



MONTGOMERY COUNTY
OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY
& SOCIAL JUSTICE

REIA #26-19

Chesapeake Bay Trust—Urban Trees Grant Award

Requesting Agency/Department(s)	Dollar Amount
Department of Environmental Protection	\$719,750
Funding Source	County Match Amount
State Aid	\$143,900

Finding

The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #26-19 Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT) Urban Trees Grant Award is likely to advance racial equity and social justice in the County, as eligibility criteria related to these grant dollars require the planting and care of shade trees in ‘underserved areas’ (as defined by the State of Maryland). In Montgomery County, these areas are more likely, because of structural inequities, to be where Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and low-income residents live. This supplemental appropriation could therefore reduce racial disparities in tree canopy coverage (and increase the equitable distribution of tree-related health benefits).

Background

Purpose

The purpose of SA #26-19 Chesapeake Bay Trust Urban Trees Grant is to allocate \$719,750 from the Chesapeake Bay Trust Urban Tree Grant #26076 to the Department of Environmental Protection for planting and providing aftercare for shade trees through the Tree Montgomery program. DEP is proposing to plant 1,440 urban shade trees, including 1,200 funded through the grant and 240 as cash match (equivalent to \$143,900)¹.

The department’s response to the RESJ template provides further detail about the grant and its eligibility requirements:

Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #26-19 Chesapeake Bay Trust – Urban Trees Grant Page 2

“The FY26 Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT) Urban Trees Grant awarded to the Department of Environmental Protection requires that all trees planted using grant funds be installed in equity areas as defined by the CBT within Montgomery County. The eligible areas are defined by CBT as urban areas with low median household income, high unemployment, and neighborhoods with housing projects or that were historically redlined at any time.

The shade trees will be planted through the County’s Tree Montgomery program on Montgomery County Public School property, Montgomery County Government land, land owned by Homeowners Associations, and private single-family and multi-family residential properties. Increasing shade canopy in urban areas will contribute to cooling effects in heat islands in those communities.”²

Relevant REIAs and Other Assessments

ORESJ has conducted REIAs since 2021. The below REIA(s) are relevant to supplemental appropriation #26-19.

- Supplemental Appropriation #22-29 Tree Replacement
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-29.pdf>
- Supplemental Appropriating #23-26 Chesapeake Bay Trust Urban Trees Grant
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-26.pdf>
- Supplemental Appropriation #24-18 Chesapeake Bay Trust Urban Trees Grant
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/24-18.pdf>
- Supplemental Appropriation #25-43 Chesapeake Bay Trust Urban Trees Grant
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/25-43.pdf>

Analysis

ORESJ Research & Analysis

ORESJ conducted a REIA of a grant award, under the same program, in January and October 2023 and January 2025. In those REIAs, ORESJ explained the role redlining and other systemic inequities have played in the inequitable distribution of tree canopy and its health benefits. Highlights of that research include:

- A 2021 study conducted by researchers from the Nature Conservancy, the relationship between tree coverage in urban areas and factors like income and race/ethnicity was statistically significant.³

Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #26-19 Chesapeake Bay Trust – Urban Trees Grant Page 3

- The same study concluded that the strongest predictor of the difference in tree cover between high- and low-income blocks was income inequality, noting that urbanized areas with greater income inequality had greater differences in tree cover between high- and low-income blocks⁴.
- American Forest, the creator of the Tree Equity Score, explains, “With few exceptions, trees are sparse in socioeconomically disadvantaged and neighborhoods of color and more prominent in wealthier, whiter neighborhoods. Redlining policies, dating back to the 1930s, helped lay the groundwork for this inequity”.⁵

Based on this research, efforts to plant and preserve trees in eligible areas under this grant could help reduce disproportionate burdens on BIPOC and low-income communities.

The department’s response to the RESJ template also affirms this by stating, “Planting large shade trees at CBT-defined eligible areas prioritizes the needs of communities impacted by racial inequities. The eligible areas have undergone significant development and loss of green space inherent to the historical zoning practices. By prioritizing these communities for the planting of shade trees, this project will provide cooling shade and cleaner air in neighborhoods where it is most needed, as well as a wide array of mental health benefits such as a sense of well-being, test scores, and attention spans.”⁶

Caveats

This REIA has been conducted with the best available information at the time of writing, including department responses to the Racial Equity and Social Justice template and research conducted by ORESJ Policy Team Analysts. While the assessment examines specific racial equity and social justice impacts of the funding request, it cannot fully address all systemic inequities that affect the communities in question, nor do we seek to examine impacts outside the scope of the funding request. We recommend using this assessment as a starting point for discussions about the impact of the program on advancing racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County.

References

¹ Memo from Jeff Seltzer, Deputy Director, Department of Environmental Protection to Jennifer Bryant, Director, Office of Management and Budget. Subject: “Supplemental Appropriation #26-19 to the FY26 Operation Budget Montgomery County Government Department of Environmental Protection The Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT) – Urban Trees Grant Award \$719,750. September 3, 2025.

**Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA)
Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #26-19 Chesapeake Bay Trust – Urban Trees
Grant
Page 4**

² Department response to RESJ template questions.

³ McDonald RI, Biswas T, Sachar C, Housman I, Boucher TM, et al. (2021) The tree cover and temperature disparity in US urbanized areas: Quantifying the association with income across 5,723 communities. PLOS ONE 16(4): e0249715. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0249715>

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⁵ <https://www.americanforests.org/tools-research-reports-and-guides/tree-equity-score/>

⁶ Department response to RESJ template questions.