



COMMISSION
AGENDA MEMORANDUM

Item No. 7b

BRIEFING ITEM

Date of Meeting September 24, 2019

DATE: September 6, 2019

TO: Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director

FROM: Andy Gregory, AV Environmental Engagement, External Relations
Sally del Fierro, Director, Community Engagement, External Relations
Christina Billingsley, Environmental Engagement, External Relations

SUBJECT: Airport Community Ecology (ACE) Fund Briefing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Airport Community Ecology (ACE) Fund, authorized by the Port Commission in November 2016, recognizes that near-airport communities experiencing more impacts from Port operations should also experience more benefits. The ACE Fund was designed to serve Burien, Des Moines, and SeaTac communities impacted by the Port's Flight Corridor Safety Program. Following a dedicated outreach program, the Port identified a two-pronged approach to meet Commission and community priorities including: 1) Small scale, community-based projects that should make immediate impact; and 2) broad, long-term investments that can ensure healthy urban forests now and in the future. The \$1 million fund was allocated accordingly: \$550,000 for the Small Matching Grants Program and \$450,000 to Forterra, an environmental non-profit to expand their Green City Partnerships program into Burien, Des Moines and SeaTac.

ACE PROGRAM IMPACTS

Through the Small Matching Grants Program, \$240,00 has been distributed to date to 20 community groups for 28 unique projects. The projects have resulted in seven grants in Burien, eight in Des Moines, seven in SeaTac, and six that serve two or more cities. In the Spring 2019 round of funding, the Port received 10 applications for ACE grants, the highest number received since the program began. Six projects were awarded, including four first-time recipients.

Forterra's Green Cities Partnership works with 15 cities and one county across the region to steward and restore urban forests. The program has a commitment to restoring 13,000 acres, has planted 1.2 million trees and shrubs, and trained 284 volunteers as forest stewards. Together, Green Cities serve more than 1.6 million residents. ACE funding has helped to bring Burien, Des Moines and SeaTac into the network and Forterra is working with all three cities on Urban Forest Enhancement Plans or Guides which include a Tree Canopy Cover Assessment, a Forest Health Assessment, and findings from extensive community engagement activities accomplished in 2018. The Plans also provide a path forward for equitably increasing canopy

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cover, preserving existing resources, and implementing best practices for stewardship and restoration.

Challenges

While the Small Matching Grants program has had positive impact in the communities, it has illuminated challenges for inclusive participation by diverse community stakeholders:

1. RCW 35.21.278 requires non-profits to provide a 3:1 match identifying three times the value for each dollar contributed by the Port. This is a significant barrier for small non-profits and community-based organizations and favors organizations that have large budgets or staff capacity.
2. ACE Fund application processes and reporting requirements, though comparably more flexible and user-friendly than other similar public agency grant application processes, lacks a strong equity foundation that would come from a community-designed process.
3. The ACE Fund does not fully served low income, or historically underserved communities. Most organizations that have applied for funds represent traditional mainstream environmental organizations that emphasize conservation over livability values.

Next Steps

Small Matching Grants Program

Several opportunities exist moving forward with the ACE Fund. While the 3:1 match has made it challenging to distribute the full \$550,000 in small matching grants over the anticipated 3-year time period, it has allowed staff, city partners and community members the opportunity to continue to refine the application and reporting process, increasing access by removing barriers. Staff recommend the following steps to continue to improve the ACE Small Matching Grants Program:

1. Government Relations will work with Washington state Legislature to amend RCW 35.21.278 to decrease the match requirement. This is on the Port Legislative Agenda for 2020;
2. Work with Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion to conduct an equity evaluation and modify the program as needed to increase access and equity for historically underserved communities in South King County;
3. Expand scope and marketing of the fund, within the confines of RCW 35.21.278, to be more inclusive of different perspectives on “environment.” Use the results of the equity evaluation to “co-create” culturally-relevant messaging that connects with community sense of place.

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Green City Partnerships

Forterra is currently moving into the implementation phase of the project. This kicks off with “Green City Days” in each of the cities during September and October. They will be training forest stewards and working with the cities to secure tools, trees and support for volunteers. Additionally, they will be conducting tree distribution events in each city and supporting the Des Moines Memorial Drive Preservation Alliance in the planting of historic Elm trees. Forterra’s GIS Analyst has produced a map of every parcel along Des Moines Memorial Drive identifying the feasibility of planting Elms, which will be used to work with city and private landowners to restore the “Living Road of Remembrance.”

Staff has recommended continuing the Forterra contract through 2021 to create a path for the sustainable transition of programmatic and volunteer management to each of the cities. This will allow for nearly two years of on-the-ground implementation; training forest stewards, acquiring tools, and hosting volunteer events. Port staff has heard concerns from the cities about sustaining programmatic funding beyond the grant term and hope that this will allow all parties more time to identify long-term solutions.

ATTACHMENTS TO THIS BRIEFING

- (1) Presentation slides
- (2) Port of Seattle Community Programs Infographic

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS OR BRIEFINGS

December 12, 2017 – the Commission authorized execution of contracts with community service organizations to implement the Airport Community Ecology Fund Small Matching Grants Program for a total combined contract value of \$550,000.

June 13, 2017 – the Commission exercised its authority under RCW 35.21.278 to authorize execution of a sole-source contract with Forterra to implement the Green Cities Partnership, including tree canopy assessment and strategic planning for local urban forestry opportunities, community engagement, and project implementation (e.g. habitat restoration work parties, environmental education events, and stakeholder outreach in the target cities).

November 22, 2016 – The Commission approved the creation of the Airport Community Ecology Fund to support projects and programs in Sea-Tac Airport-area communities to improve ecological and environmental attributes in airport-area communities. A sum of \$1 million was allocated to the fund.