

*Frogtown Green and USFS
Increasing Tree Canopy with Neighborhood Volunteers*



FINAL REPORT NOVEMBER 2023

This is an annual report on a US Forestry Service-supported effort by Frogtown Green to increase the tree canopy in Frogtown and Summit-University, two low-income communities with the lowest percentage of tree cover of residential neighborhoods in St Paul.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Frogtown and Summit-University are St Paul, Minnesota residential neighborhoods with the lowest percentage of tree cover, according to the city's forestry department. In 2023, with \$20,000 in support from the US Forest Service Urban Connections program, Frogtown Green, a neighborhood-based environmental initiative, worked to increase that percentage through extensive **outreach** to neighborhood residents on the importance and benefits of the urban tree canopy, and through volunteer-driven gravel-bed **cultivation and planting** of bare-root trees in the two neighborhoods.

2023 outreach results:

- We produced 10 stories about our tree planting program in Frogtown Green's monthly newsletters.
- An article about the tree program was published in the *Frogtown-Como-Midway Monitor*.
- Fox News produced a special news report about our efforts.
- Frogtown Green volunteers hand-delivered flyers to 10,000 residences in in Frogtown and Summit-University.
- Our neighborhood festival, including a tent /table staffed by volunteers and USFS was attended by approximately 250 individuals.

2023 planting results:

- 165 bareroot trees were maintained in gravel beds in Frogtown and Summit-University.
- Despite feverish watering, 17 trees succumbed to the summer's heat and drought.
- Ultimately, 148 bareroot trees were planted in Frogtown and Summit University, with a focus on areas of lowest tree canopy:
 - 132 bareroot trees were planted in residential yards in the two neighborhoods, including 19 in multi-unit housing developments, and
 - 16 bareroot trees were planted in public spaces including Rondo Commemorative Plaza, neighborhood parks, community gardens and public greenspaces.

REPORT NARRATIVE

How our work is carried out: Frogtown and Summit-University

Frogtown Green, a resident-led, volunteer-powered neighborhood environmental initiative, has been planting trees on Frogtown land since 2011. Working with very limited funding, Frogtown Green volunteers (known as the “Tree Frogs”) have to date planted more than 600 trees on public and private property within Frogtown neighborhood boundaries; we will reach a goal of more than 1,000 trees by early 2024. USFS funding has supported our efforts since 2016.

We provide education: Frogtown Green places a very high priority on educating residents about the value of urban trees and the consequences of continued low tree canopy cover. All free tree recipients were provided a copy of the U.S. Forest Service *Tree Owners’ Manual* well as the double-sided summary sheet depicted at right. Through door-to-door flyering, site assessments and follow-up emails, we provide tree recipients with information that new owners need, in order to select and care for trees.

We focus on rental property: In 2023, we focused for the fourth consecutive year on planting trees on rental properties, which comprise 66% of the homes in both Frogtown and Summit-University. We were successful in forging partnerships with multi-unit housing complexes, at Mount Airy Homes and Liberty Homes.

We rely on volunteers: We received welcome help from AmeriCorps volunteers with the Community Forestry Corps, who were assigned to Frogtown Green, as well as major help from steadfast Tree Frogs and volunteers with Unity Church-Unitarian’s “Canopy Connectors” group. We were delighted to be joined at our Climate Carnival and on our planting day by USFS program manager Dan Dressler!

We meet our commitments:

Our stated deliverables for the USFS 2023 grant were

- Monthly posting of information about urban tree benefits in social media, newspaper articles and Frogtown Green’s newsletter
- Outreach to at least 100 rental property owners in Frogtown and Summit-University, generating interest in tree plantings
- Information delivered to residents attending Frogtown Green’s annual outdoor Climate Carnival
- Up to 100 trees planted in two neighborhoods: Frogtown and Summit-University
- 165 bare root trees cultivated in gravel beds in both neighborhoods
- Up to 65 trees planted in public spaces including public housing sites in Frogtown and Summit-University



We partnered with other organizations and communities:

Frogtown Green staff and volunteers also participated in additional tree-planting activities, supported by other funders and partners, as described below. While these efforts were not funded directly by the US Forest Service, they benefitted from Frogtown Green staffing and experience that has been increased over the years due to USFS consistent support.

