



Frogtown Green and USFS Increasing Tree Canopy with Neighborhood Volunteers in 2022

**Final Report
December 2022**

This is an annual report on a US Forestry Service-supported effort by Frogtown Green to increase the tree canopy in Frogtown, a low-income neighborhood with the lowest percentage of tree cover of any in St Paul, according to the city’s forestry department. In 2022, 259 new trees were planted in Frogtown and three adjacent neighborhoods with similarly low canopy percentages.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Frogtown Green is a neighborhood sustainability initiative working to increase the low percentage (21%) of tree canopy coverage in our neighborhood. From 2011 through 2022, Frogtown Green members have delivered outreach and education to property owners in the neighborhood and planted more than 500 trees in private and public spaces.

In 2022 our project model was also deployed—with Frogtown Green assistance—to three adjacent low-canopy neighborhoods. In total, 259 trees were planted in low-canopy neighborhoods in St Paul in 2022 by Frogtown Green-associated volunteers. 120 fruit and shade trees were planted in Frogtown and 139 more went to the adjacent neighborhoods of Summit-University, Payne-Phalen and Hamline-Midway.

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, and 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, members of the Association of Black Women in Higher Education, and members of Unity Church-Unitarian.

HOW THE WORK WAS DONE

How our work was carried out: Frogtown

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 500 trees on public and private property, primarily homes owned by residents.

In 2022, we focused for the third consecutive year on planting trees on rental properties, which comprise 66% of the homes in Frogtown. We received welcome help from AmeriCorps volunteers with the Community Forestry Corps who were assigned to Frogtown Green.

Our stated deliverables for the USFS 2022 grant were 10 new trees planted on Frogtown rental properties and at least 25 trees planted on non-rental properties, including homes and public spaces.



Summary of Frogtown outcomes

We are pleased to report that with USFS support in 2022, a total of 120 new trees were planted in Frogtown by the Tree Frogs, bringing our cumulative total to 534 trees planted in the neighborhood since 2011.

In addition, the Tree Frogs’ volunteer-driven program was recognized as a model for a multi-neighborhood program sponsored by AmeriCorps’ new Community Forestry initiative.

The Tree Frogs carried out planting on October 7 and 8, 2022 coordinating with the Summit-University team (whose work is described below). All of the Frogtown trees were cultivated in our gravel beds, at Frogtown Green’s “Lily Pad”, a large community garden and gathering space. Signage next to the gravel bed (shown above) helped explain their purpose.

As always, Frogtown Green was able to carry out an ambitious tree planting program thanks to the energies of the Tree Frogs, a group of Frogtown residents who have been working together since 2011. The Tree Frogs met regularly over the summer (in person and through zoom) to plan the two-day planting process.

- ***Invaluable Community Forestry Corps members continued to volunteer past their terms***

From September 2021 through July 2022, the Tree Frogs were supported in their efforts by Chris Stevens, an AmeriCorps Community Forestry Corps (CFC) member and a longtime Frogtown resident (shown at left with onlookers). Chris managed our gravel beds, worked to recruit tree recipients and to arrange for efficiency on our planting days.



Since ending his AmeriCorps assignment, Chris has continued to work at Frogtown Green as a paid contractor. In September, 2022 another AmeriCorps/CFC member joined our crew. Mae Macfarlane has also provided able assistance. Her assignment allowed us to offer on-site assessments to would-be tree recipients. Rennie Gaither and Mason Donat, CFC members in 2020 and 2021, also continued to volunteer with Frogtown Green.

- ***On-site assessments added this year helped to ensure successful planting***

This year for the first time, we made site visits to all residential properties at which a tree would be planted. Site visits were carried out by Chris Stevens and Mae Macfarlane, along with several of the Tree Frogs. 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, we found the site visit process to aid 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***

The summer of 2022 had record-breaking stretches of heat and drought in July and August. As in 2021, the trees in our gravel beds suffered initially, and six trees simply did not survive, despite regular watering. However, the visible impact of climate change prompted two stories in the Minneapolis-St Paul *StarTribune*. (The articles are [Putting Green into St Paul's Frogtown](#); [How Planting Trees Fights Racial Inequity in Twin Cities' Poorest Neighborhoods](#); and [Frogtown Green Is Making a Difference, One Garden At A Time](#).)

- ***Tree Trust partnership supplemented collaboration with US Forest Service, St Paul Forestry***

Since 2011, the Tree Frogs have 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 2022, as with the support of the Department, we planted 33 trees on Frogtown boulevards and in neighborhood parks and public spaces. In 2022, 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.

- **Contacts with St Paul Public Housing Agency led to a planned 2023 collaboration**

In late summer 2022, we connected with leadership staff at the St Paul Public Housing Agency, which 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 a tree-planting effort at a public housing site in Frogtown.

How our work was carried out: Hamline-Midway neighborhood

Hamline Midway Coalition Environmental Committee



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 neighborhood.

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 bed that they built in 2021. This year again, tree orders and planting plans and resources were coordinated and shared by the Tree Frogs. The expectation is that as neighborhood tree-planting groups gain experience, they will develop their own

volunteers and, when possible, funding.

Summary of Hamline Midway outcomes

The committee recruited a dozen volunteers, who planted 44 of their total 47 trees on residential properties, and the remaining three trees at the Hamline Elementary School.

How our work was carried out: Summit-University neighborhood

Unity Church Canopy Connectors in Summit-University

Our second neighborhood collaboration is with the Summit-University community. Members of Unity Church-Unitarian, whose large and active environmental committee enthusiastically responded to the invitation to build a gravel bed in 2021, continued to maintain the bed this year.

