

DATE OF MEETING MAY 19, 2021

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SUBJECT TWO BILLION TREE REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with information on the Federal Growing Canada's Forests (GCF) program Two Billion Tree program.

Recommendation

That Council direct Staff to submit the Growing Canada's Forests: Future Respondent form to Natural Resource Canada in response to the Two Billion Tree Request for Information for the Millstone / Nanaimo Riparian Restoration Project.

BACKGROUND

In 2020, the Government of Canada committed to planting two billion trees over 10 years as part of a broader approach to nature-based climate solutions in Canada. To identify and determine interest from communities across the country in implementing and contributing to a multi-year tree planting project, the Growing Canada's Forests (GCF) Two Billion Tree program issued a Request for Information (RFI) in March 2021.

The RFI is intended to identify potential projects that have a connection to tree planting and forestry in Canada. The RFI is also intended to provide an opportunity to identify tree planting project sites and community partnerships with land holders, community groups, and forestry tree providers. The RFI is seen as part of an engagement process and does not lead to funding by itself. It signals interest by applicants and opportunity for projects and community partnerships that can be followed up by Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), who administer the Growing Canada's Forests program. Participation in the RFI is encouraged, but is not a condition or prerequisite for participation in any subsequent Request for Proposals.

DISCUSSION

Council's 2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan has set a priority for the City to take a leadership role and focus on our environmental impact and climate change contributions in our decision-making and regional participation. The City has also declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and has set aggressive greenhouse gas reduction targets for the City to achieve by 2030 (50 to 58% below city-wide 2010 GHG levels) and by 2050 (94 to 107% below 2010 City-wide GHG levels). In order to achieve these aggressive targets, the City needs to take greater action to lower GHG emissions. Planting more trees help sequester carbon from the atmosphere and provides

opportunity to slow the impacts of climate change. It can be another climate action that the City can participate in and leverage its capacity to help coordinate with other community partners.

The GCF program provides an opportunity for the City to realize some important restoration priorities identified in a 2021 Natural Asset Study¹ of the Millstone River. The report highlights the need for restoration of the riparian area along the Millstone River. For a significant length of the river, few mature trees are found along the banks, which are primarily dominated by a mix of invasive and native shrub species. A coordinated, multi year planting and maintenance program can create a more ecologically diverse forest canopy along the river that can help cool water temperatures and improve conditions for fish. This type of project also creates an opportunity to collaborate with both Snuneymuxw First Nation and several community environmental groups interested in improving the ecological health of key urban streams and rivers in the City of Nanaimo.

The GCF program is open to:

- A municipal or local government or a regional municipal organization;
- A not for profit organization (legally registered in Canada);
- An indigenous organization (for profit and not for profit) or community.

Eligible activities include activities directly related to tree planting, managing trees, and forests, and monitoring the health and growth of planted trees. Eligible expenditures are those necessary to support the tree planting supply chain and must be directly related to the implementation and conduct of the project. They include:

- Salaries and benefits, and employee recruitment and training;
- Professional, technical, and capacity building services;
- Community and landowner engagement;
- Contractors, such as for tree planting and Silviculture;
- Transportation;
- Honoraria and ceremonial costs where indigenous recipients or indigenous partners are involved.

Recognizing that the Government of Canada will ultimately be looking to enter into a cost-sharing agreement, consideration will need to be given to how the City would cost share a proposed project. While subject to change, the maximum NRCan contribution for eligible project costs are 50% of eligible expenditures.

At this time, Staff feel that existing budgets and staff time contributions, as well as funding leveraged from partnering organizations would be able to make up the 50% contribution required. However, at this stage, no detailed budgeting has been done, or is expected as part of this RFI.

Millstone and Nanaimo Riparian Restoration Program

Staff propose a six-year tree and shrub planting and tree maintenance program that would initially target City land along the Millstone River, upper Cat Stream, and Wally Creek in the City of Nanaimo. In later phases, publically held lands along the lower Nanaimo River, could be targeted with coordination managed through the Nanaimo River Watershed Roundtable.

¹ Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC (2021). *Millstone River – A Natural Commons in the Regional District of Nanaimo*.

Potential partners in a future planting program could include MOSAIC Forest Management, Vancouver Island University (Forestry Program), Ducks Unlimited and SFN Forestry staff from Petroglyph Development Group.

The following City properties are proposed as sites for the proposed planting program:

- 2191 East Wellington Road (East Wellington Park)
- 155 Westwood Road
- 1996 Jingle Pot Road (West Marsh – Buttertubs Marsh Conservation Area)
- 750 Third Street (Third Street Park)

The West Marsh property (1996 Jingle Pot Road) is under a co-management agreement with Ducks Unlimited (DU) and the restoration would need to comply with the overall restoration plan for the West Marsh.

OPTIONS

1. That Council direct Staff to submit the Growing Canada's Forests: Future Respondent form to Natural Resource Canada in response to the Two Billion Tree Request for Information for the Millstone / Nanaimo Riparian Restoration Project.
 - The advantages of this option: The GCF Two Billion Tree program is still under design. Participating in the RFI will provide the program designers understanding of the City of Nanaimo's vision and capacity in relation to tree planting in the area. Any potential funding from this program would provide sustaining funds to plant and maintain a greatly expanded Millstone riparian area, which would provide benefits to fish and wildlife in the Millstone as well as provide a carbon sink that can contribute toward the City's GHG emission reduction targets.
 - The disadvantages of this option: Completing the RFI will require dedicated staff time.
 - Financial Implications: None at this time. Completing the Request for Information will not result in funding, and is not a condition or prerequisite for participation in any subsequent Request for Proposals.
2. That Council provide alternative direction to Staff in relation to the Two Billion Tree Request for Information.

SUMMARY POINTS

- In 2020, the Government of Canada committed to planting two billion trees over 10 years as part of a broader approach to nature-based climate solutions in Canada.
- The GCF program provides an opportunity for the City to realize important restoration goals identified in a recent 2021 Natural Asset Study.
- Staff propose a six-year tree and shrub planting and tree maintenance program that would initially target City land along the Millstone River, upper Cat Stream, and Wally Creek in the City of Nanaimo.

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