

Council Agenda Item 26-0293R



MEETING DATE: 4/13/2026

SUBJECT/TITLE: Resolution authorizing acceptance of a Community Tree Planting Grant of \$213,705 from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to support replacement of trees lost to emerald ash borer and establish a more resilient urban forest

SUBMITTED BY: Allison Brooks, Project Coordinator

RECOMMENDATION: Approve

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: N/A

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION: 25-0727R authorized application to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for a Community Tree Planting Grant for up to \$385,000 to support replacement of trees lost to emerald ash borer and establish a more resilient urban forest.

BACKGROUND: This resolution authorizes acceptance of a Community Tree Planting Grant of \$213,705 to support removal and replacement of trees lost to emerald ash borer (EAB) damage in ten neighborhoods across Duluth. There is no local matching requirement for this grant program.

The grant program prioritizes awards for projects that are located in census block groups with an increased risk of potential community vulnerability using the supplemental demographic index score in the 70th percentile or higher, where the index value is based on percentages of the community in the following categories: low-income, persons with disabilities, less than high school education, limited English speaking, and/or low life expectancy. Duluth's neighborhoods that are prioritized under this program include: Fond du Lac, portions of Gary-New Duluth, portions of Cody, Lincoln Park, Central Hillside, Central Business District, and East Hillside, as well as portions of Kenwood, Woodland, and Endion.

The funding supports continued progress to address remaining dead and dying ash trees and replanting efforts that exceed available resources for City staff time or funds to support contractor support. The grant funds will support removal of 600 dead or dying boulevard ash trees and replacement plantings of a variety of native and climate-adapted species within these ten neighborhoods. The invasive EAB was confirmed in Duluth in October 2015, and the City of Duluth has been working hard to respond to dead and dying ash trees since then. City staff and equipment capacity is outpaced by EAB damage, in addition to the typical workload maintaining Duluth's urban forest. The priority in recent years has been cutting the dead and dying trees to remove the standing biomass, which presents the greatest public safety threat posed by the brittle dead trees that are at a high and unpredictable risk of structural failure. Due to capacity constraints, Duluth is left with a backlog of ash stumps that must be removed to accommodate replacement plantings.

The requested funds will allow Duluth to hire qualified contractors to remove 513 dead ash stumps and remove 87 dangerous trees efficiently and safely, then City staff will replace these removals to support urban canopy recovery within neighborhoods identified as Priority Areas. Without the requested funds, staff will continue to triage removal of the most dangerous trees as they present, and the backlog of stump grinding will continue to accumulate, thereby hindering the recovery of Duluth's community forest after widespread EAB damage.

BUDGET/FISCAL IMPACT: The grant application was developed to address the existing backlog of dead and dying ash tree removals, site preparation, and replacements resulting from damage by the emerald ash borer. This grant will support hiring of contractors to perform tree removals and necessary stump grinding. Then, City staff will plant replacement trees at these locations.

OPTIONS: Authorize acceptance of the grant to support replacement of boulevard trees or decline the grant agreement to refuse the awarded grant.

NECESSARY ACTION: Authorize acceptance of the grant.

ATTACHMENTS: Exhibit A – Grant Contract