

USFS Grant Acceptance

City of Billings
Park Board Meeting
November 8, 2023

Mike Pigg
Parks Director

Title: Billings Urban Forestry Grant for Disadvantaged Areas

- Funding originated from the Inflation Reduction Act
- Designated \$1.5B to Urban Forestry
 - The largest investment in Urban Forestry ever
 - Approximately \$1B was made available for grants
 - Billings applied for \$2M and was awarded \$1M

Program Focus

- The two primary objectives for this grant are:
- Social Equity
- Mitigating Climate Change

Social Equity

- The basis is that in almost all US cities (including Billings), historic economic disparities have resulted in significantly, and palpable, differences in the quality and quantity of trees and tree canopy
- The USFS provided a “Climate and Economic Justice Mapping Tool” to identify these areas.
- Projects proposed in these areas were designated as “no-match” areas meaning no matching funds were required for work in this area
- The project area chosen for Billings was the entire area identified by the USFS Mapping Tool

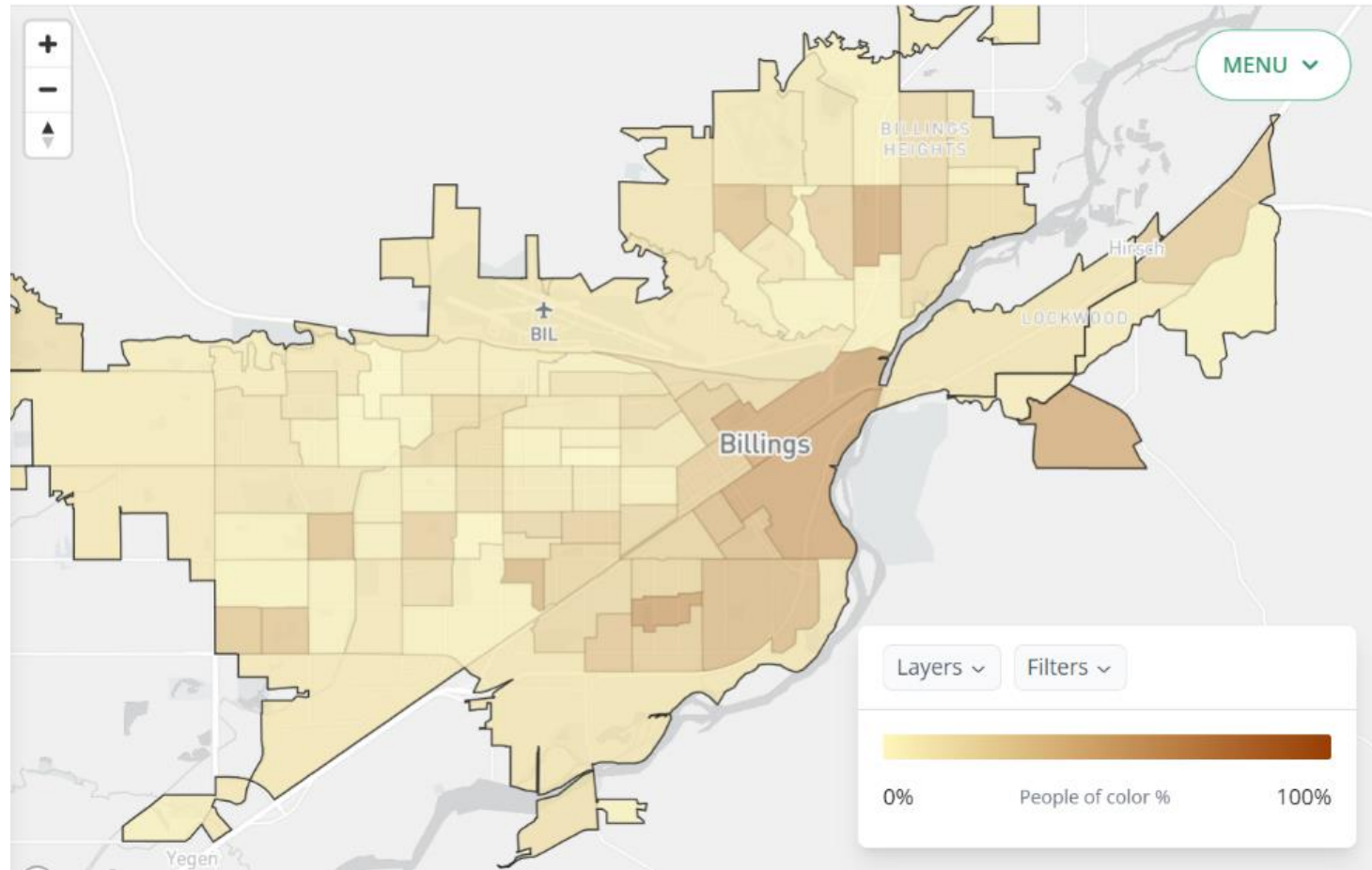
Climate Mitigation

- Heat islands (parking lots in particular)
- Boulevards
- There is tons of data showing that a well-designed urban forest:
 - Cools temperatures across cities
 - Reduces heating and cooling bills for homeowners and businesses
 - Slows traffic
 - Reduces crime
 - Increases prosperity
 - Improves quality of life

Figure 1 – IRA Grant Project Area (in grey)



Figure 2 – Demographics of Project Area



Setting, Context and Background

- Responsibility for Urban Forestry is divided
 - Parks, Recreation and Public Lands Department, Forestry Division
 - Parks, Mountview Cemetery, Natural Areas
 - Public Works Department, Streets and Traffic Division
 - Boulevards that are the responsibility of adjacent property owners

Setting, Context and Background (Cont)

- Billings does not have normal prerequisites for doing urban forestry work
 - No complete tree inventory
 - No Forest Management Plan
 - No Tree Board
 - Antiquated forest regulations (adopted in 1967 – 56 yrs old)

Setting, Context and Background (Cont)

- Remedying these discrepancies were made important first steps to putting \$ to effective use
- Grant \$ can only be spent in project area
- Some prep work will require other \$\$
 - Forest Management Plan
- Some prep work will be done using city staff and resources
 - Updating “tree code”
 - Establishing Forest Practices Board
 - Collecting inventory from boulevards in remainder of city

Project Goals

- Engage Billings citizens in urban forestry, especially in project area
- Transform tree canopy in project area
- Create a new dynamic for urban forestry going forward that recognizes trees as valuable, key “green” infrastructure.

Approach

- Hire a “Community Organizer” and a “Project Manager”
- The Community Organizer will work half-time, will connect us to groups living in the project area, provide public education, organize events, handle publicity and be the go-to contact for the project
- The Project Manager will prepare RFQ’s, RFP’s, contracts, etc. and work with arboricultural contractors (pruning, planting, felling trees, nurseries (acquiring trees) and construction workers (creating planting spots that are currently covered with concrete and asphalt)

Near-Term Pre-Project Tasks to be Completed

- Negotiate with USFS to revise narrative and budget to reflect \$1M rather than \$2M budget
- Establish Tree Board (will require writing charter, gaining City Council approval, and then appointments made by Mayor)
- Collect inventory data.

Project Tasks to be Completed

- Inventory of current trees and potential planting sites
- Prune trees that will be retained
- Create planting sites under impervious surfaces
- Plant trees in boulevard strips and created openings

Questions and Discussion