



Great Neighborhoods, Great City

**Rochester
Minnesota's
Neighborhood
Resource
Center**

829 3rd Avenue South East Suite 225 Rochester, Minnesota 55904 507.529.4150 www.RNeighbors.org

To: **Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council**
Room 500 Lafayette Road • St. Paul, MN 55155
Date: February 17, 2009
Subject: RNeighborWoods Reforestation of Rochester Boulevards

Vision

RNeighbors works toward a future in Rochester when community life is rooted in neighborhood networks that nurture citizen involvement for positive community change.

Mission

RNeighbors empowers citizen leaders to create sustainable neighborhood networks that promote a vibrant, healthy, and livable community.

Board of Directors

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Mr. Bill Becker and Council:

Currently Rochester is the third largest city in Minnesota, with a population of 101,000 and climbing quickly. We embrace our city's rich diversity and recognize the challenges associated with different cultures and generations sharing the same space in an ecologically responsible way.

The attached proposal will outline the opportunity for reforestation of Rochester boulevards, utilizing an existing successful community tree planting program. Since 2006, the RNeighborWoods program has organized the planting of over 1,000 trees on Rochester boulevards, that provide multiple ecological and other public benefits including reducing Rochester's carbon footprint.

Besides the obvious benefits of planting trees, the RNeighborWoods program is unique because it reaches out to inhabitants of neighborhoods and engages them to assist in the plantings. Door knocking to communicate with the neighbors and invite them to be a part of the tree planting is a key element to each of our neighborhood plantings. By engaging them in a neighborhood improvement project, we have found that neighbors from all walks of life form relationships with each other and are proud of the trees they planted in their neighborhood.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (507) 289-8051 or the RNeighbors' Executive Director, René Lafflam at (507) 529-4150. Thank you for consideration regarding this request.

Sincerely,

Bob Suk
RNeighbors President

Staff

René Lafflam



Program Title: RNeighborWoods Reforestation of Rochester Boulevards

Total Program Budget: \$2,275,000

Period for Funding Request: 18 months. July 1, 2009, through December 31, 2010

New Minnesota FTEs: 9+

Summary

Rochester is the third most populated city and tax contributor in Minnesota. Currently there are 29,088 vacant boulevard tree spaces throughout Rochester neighborhoods, out of a total of 98,475 spaces. The city is currently at less than a third of capacity and each year 500-900 boulevard trees are removed to disease or damage.

Adding to those alarming numbers concerning our city green infrastructure, there are over 7,000 Ash trees on Rochester boulevards, which are susceptible to the latest pest, the Emerald Ash Borer. This beetle has killed more than 40 million ash trees in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin. It is feared this bug will be attacking Minnesota trees soon. At this time we would like to respectfully ask for funds to restore 10,000 native trees to Rochester's boulevards.

Community engagement is a natural resource that RNeighbors, a 501(C)3 nonprofit organization, relies on to strengthen and improve the health and vitality of Rochester neighborhoods. This proposal will outline our plan to utilize an already successful boulevard tree planting program entitled RNeighborWoods, which relies on strong community partnerships and volunteers to assist in reforesting Rochester's urban forest.

Trees are essential to Rochester neighborhoods. Among other benefits, they produce oxygen and filter the air, control noise pollution, and shade and cool neighborhood streets and homes. Studies have shown that parts of cities without cooling shade from trees can literally be "heat islands" with temperatures as much as 12 degrees Fahrenheit higher than surrounding areas.

Besides the beautification and energy efficiency aspects, trees play integral roles in healthy neighborhoods including reducing violence and increasing public safety. A recent study by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign "showed that leafy green spaces can reduce domestic violence rates, relieve ADHD symptoms, and reduce crime. In fact, city buildings with high levels of greenery had 48% fewer property crimes and 56% fewer violent crimes. City kids with bedroom views of greenery had higher test scores than kids that just looked at pavement."

This program will restore a highly valuable forest resource that is central to and inextricably linked to water, fish, and wildlife resources in the southeast Minnesota region. The program will be supplemented by the energy of over 1,000 local volunteers, providing \$100,000 in planting labor, all across the city.

