



DATE: August 15, 2024

MEMO TO: Nels Leutwiler, Chair
Preservation Foundation Board

FROM: Dr. Pati Vitt
Director of Natural Resources

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend approval of a \$25,000 grant to support the planning and design phase of Openlands' Lands in Harmony Sustainable Landscaping Initiative in Lake County.

FINANCIAL DATA: As of March 31, 2024, the Foundation's unrestricted funding total was \$320,611.95. Grants paid and payable from the unrestricted funds as of June 30, 2024, include:

Year	Amount
2024 (paid)	\$ 94,468
2025	\$ 84,268
2026	\$ 53,268
Total Paid and Payable	\$ 232,004

The requested funds would be paid as a \$25,000 disbursement in 2024.

BACKGROUND:

To enhance the ecological health and biodiversity of Lake County, including the Forest Preserve District lands, it is essential to connect fragmented habitats and support native species. The District can achieve this by aiding the management of private lands through effective methods that reduce invasive species, encourage native plant growth, and minimize aquatic pollution from de-icing salts and turf management products. Lake County's most common land use, by far, is suburban residential, covering approximately 115, 000 acres. In addition, when homeowners are encouraged to remove invasive buckthorn, they are commonly perplexed about how to create an alternative home landscape that provides similar benefits, and many local landscaping companies that might provide resources are unfamiliar with the use of native species, and other sustainable landscaping practices.

To help bridge this disconnect, Openlands, a 60-year-old nationally accredited nonprofit, is collaborating with the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association and other partners to overcome barriers that limit contractors' ability to offer ecologically beneficial services. To support this effort, the Natural Resources Department seeks \$25,000 to assist Openlands in the planning and design phase of their Lands in Harmony Sustainable Landscaping Initiative in Lake County.

This initiative, a major strategy of Openlands, was developed following extensive market research and a listening tour addressing the landscaping industry's needs in Lake County and the Chicago Region. Openlands identified a critical need for demonstration sites and resources to help companies adopt sustainable practices while meeting client demands.



Funding for the Planning and Design Phase will enable Openlands to create four demonstration sites, generating valuable data and how-to resources on sustainable landscaping over five years. Additionally, Openlands will collaborate with the landscaping industry to develop a strategy for distributing this information, ensuring it reaches both large and small businesses in accessible ways that positively impact their services.

This initiative is particularly beneficial to Lake County, where many landscape contractors reside in underserved communities and work for small, family-owned businesses. By supporting this project, the Lake County Forest Preserve District can play a crucial role in promoting sustainable landscaping practices, thus enhancing the ecological function and native species diversity of both public and private lands.

The Planning and Design Phase of this initiative is scheduled for completion by November 30, 2024. The total cost of Phase I - Planning and Design is \$94,985 and includes Lake County Stormwater Management Commission funding (32%) and private sector funding (42%) for Openlands, a long-time District Partner. This \$25,000 request (26%) fills the funding gap for this critical regional opportunity which will greatly support the District’s restoration and preservation of native habitat throughout Lake County.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Executive Director of the Preservation Foundation, Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships, Director of Administration, Chief Operations Officer, and Forest Preserves Executive Director

PRESERVATION FOUNDATION BOARD:

Date: _____ Roll Call Vote: Ayes: _____ Nays: _____

Voice Vote Majority Ayes: _____ Nays: _____