to ensure maintenance of the additional trees planted using ARP funds, while still ensuring that planting

progresses beyond 2024 to achieve the 40% goal. Planting and maintaining trees is a long term investment, the benefits of which increase year-on-year; by using ARP funds to ramp up Milwaukee's planting schedule, Milwaukee communities – and the climate-- will enjoy the multiple benefits of increased tree canopy sooner. Planting priorities and strategies should draw insights from the Branch Out Milwaukee Master Plan to ensure equitable distribution of the benefits of Milwaukee's expanded tree canopy.

- Provide funding to **build an equitable workforce to support Milwaukee's tree canopy**, leveraging insights and recommendations in the Branch Out Milwaukee Master Plan, including investments in pre-apprenticeship and transitional jobs training opportunities in forestry and landscaping which should be increased and targeted to people of color and low-income individuals. Recommendation 33 of the Governor's Climate Task Force could further support this work by creating a state-funded and state-run AmeriCorps-like program to train and deploy workers in climate resilience such as floodwater management and drought preparedness and tree-planting in urban areas.
- **Allocate APR funds to leverage state funding to remove invasive tree species and plant native trees in City parks and on other City-owned lands**, in line with [Governor Evers' April 2021 Executive Order pledging to plant 75 million trees across Wisconsin, including in urban areas, by 2030](#).
- **Milwaukee County should allocate ARP funds to supplement funds available for planting trees and other green infrastructure on boulevards maintained by the County.** County-maintained boulevards provide a prime opportunity to increase tree canopy, landscaping and green infrastructure across the County to achieve the multiple benefits outlined above.
- **Milwaukee County should use ARP funds to leverage state funding to remove invasive tree species and plant native trees in County Parks and on County lands**, in line with [Governor Evers' April 2021 Executive Order pledging to plant 75 million trees across Wisconsin, including in urban areas, by 2030](#).
- **The City of Milwaukee should increase funding to implement the [City's Green Infrastructure Plan](#), including in particular a major increase in funding to de-pave excess parking lot areas and replace them with trees and other landscaping through the City's Green Lots program.**
 - Milwaukee's comprehensive [Green Infrastructure Plan](#), published in June 2019, aims at adding 36 million gallons of stormwater storage and 143 acres of new open space by 2030, targeted at high-priority subbasins and public schoolyards. **The [Green Infrastructure Plan](#) prioritizes de-paving of private and public land, adding and maintaining green infrastructure on City-owned parking lots and**

streets and Milwaukee schoolyards, as well as working with contractors that provide a diverse green workforce for green infrastructure projects. It is currently funded with \$2 million from the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District and \$800,000 additional allocation in the City budget annually. A portion of the program funding is targeted to the Green & Healthy Schools program for schoolyard redevelopment projects at Milwaukee area schools. It is highly successful and routinely oversubscribed. Additional funding is needed to allow the City to achieve the ambitious goals of the plan and meet the demand for these programs. In addition, MPS should be encouraged to designate a sizeable portion of their ARP funding allocation towards the Green & Healthy Schools program that revitalizes MPS schoolyards and to designate sufficient ARP funds to fully cover the related MPS Sustainability Project Manager position for the next 3 years.

- An aerial view of the City reveals a predominance of cement and asphalt hardscape that covers over 40% of the City. Not only are these paved areas unattractive, they're detrimental to the city's health and the people who live there. Impervious pavement does little to mitigate the effects of flooding and runoff pollution in a region already facing increases in rainfall due to climate change. **Expanses of excess hardscape, such as excess parking at the many strip malls around the city, occupy space that could be converted for nature-based climate solutions.**
- The Milwaukee ECO [Green Lots program](#) is the answer on both ends as it aims to remove excess parking lot area and replace it with landscaping and green infrastructure. However, it has scarcely been implemented due to severe across-the-board City budget cuts. **New funding for the [Milwaukee ECO Green Lots Pilot Program](#) will provide grants to commercial parking lot owners for pavement removal and landscape edge improvements that meet or exceed the City's landscape code.** See the [Landscape Design Guide](#). The program can be targeted to the Neighborhood Strategic Planning Area (See [Council File 190186](#)) as well as to other areas that can be identified through mapping tools with a high concentration of hardscape, such as the commercial corridors at North Avenue, Center Street, Uptown Crossing, Fond du Lac Avenue and underutilized parking lot areas on the City's south side.
- **The benefits of the [Green Lots program](#)** include physical and mental health benefits of increased equitable access to green space, building an inclusive green workforce, stormwater retention to reduce flood risk and water pollution, increased tree canopy to mitigate the urban heat island effect, increased biodiversity, urban pollinator and wildlife habitat, neighborhood beautification, and carbon sequestration within plant biomass and the surrounding soil.