There are many habitat benefits tied to restoring a healthy urban forest in Rochester, including:

- Restore and protect water quality of the Zumbro River Watershed Impaired Waters (map attached) by decreased runoff and pollutant loading in receiving waters. Receiving waters impacted by runoff from the city of Rochester and which are currently impaired are:
 - Zumbro River
 - Lake Zumbro
 - Silver Lake
 - Cascade Creek
 - Salem Creek
 - Willow Creek
- There are multiple mechanisms by which boulevard trees accomplish desired water conservation effects. They include:
 - Combat nonpoint-source pollution from pavement, buildings, and landscapes by substantially reducing runoff during small rainfall events, which are responsible for most pollutant washoff.
 - Rainfall interception and storage of 1-2 inches of rain occurs on leaf and branch surfaces lower runoff volumes and delay onset of peak flows.
 - Roots increase rate at which rainwater infiltrates soil and the capacity of soil to store water.
 - Reduction in water consumption at power plants by decreased demand for heating and cooling of buildings and homes.
- Air quality in the region is enhanced by:
 - Uptake of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, ozone, and particulate matter.
 - Reduction of atmospheric carbon dioxide through sequestration and avoided power plant emissions.
 - Native boulevard tree species provide habitat for native birds, squirrels, and other urban wildlife.
- There are numerous forest resource benefits of this program:
 - Restore 10,000 native trees to the Rochester urban forest
 - 33% of empty boulevard spaces will become filled
 - Achieve much needed boulevard species diversification
 - Provide protection and recovery from threat of Emerald Ash Borer infestation. There are currently 7,000 ash trees in Rochester boulevards.
 - Economic returns on the investment in this program, less maintenance costs, after 40 years: \$12,400,000 (estimated using Midwest Community Tree Guide published by the US Forest Service Center for Urban Forest Research. http://www.fs.fed.us/psw/publications/documents/psw_gtr199/)
- In addition to improved habitat and forest resource benefits, residents and visitors to the Rochester would also experience countless health, social, and psychological benefits from this program.

Performance program outcomes will be monitored by RNeighbors include:

- GIS maps of intended planting locations
- Routinely updated GIS maps indicating progress of planting as program commences
- Number of trees (including # of each species) planted by volunteers
- Number of trees (including # of each species) planted by contractors
- Number of volunteers and neighborhoods involved with planting OHF trees

- Survival rate of trees planted (including survival rate of each species)
- Estimated reduction in storm water runoff
- Estimated reduction in pollutant loading

Methods by which RNeighbors will be reporting the outcomes of the program:

- On the RNeighbors website (www.RNeighbors.org)
- Included in the RNews (RNeighbors e-newsletter distributed to over 600 community members, who have volunteered at one of our tree plantings, street paintings, litter pick-ups, or participated in one of Rochester's 32 neighborhood associations)
- To local media as part of various media spotlights that routinely highlighting activities of RNeighbors to the community
- Through routine communications with the LOHC and state government as desired by LOHC and required by law.

This program will utilize the best available science regarding urban forest enhancement, restoration, and protection.

- Contractors used will be required to utilize best planting practices
 - Contractor technique and progress will be monitored through on-site inspections performed by RNeighbors and/or the City Forester
- Volunteers will be lead by Citizen Foresters (citizens who have completed 4 hours of training on tree planting best practices)
- Best practices include:
 - Planting at proper depth to eliminate stem girdling roots and promote long term tree survival
 - Appropriate use of smaller species near overhead utilities
 - Diverse range of native species proven to be successful in urban environments will be selected
 - Mixing of tree species in each boulevard will be employed to ensure long term resilience of the urban forest
 - Every 3rd tree must be of a different family

Species to be planted may include but are not limited to:

- *Celtis occidentalis*: common hackberry
- *Gleditsia triacanthos var. inermis*: thornless honeylocust
- *Gymnocladus dioica*: Kentucky coffeetree
- *Quercus bicolor*: swamp white oak
- *Quercus macrocarpa*: bur oak
- *Tilia americana*: American linden
- *Ulmus americana*: American elm (DED resistant cultivars)
- *Prunus virginiana* Chokecherry
- *Ostrya virginiana* Ironwood or Hophornbeam
- *Amelanchier sanguinea* Serviceberry
- *Viburnum lentago* Nannyberry
- 100% of species will be native to SE MN

RNeighbors will implement the following plan to sustain the resource and/or habitat outcomes specified:

- A one year replacement guarantee will be required of the contractor and included in the cost for planting the tree. Any tree that does not survive within one year of planting must be replaced by the contractor. In addition, trees planted early in the spring must be covered under the guarantee through the spring leaf-out period of the following year.

