

The Tribune-Democrat



Aid for shade: Municipalities eyeing money to buy trees

By **KATHY MELLOTT**
The Tribune-Democrat

April 26, 2009 11:38 pm

— Cambria County communities are lining up to take advantage of a state initiative to increase the number of trees along urban streets and in parks.

The state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is making available to Cambria and Blair counties – which are home to cities – \$85,000 to purchase trees. Volunteers will be enlisted to plant and maintain the trees for years to come.

Regionally, the program known as TreeVitalize is being administered by the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission and will mirror similar initiatives in place in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

While distribution of the money is pending receipt of a state contract, funding applications are being reviewed for Johnstown, Richland Township and the boroughs of Southmont, Ebensburg and Loretto, said Stephanie Powers, Southern Alleghenies community development planner.

“The funding is for the actual purchase of the trees and the applicant finds volunteers to plant and maintain them,” Powers said.

Part of the program is a plan showing where and what trees will be planted. Help with those plans is coming from DCNR Bureau of Forestry and Penn State Cooperative Extension offices.

Richland Township sees a need for more trees in its parks and recreation areas, including the Luray Avenue Park, said township secretary Kim Stayrook.

When funding is received, the township road crew will help with the planting, but Richland is looking to the groups who use the park and recreation areas most to kick in with volunteers, she said.

TreeVitalize was initiated four years ago in Philadelphia after an analysis of the urban ecosystem showed an 8 percent loss of heavy tree cover or 34,000 trees over 15 years.

A decline in tree canopy increases stormwater runoff, boosts energy costs and results in a loss of air quality, according to the TreeVitalize

Web site.

The state contributed \$3 million and – in partnership with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and other nonprofits – undertook a widespread tree-planting effort.

Last year the program was initiated in Pittsburgh, where \$1 million in state money was coupled with \$1.2 million in private money to restore the tree canopy in the city and outlying areas.

This year it is time for the state’s 12 smaller metropolitan areas to benefit from an estimated \$3 million in DCNR money. TreeVitalize is actively seeking support from private foundations and corporate donors.

“We’re trying to increase the shade canopy for urban areas,” Scott Sjolander, a Penn State urban forester in Crawford County, said of the goal to plant 1 million trees by 2012.

The species range from larger trees for streets, parks and other public property to seedlings along streams to reduce erosion.

The benefits of trees extend far beyond the shade. They keep cities cooler and provide countless

environmental benefits and increase property values.

But perhaps the most significant benefit may be in what trees do for a person's psyche.

People in shaded areas are friendlier, and trees relieve tension leading to less hostility, Sjolander said, referring to a study from the University of Illinois.

The hope is that trees planted in urban areas will lead to greater resident involvement in the communities, Sjolander said.

"The idea is to get people to plant trees," Sjolander said.

"Another goal is to get people to volunteer for all parts of their community. To think of their property, their neighborhood, then their community."

Copyright © 1999-2008 cnhi, inc.

Photos



The Tribune-Democrat