



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Reginald Goodson, City Manager
Stacy Williams, Parks and Recreation Director
Carl Best, Development Services Director
Jon Hawley, Grants Administrator

Date: February 18, 2026

Re: Consideration - Request to Apply, Parks and Rec System Tree Inventory Grant

BACKGROUND:

Since 2008, the NC Forest Service and the Arbor Day Foundation have recognized the City of Elizabeth City as a "Tree City" under the "Tree City USA" program. Tree City status reflects the City's commitment to urban forestry, and ensuring our residents benefit from the many benefits of trees. Per the Arbor Day Foundation, trees "clean our air, filter our water, and even slow storm surge and flooding ... Trees also provide shade and cool our cities by up to 10 degrees, which can help prevent heat-related deaths."

Tree City status requires the City to maintain a tree board or department, have a tree care ordinance, spend at least \$2 per capita on urban forestry annually, and celebrate Arbor Day. These standards inherently require a tree management plan and an accurate tree inventory.

NC Forest Service offers an Urban and Community Forestry Financial Assistance Program to help communities maintain and strengthen their Tree City status. Parks and Recreation is proposing to submit an application with two components. The first is an inventory of City-owned trees, including those on parks, cemeteries, and streets. The second is to adopt a management plan that would use that inventory as the basis for maintaining and improving our urban forest while also updating our tree ordinance, which is 17 years old.

Due to geographic restrictions, the entire city is not eligible for grant funding. This means that the inventory and management plan would carry local costs. City staff are proposing to request up to \$70,000 in grant funds, and to commit \$10,000 in next fiscal year's budget for ineligible project costs.

ANALYSIS:

Tree inventories are essential for proper maintenance of the City's urban forest. Tree inventories precisely locate trees and provide their key characteristics, including species, width, and health, and identify conflicts with surrounding uses and overhead utilities. They are a cornerstone of a tree management plan, which ensures trees are properly planted, cared for, and, when necessary, pruned or removed.

The City's last tree inventory was in 2010, and is too outdated to serve as the basis of a management plan. Based on an estimate from a qualified consultant, approximately 5,400 trees need to be inventoried to cover the majority of the City's park, cemetery, and street trees. Based on the new inventory, the project can proceed to updating our management plan, including reviewing policies for tree management and suggesting updates to the City's tree ordinance. These updates would be timely, and be excellent supplements to various resiliency-related planning efforts the City is undertaking, including a new, resilient Land Use Plan and Unified Development Ordinance.

However, as noted above, the proposed scope includes some grant-ineligible areas, resulting in a local cost. The NCFS Financial Assistance Program is offering funding from three different sources, and the best funding source for the City comes from the Inflation Reduction Act. Under the IRA, 100-percent grant funding is available within disadvantaged Census tracts, which cover a majority of the City and its public trees. To control project costs while still achieving a near-complete inventory, we are proposing to inventory approximately 5,000 trees, and to perform the management plan based on that data. Where management plan tasks involves analyzing data specific to ineligible areas, we will propose prorating those costs. Based on quotes from a qualified consultant, we believe we can undertake the inventory and management plan for \$80,000 or less, with no more than \$10,000 in local expense.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

By motion, authorize submission of an NCFS Financial Assistance Program application for an updated tree inventory and management plan as described herein, and to commit a local share in the FY2027 budget not to exceed \$10,000.