- City of Rochester will assume responsibility for tree maintenance one year after planting.
- Best scientific pruning and trimming techniques will be used to ensure strong branch structure and long term survival of the OHF trees.
- To continue the involvement of the community and lower maintenance costs to the city, Citizen Forester lead volunteers (to the extent that is possible) will aid in pruning and trimming OHF trees for 5 years after planting.
- RNeighbors will continue to inform citizens about the local and regional benefits of the OHF trees and a healthy urban forest in Rochester.
- RNeighbors will continue to advocate for preservation, protection, and enhancement of the urban forest which includes
 - Adoption of proposed city tree ordinance requiring developers to plant boulevard trees in all future residential and commercial lots
 - Creation and adoption of a complete urban forest master plan for the city.
- During and after completion of the program, RNeighbors will continue to seek funding from various sources, including the City of Rochester, for additional trees and to supplement the benefits of the OHF trees.

Program Budget for RNeighborWoods Reforestation of Rochester Boulevards

Description	Amount	Price (each)	Total price
1.5" caliper trees	10,000	\$130	\$1,300,000
Labor FTE (per tree) for contractor planting (includes 1 year warranty and watering, mulching, staking, and tagging)	9,000	\$100	\$900,000
Supplies associated with volunteer planting events (e.g. shovels, t-shirts, tree tags, instructional materials)		\$10,000	\$10,000
Administrative costs (includes 18 month program coordinator position, computer, office supplies, etc.)	1	\$65,000	\$65,000
Total Program Cost			\$2,275,000
In-Kind Value			
Labor for volunteer tree planting (includes mulching, staking, and watering)	1,000 volunteers planting for 3 hours each=3,000	\$19.51 per hour (Independent Sector)	\$58,530

Use of volunteers not only supplements the financial costs to the program, but also helps citizens know each other better, take pride and ownership in the trees, and allows the residents of all ages to touch and experience nature.

The state of Minnesota will not be exposed to additional funding for the project.

- The city of Rochester will be responsible for the long term maintenance of the OHF trees.

This program will ensure transparency and accessibility in all stages of implementation.

- Contractors will include RNeighborWoods partners Maier Forest and Tree and Herring Exterior Design as there are trustworthy partnerships already in place. They contractually agree to 10% retention of payment until all tree guarantee periods and necessary tree replacement work has been completed successfully.
- All RNeighbors board meeting minutes pertinent to the program will be made available to the city government, LOHC, state government, and the public as recommended and/or required by the LOHC and state law.
- Abide by RNeighbors conflict of interest policy in all decisions.
 - The purpose of this policy is to protect this tax-exempt organization's interest when it is contemplating entering into a transaction or arrangement that might benefit the private interest of an officer, staff member, or director of the organization or might result in a possible excess benefit transaction. This policy is intended to supplement but not replace any applicable state and federal laws governing conflict of interest applicable to nonprofit and charitable organizations.
- All program measures of habitat and resource outcomes will be reported to the public as described above.

RNeighbors will also seek funding to supplement (not replace) OHF funding sources for the planting of boulevard trees within the city.

RNeighbors will continue to seek funding from Rochester City Council, Rochester Public Utilities, and the city Capital Improvement Program

Source	2009 (secured)	2009 (pending)
Rochester City Council	\$20,000	
Rochester Public Utilities		\$10,000
CIP fund		\$15,000

RNeighbors also incorporates in-kind donations from local businesses and the Home Depot Foundation for refreshments and supplies at volunteer planting events.

Other program features for consideration by the LOHC.

The program proposed herein has been designed to meet and abide by all requirements and statutes as required by law in Article XI of the Minnesota Constitution, Minnesota Statutes 97A.056, and criteria establish by the LOHC for use of OHF funds.

