



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT ANNOUNCES NEW TREE EQUITY INITIATIVE "OUR ROOTS CHICAGO"**

*Chicago will plant 75,000 trees, equitably doubling tree planting compared to the previous year*

**CHICAGO** – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot announced on Arbor Day today a new tree equity initiative, Our Roots Chicago. Encompassed in the Chicago 2022 Climate Action Plan and the City's commitment to environmental justice and equity, Our Roots Chicago will plant 75,000 trees over the next five years under the \$46 million Chicago Recovery Plan investment expanding Chicago's tree canopy across the city.

Our Roots Chicago is a community-driven plan to expand tree planting in the city and increase the number of trees in neighborhoods with low tree canopy cover to ensure a more equitable distribution of trees across the city. The initiative uses a data-informed, community-driven approach to tree planting to create more resilient and sustainable communities across the city.

Our Roots will prioritize planting in historically marginalized and underserved communities on the South and West sides, where the city's current tree canopy demonstrates a shortage of trees. In doing so, Our Roots Chicago will equitably convey ecosystem benefits to communities disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis.

"Trees are a critical piece of our city's infrastructure and vital to our work towards combating climate change," said Mayor Lightfoot. "As a city, we must address Chicago's continual net loss of trees and apply comprehensive, equitable strategies that will, not only increase the city's tree canopy, but ensure that underinvested communities are prioritized and included in the process."

Currently, the city's average canopy coverage is only 16% which is below the ideal average for cities, and it is even lower in historically under-resourced and underserved community census tracts, often varying from 4% to 10%. The goal to plant 75,000 trees represents a doubling in tree planting over the previous year. This effort tackles tree coverage in communities that fall below Chicago's 16%



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average thus reducing serious climate change impacts such as urban heat island effects and frequent flooding. Chicago's tree planting will help offset greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change and support climate resiliency across the city.

"Trees bring many benefits to communities," said CDOT Commissioner Gia Biagi. "They offer shade on a hot day, provide habitat for birds, improve air quality, and make our city more beautiful. We look forward to continued partnership with our sister agencies and community groups to bring more of these benefits to more communities through Our Roots Chicago and the unprecedented investments being made through the Chicago Recovery Plan to expand the tree canopy in areas that need it most."

"One of the Bureau of Forestry's top priorities is to plant trees along the public right-of-way in neighborhoods throughout Chicago," said Malcolm Whiteside, Deputy Commissioner for the Department of Streets and Sanitation Bureau of Forestry. "We are excited to get to work on the expansion of tree planting this spring through Mayor Lightfoot's Our Roots Chicago program, where we will work with community groups to bring the numerous and long-term benefits that trees offer to residents."

Using the Chicago Department of Public Health's new 'community tree tool,' which overlays data on tree canopy with air quality, land surface temperatures, economic hardship, and other social vulnerability and environmental factors, City departments will plant trees where there is the greatest need. The identification of tree planting locations is also supported by a diverse 70-member community-based working group who share a commitment to helping the City expand Chicago's tree canopy and reduce tree removals.

The "community tree tool" was developed by the Chicago Department of Public Health with support from the Bloomberg Philanthropies Partnership for Healthy Cities, which brings together data on tree canopy, air quality, land surface temperatures, economic hardship, and other factors. The city is using the tool to work with local nonprofits and community groups to identify priority communities and locations to plant trees. Bloomberg Associates, a pro bono municipal consulting service, has also supported the development and rollout of the tree equity strategy.

"We've seen the data and we know that Chicago's urban tree canopy is not equally distributed across the city," said Angela Tovar, Chief Sustainability Officer for the Office of the Mayor. "Our Roots Chicago reflects the administration's commitment to implementing nature-based solutions to slow down climate change, delivering climate investments to most impacted communities, and ensuring that communities



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most affected by the climate crisis are included in the City’s tree planting operations.”

“Trees are good for physical health, mental health, and even economic health—so more healthy trees lead to healthier communities, said Dr. Allison Arwady, CDPH Commissioner. “Every day, CDPH aims to close the racial life expectancy gap in Chicago by addressing the root causes of health. Our Roots Chicago is the most literal example of how to do this well, and we’re thrilled that the city is adopting this data-driven community-partnered approach to planting trees where they are most needed.”

In addition to the City’s tree equity working group, the Community Tree Ambassador program will launch in May, which will train community residents on how to identify potential tree locations on City parkways. Tree ambassadors will be able to survey and submit potential tree planting sites from their mobile devices, providing an efficient way to have more trees planted in a shorter period of time. The ambassadors will also be able to geolocate trees to monitor their progress and performance in priority community areas.

“TREEmendous Lawndale is excited to connect with the Our Roots Chicago equitable tree planting initiative to bring needed shade, habitat, and beauty to our Lawndale neighborhood,” said Annamaria Leon, North Lawndale resident, business owner, and member of the TREEmendous Lawndale committee. “We are committed that our residents are active participants in this collaboration and will be sharing knowledge, storytelling and celebrating as, together, we implement this impactful and important project over the coming years.”

The TREEmendous Lawndale committee is working with The Trust for Public Land and the North Lawndale Community Coordinating Council’s Greening Open Space Water Soil and Sustainability.

“Our Roots Chicago is a wonderful opportunity to draw attention to the benefits and value of the urban forest to quality of life and to showcase the wonderful work that is going on in the City of Chicago on behalf of our urban trees,” said Lydia Scott, Director of the Chicago Region Trees Initiative. “We are excited to partner with the City of Chicago and community-based organizations in this endeavor and do what is necessary to increase Chicago’s tree canopy.”

“Trees are critical urban infrastructure that help cool neighborhoods, reduce flood risks, provide clean air, and improve the walkability of our streets,” said Adam Freed, Principal of Bloomberg Associates Sustainability Team. “Yet far too often the communities that need these benefits most have the fewest number of trees. By



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putting equity at the heart of Chicago’s sustainability agenda, Mayor Lightfoot is showing how greening cities can solve for climate, health, and equity issues.”

Chicago is one of 25 cities selected to participate in the Bloomberg Philanthropies American Cities Climate Challenge, an effort to resource cities to take strong action to reduce pollution that contributes to climate change and impacts public health.

Our Roots Chicago seeks to empower people to request a free city tree in their community and educate Chicagoans on the benefits of trees. City residents who would like to request a free tree to be planted on the parkway in front of their home can use the CHI311 app or call 311. For more information on how to get involved, visit [chicago.gov/OurRoots](https://chicago.gov/OurRoots).

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