- In late October, tree program manager Chris Stevens planted 100 small trees at one public site in Frogtown, in the first stage of installation of a “Miyawaki Urban Forest,” a proven method for re-creation of native forest eco-systems in urban settings.
- In 2023 our project model was again deployed in the adjacent low-canopy neighborhoods of Hamline-Midway and Payne-Phalen, with 100 bare-root trees and substantial technical assistance supplied by Frogtown Green.



Taken together, the 148 USFS-funded trees planted in homes and public spaces in Frogtown and Summit-University, plus the additional 200 trees funded by partners, amount to almost 350 trees planted by Frogtown Green just this year. We will reach a goal of 1,000 new trees in Frogtown early in 2024.

These trees will provide environmental health benefits for years to come. By the time these trees reach full maturity, they will each have removed nearly a ton of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, in addition to trapping heat, reducing ground-level ozone levels, and releasing life-giving oxygen.

Our resident-led, volunteer-driven work was accomplished with funding from the US Forest Service. We had additional funding from the MN Department of Natural Resources, and help from Tree Trust, St Paul Forestry Department, the environment committee of the Hamline Midway Coalition, Urban Roots non-profit, Great River Greening non-profit, and members of Unity Church-Unitarian.

Please see the table on the next page for details on outcomes achieved with USFS support.

Outcomes of US Forest Service-Funded Work in 2023

Task	Goal	Deliverables listed in 2023 proposal	Actual Outcomes
Environmental education and outreach	<p>Wider awareness of urban tree benefits in Frogtown and Summit-University neighborhoods.</p> <p>Increased understanding by landlords of the importance of trees for rental properties</p> <p>Greater awareness of benefits of trees to low income neighborhood residents and residents of public housing sites</p>	<p>Monthly posting of information about urban tree benefits in social media, newspaper articles and Frogtown Green newsletter</p> <p>Mailed outreach to at least 100 rental property owners in Frogtown and Summit-University, soliciting interest in tree plantings</p> <p>Information delivered to residents attending Frogtown Green’s annual outdoor Climate Carnival</p>	<p>10 monthly issues of the 2023 Frogtown Green newsletter included stories about or references to our tree planting program.</p> <p>An article about the tree program was included in the October issue of the <i>Frogtown-Como-Midway Monitor</i>, which is delivered door-to-door to 5,000 Frogtown residences and is online at monitorsaintpaul.com.</p> <p>Our program’s achievement of a longtime goal was highlighted in a special news report on Fox News and is viewable here: https://www.fox9.com/news/frogtown-green-working-to-plant-trees-in-st-paul</p> <p>Instead of postal mailings, we hand-delivered flyers to all accessible residences in Frogtown and Summit-University (10,000 households), encouraging tenants to work with their landlords to enable tree-planting.</p> <p>The Climate Carnival was attended by approximately 250 individuals, many of whom stopped at the USFS station to learn more about urban trees.</p>
Gravel bed cultivation	Demonstration of efficacy and cost-effectiveness of gravel bed cultivation of trees	165 bare root trees cultivated in neighborhood-based gravel beds	We cultivated 100 trees in Frogtown’s gravel beds and another 65 trees in a gravel bed at Unity Church-Unitarian, in Summit-University.
Volunteer-led planting	Engagement of resident volunteers Actual planting of trees	Up to 100 trees planted in two neighborhoods	Volunteers in Frogtown and Summit-U planted 148 trees in the two neighborhoods.
Public space plantings, including pilot plantings at public housing	Successful collaborative pilot program with public housing agency is first priority; other tree plantings at non-PHA multi-housing sites, schools, parks and other public spaces	Up to 65 trees planted in public spaces including public housing sites in Frogtown and Summit-University	We planted 12 USFS-funded trees in the Mt Airy Homes maintained by St Paul Public Housing, and 7 USFS-funded trees at Liberty Homes, a private non-profit low income housing site in Summit-University.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023

On-site assessments again helped to ensure successful planting in Frogtown and Summit-U

This year for the second time, we made site visits to all residential properties at which a tree would be planted. Site visits in Frogtown were directed by Frogtown Green's Chris Stevens, who manages our tree program, with help from AmeriCorps interns and Tree Frogs volunteers. In Summit-University, a new team of volunteers assembled primarily from the Canopy Connectors group completed site visits, after training by Chris. A standard form was used which confirmed the location of the tree planting, cited residents' ability to assist with planting, and noted any conditions specific to the site.