No property acquisition is being proposed in this program. All trees will be planted in public boulevards which are under ownership of the city of Rochester.

RNeighbors is committed to erecting and maintaining signage, to a standard to be adopted by the LOHC, crediting the OHF with support for protected, restored, or improved sites. In addition, tags will be applied to all trees upon planting which will:

- credit OHF for funding the program
- list conservation benefits of the tree

RNeighbors has a proven record of successful management and implementation of city tree planting events and other programs. They will efficiently and effectively oversee the use of both volunteer and contract labor in the completion of this program.

- Since 2006, RNeighbors has organized 12 tree planting events and planted 820 trees in Rochester boulevards with the help of 1000 volunteers.
- The RNeighbors board and the RNeighbors tree planting program committee consist of a diverse coalition of city and community leaders, citizens, educators, scientists, and business partners.
- RNeighbors is very successful in collaborating closely with neighborhood associations across Rochester to raise awareness and volunteer support for projects.
- RNeighbors holds Citizen Forester training classes and offers a 4 hour classroom and hands-on training each spring and fall prior to planting events.
- Citizen foresters are key group leaders at planting events and are actively involved in protecting and enhancing the urban forest. They are trained in proper planting technique and basic tree care and help ensure long term survival of the new trees.

RNeighbors practices the highest level of fiscal management and organizational efficiency. They have demonstrated the ability to identify and establish financial and managerial controls needed to successfully and fully implements numerous projects and programs.

- RNeighbors is lead by Executive Director, René Lafflam, and a board of directors from diverse professions
- The RNeighbors tree planting program is directed by René Lafflam and driven by an strong committee and Rochester City Forester, Jacob Ryg.
- Approval of the proposed program will include funding for a program coordinator position which will report to the executive director and ensure adequate staff to coordinate contract labor and payments, perform progress assessment and outcome reporting, and facilitate volunteer planting efforts.

RNeighbors has no serious negative findings in their financial records.

- RNeighbors is funded in part through the City of Rochester. The remainder of our operating budget comes from grants and donations. The Board of Directors and staff at RNeighbors believes in transparency.
- RNeighbors is near completion of The Accountability Wizard® review as administered by the Minnesota Charities Review Council.
- All organizational accounting is performed by an external accountant
- Will obtain a external financial upon request

This program identifies boulevard trees as a first line of defense against storm water run-off and pollution loading since entire city resides within the Zumbro River Water Shed. Outcomes of the project include multiple conservation benefits for water, fish, forest, and wildlife habitat protection and enhancement. It also produces conservation benefits across a large geographic area:

- Direct restorative impact of forest in Rochester city limits: 25,600 acres
- Direct restorative impact of water quality and fish habitat in Zumbro River Watershed Impaired Waters

This program will be implemented collaboratively by multiple stakeholders and interests.

- City, neighborhood, as well as service, fishing, water recreation, wildlife, and conservation groups are all stakeholders in the project.

Additionally, this program leverages funds to supplement any OHF appropriation:

- City council funds, RPU funds, CIP funds, in-kind business donations

There are a numerous one-time conservation opportunities that will be lost if not immediately funded.

- It can be said the best time to have planted 10,000 boulevard trees to attain a large sustainable urban forest canopy and to achieve the conservation outcomes identified herein obviously would have been 20 years ago. However, the second best time is as soon as possible!
- EAB is fast approaching and threatening urban deforestation in Rochester. Rochester has 7,000 boulevard ash trees and many more ash trees on parks and homeowner yards.

This unique urban forestation program combines the power of volunteers with important water, fish, and wildlife conservation benefits within the city of Rochester and surrounding rural areas and communities of SE Minnesota. It will also beautify Rochester encouraging residents and visitors to recreate within the city and support local businesses. Rochester will become a more desirable city to reside, increasing population density, thereby reducing unchecked urban sprawl and preserving precious rural landscapes and habitat.

Photo: On Saturday, September 27, 2008, 100 youth came out to plant 100 trees in the SE Rochester Homestead neighborhood. Over 175 people worked together to ensure this neighborhood will have greenspace and shade in years to come.