The “Canopy Connectors” again conducted vigorous outreach through flyering door-to-door. They also achieved an exciting partnership with a local elementary school, planting 16 new shade trees on the school’s previously barren playground. A hundred school children and members of an association of African-American women educators participated on a very successful planting day.



Summary of Summit-University outcomes

Three of the trees grown in the Canopy Connectors’ gravel bed were not viable after the summer’s heat and drought, and two shade trees went unclaimed, and were returned to Frogtown Green. Hence, 60 trees were planted in the Summit-University neighborhood.

How our work was carried out: Payne-Phalen neighborhood

Urban Roots’ teen tree planters

A new collaboration with members of the Payne-Phalen neighborhood, to the east of Frogtown, developed in 2022. Urban Roots, a non-profit organization whose mission is to cultivate and empower youth through nature, healthy food and community, took on the challenge of planting 32 trees in their low income community.

Like Frogtown, the East Side has lower tree canopy coverage than most other parts of the city. Teen conservation crews at Urban Roots have planted thousands of trees in public parks over the years but had not done residential planting. Donated trees from Frogtown Green were kept over the summer months in gravel beds at Urban Roots’ community garden space.



Summary of Payne-Phalen planting outcomes

A total of 32 trees were planted in the Payne Phalen neighborhood.

OVERALL PROJECT DELIVERABLES AND IMPACT

Our USFS contract deliverables were to:

Hire an outreach coordinator whose primary audience will be Frogtown landlords and residents, and secondary audience residents of the Hamline Midway, Summit-University and Payne-Phalen neighborhoods.

AmeriCorps Community Forestry Corps member Chris Stevens assisted with coordination from September 2021-July 2022. After his service with Americorps, Chris was contracted to coordinate the Frogtown Green tree program the remainder of 2022 with the help of our 2022/2023 Community Forestry Corps member, Mae Macfarlane. Patricia Ohmans, Frogtown Green's director, assisted in outreach to the additional neighborhoods.

Make indirect contact through mailing or other media to at least 100 landlords and direct contact with at least 20 Frogtown landlords educating them as to the value of urban trees and to offer them a free tree for their property. Outreach to landlords was done by email, word of mouth, and social media. We especially targeted the owners of Liberty Homes, a privately managed low-income housing site in the Summit University neighborhood. Conversations are continuing with the manager of this site. We also attempted to interest managers of Wilder Townhomes, a low-income housing cooperative at the intersection of Victoria and Van Buren in Frogtown, where many mature trees were recently removed. While these efforts have yet to be successful, we hope that they will be eventually. We are greatly encouraged by the response of the St Paul Public Housing Agency and are confident that we will be planting trees in public housing sites in 2023.

Plant at least 10 trees on residential, rental properties in Frogtown during the 2022 planting season. Despite the difficulty of recruiting landlords or managers of large multi-unit properties, we planted a total of 20 trees on known rental property in Frogtown. Model Cities, a local neighborhood development corporation, requested 4 trees to be planted at two of their properties. The additional 16 trees were planted at the single family home properties of another seven landlords.

Plant at least 90 trees on non-rental properties (including public spaces) during the 2022 planting season. A total of 139 fruit and shade trees were planted in Summit University, Payne-Phalen and Hamline-Midway. A total of 99 fruit and shade trees were planted in Frogtown homeowner (non-rental) residences and public spaces.

Assess the status of trees planted in previous years and recommend possible follow up care of trees when appropriate: Several tree recipients have contacted Frogtown Green with questions about their tree care. Tree recipients receive quarterly email tree care reminders that are seasonally appropriate, for example, rodent protection in the winter, and watering reminders in the height of summer.

Frogtown Green's Community Forestry Corps member Mae Macfarlane is currently contacting past tree recipients to assess ongoing tree health and connect with owners to answer tree related questions; her

goal is personal visits with at least 100 tree recipients. In future tree plantings, we will continue to perform individual resident site assessments and encourage our neighborhood partners to do the same.

Impact of the USFS grant in 2022

The 2022 US Forest Service grant was critical to the achievement of a record number of tree plantings, with the great majority in Frogtown. Financial support enabled Frogtown Green to support Chris Stevens, who provided important continuity in a time of transition between CFC workers.

Funding from USFS also continued to support the development of resident-led and volunteer-driven tree planting groups in Hamline-Midway and Summit-University, and the creation of a new program in Payne-Phalen. These groups will continue their activity in 2023.

A “gravel bed summit” that Frogtown Green sponsored in January 2022, brought together the leaders of these neighborhood planting groups with professional urban foresters, allowing all to share experiences, stories and best practices.

Our record of accomplishment likely influenced the repeat selection of Frogtown Green as a host site for the Community Forestry Corps. In addition, our successes through partnerships have led to important additional connections with the Nature Conservancy and the Metropolitan Council. Both organizations now feature descriptions of our work on their websites.

As noted in the Executive Summary, USFS support has been critical to Frogtown Green’s work. From 2011 through 2022, Frogtown Green members have delivered outreach and education to property owners in the neighborhood and planted close to 550 trees in private and public spaces.

In 2022 our project model was again deployed to three adjacent low-canopy neighborhoods. In total, 259 trees were planted in low-canopy neighborhoods in St Paul in 2022 by Frogtown Green-associated volunteers. 120 fruit and shade trees were planted in Frogtown and 139 more went to the adjacent neighborhoods of Summit-University, Payne-Phalen and Hamline-Midway.

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Thanks to USFS staff

An additional word of thanks to former USFS Urban Connections coordinator Teri Heyer, whose technical support, expertise and energy has been invaluable to the Frogtown Green Tree Frogs. We are grateful for her partnership as well as for the funding we received this year and in previous years.

We look forward to further productive collaboration with Teri’s successor and USFS staff.