While time-consuming, the site visit process aids greatly in enlisting residential "customers" to select an appropriate place for their new tree. Site visits allowed an opportunity to give advice on tree management best practices and in many instances, site visitors were able to point out that tree recipient yards could benefit from more than one tree.

Greater awareness of climate change focused media attention

For the third year in a row, we endured high temperatures and drought, which affected the trees in our gravel beds. The visible impact of climate change, as well as the achievement of our goal to plant a total of 1,000 trees in Frogtown, prompted a long news story by Fox Television News.

Partnerships supplemented collaboration with US Forest Service

Since 2011, Frogtown Green has worked closely with the St Paul Forestry Department, advising contacts there of our plans, and getting their counsel on appropriate trees to plant. This relationship continued in 2023, as with the permission of the Department, we planted 16 trees on Frogtown and Summit-University boulevards and in neighborhood parks and public spaces.

In 2023, we ordered trees through Tree Trust, a non-profit organization with the nursery certification which allows us to benefit from wholesale prices. We expect to do the same this year. Our mini-forest project, which began in late 2023, is funded through a partnership with the MN Department of Natural Resources.

We also worked closely with Great River Greening, an environmental organization with new programming focused on tree-planting in urban areas. A prairie restoration day at Frogtown Park and Farm resulted in several new bur oak and swamp white oak trees being planted on site. Great River Greening also used extra funds to purchase 55 new container trees, which were distributed in Frogtown. Fifteen of these were given away to Frogtown residents who had been placed on the waiting list for trees in 2024. Another 30 were planted at Mt Airy and Liberty Homes.

We expect all of these partnerships to continue in the coming years, greatly enhancing our USFS-funded efforts.

Contacts with St Paul Public Housing Agency led to 2023 planting

After connecting with leadership staff at the St Paul Public Housing Agency in late 2022, we

were able to add new shade trees at Mt Airy Homes in September 2023. The St Paul Public Housing Authority owns and manages 4,273 units of public housing, including high rise units, townhomes and scattered-site single family homes and duplexes. The Agency receives no tree replacement funding from the city of St Paul budget, despite losses of a high number of trees at public housing sites. We are in continuing conversation with Agency staff about how best to coordinate with one or more of their resident councils to pilot additional tree-planting efforts in coming years.

Hamline Midway and Payne-Phalen groups assumed responsibility for their own tree planting efforts

Having proven the viability of our “Tree Frogs model” over a decade in Frogtown, Frogtown Green’s agreement with the USFS and AmeriCorps Community Forestry Corps initiative allowed us to continue to support the model in the Hamline-Midway and Payne-Phalen neighborhoods until these communities were able to assume responsibility for their efforts.

The environmental committee for the Hamline Midway Coalition (the district council for the Hamline Midway neighborhood, immediately to the west of Frogtown) assumed responsibility for recruiting tree recipients and volunteers as well as for managing the gravel beds in their respective neighborhoods. Staff and interns at Urban Roots, an environmentally focused youth development organization in the Payne-Phalen neighborhood (northeast of Frogtown), similarly took over the reins for their program. However, this year again, tree orders and planting plans and resources were coordinated and shared with Frogtown Green.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, USFS support has enabled Frogtown Green to gradually increase the number of trees planted by volunteers, from our early years—in which we averaged 25 trees annually—to 70 trees in 2021, 115 in 2022 and 148 in 2023. With USFS technical support and encouragement, our emphasis has always been on “high touch” education to recipients of new trees. The goal is tree *survival*, not just tree planting.

The 2023 US Forest Service grant was critical to Frogtown Green’s achievement of a record number of tree plantings, with the great majority in Frogtown. USFS financial support enabled our small initiative to hire Frogtown resident Chris Stevens, who now directs our multi-community tree programming.

From 2011 through 2023, Frogtown Green members have delivered outreach and education to thousands of property owner and renters in the neighborhood and have planted hundreds of trees in private and public spaces. In 2024, with continuing support from the U.S. Forest Service, Frogtown Green proposes to repeat and build upon the success of the 2023 season.