

## **National Small Business Tree Planting Program**

Public Law 101-515 directed the Administrator of the Small Business Administration (SBA) to create the National Small Business Tree Planting Program (Title 15, Chapter 14A, § 651 of the U.S. Code) and authorized \$15 million in appropriations for FY1991, and \$30 million in annual appropriations for FY1992 through FY1997. While the program was a valuable tool for small businesses, who worked in collaboration with state and local governments on development plans to utilize the funding, SBA did not have the appropriate resources necessary to administer the program.

The program provided grants to state forestry agencies to enable communities to receive funds to hire private nurseries and arborists for tree-planting projects that helped to beautify retail storefronts and rental housing and parks, turn Main Streets into Green Streets, and jump-start many municipal tree canopy initiatives. As research has shown, trees enhance community economic stability by attracting businesses and tourists.

The funds were allocated by population and resulted in hundreds of local grants. Each locality receiving funds was obligated to contract with private industry companies, such as landscapers, nurseries, arborists, and consulting foresters. Typically, local foresters worked directly with the program, approving planting plans and transferring vital technological expertise.

Unfortunately, it offered no money for the SBA to administer it, which, from everything that we can tell, is what killed the program. With minor changes, we'd like for the National Small Business Tree Planting Program to be reauthorized. The Alliance for Community Trees is pleased to offer the following suggestions for reauthorizing the legislation:

- Appropriate the program in the amount of \$30 million for each of fiscal years 2010 to 2015.
- No more than 20% of funding shall go towards administrative costs for the SBA and we assume the remainder will be passed to the states via the state foresters. The value of it going via the State Forestry agencies is that it mandates that State Foresters oversee the projects and approve them (which they'd be only too happy to do again), thus putting them in direct contact with real people in municipalities of all sizes.
- No less than 75% of remaining program funds shall go towards state-approved pass-through local contracts for tree-planting by green industry companies and non-profit organizations.

Alternatively, we could pursue organic legislation that creates the Small Business Economic Beautification Act creates a Small Business Administration (SBA) grant program that small businesses and rental complex (apartments and condominiums) operators/managers can use to beautify retail storefronts and rental housing and participate in Main Street initiatives and municipal tree canopy initiatives. The purpose of the legislation is to encourage increased shopping and more stable rental rates. Trees enhance community economic stability by attracting businesses and tourists. People linger and shop longer along tree-lined streets. 40,000 trees in commercial parking lots would induce shoppers to spend 11% more for goods and services. In addition, properties along tree-lined streets rent for higher prices and with less turnover.

## **SBA**

- Create the Small Business Economic Beautification Program with related guidelines. Mandate that all agencies that receive federal funds from this program implement the latest Small Business Economic Beautification Program guidelines. Consultation during the development of these guidelines must be provided by Technical Advisory Committees that are composed of local planning and ISA certified arboricultural experts. Science-based tree-siting guidelines should ensure that trees are not planted in locations that will disrupt pre-existing infrastructure or damage power lines and provide options for sidewalks and signs to avoid tree and retail conflicts. The program will also create an educational campaign that highlights the synergies between trees and small business retail, and emphasizes planting the right tree in the right place.
- Designate an applicable SBA department to collect information- or fund a national NGO such as the Alliance for Community Trees to create a reporting method that includes detail such as: number of shoppers, retail sales, and existing urban forestry data related to neighborhoods and municipalities benefiting from this program. Require municipalities and other participating agencies to include an annual review that:
  - Compares retail sales with tree canopy cover.
  - Outlines a 10-year plan for including greening in economic development efforts.
  - Establishes a goal for minimum greenspace or canopy cover and timetables within which to achieve those minimums in priority-targeted economic/retail zones.
  - Designates a staff member responsible for tracking and educating intra-agency, partnering agencies, and local citizens.
- Encourage SBA to develop working partnerships that are aimed at increasing understanding of and communication with national and local urban forest organizations.
- That all municipalities or other participating agencies include a three-year plan for post-planting tree care as well as a minimum canopy cover goal for developments

targeted to benefit from this program. At minimum, trees shall be selected and installed based on appropriate International Society for Arboriculture (ISA), American Planning Association (APA), and best management practices design guidelines and industry standards. The minimum canopy cover goal shall not be less than 40%.

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**Implementation**

- Create incentives that give preference to priority economic stimulus/retail zones in low-income neighborhoods(highest preference) and Tree City and Tree Line USA municipalities. One approach could be to award grants on a competitive basis, and award points for location priority. A minimum of 50% of program funds must go towards expenses for plant materials and other green infrastructure expenses including tree space preparation, irrigation, and maintenance.
- Require municipalities to give priority in awarding grants to projects that meet a verified level of existing and projected retail sales, with additional points for more rigorous standards such as tree canopy cover less than 40%.
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- Require municipalities and other participating agencies to partner an Alliance for Community Trees certified tree-planting organization(s) who will ensure proper tree planting, maintenance, and at least three years of plant survival or replacement.

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## **Funding**

- Incentives may be loans or grants to states or municipalities. Administered by the Small Business Administration.
- Establish a federal revolving loan fund for greening-economic development partnerships, and/or offer a federal match to municipalities with revolving loan funds for such projects.
- Require a cost sharing match of 80/20 (federal to state/municipal/other non-Federal funds).
- As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, States have until June 17, 2009 to solicit green projects for the State Revolving Loan Funds unless at least 20% of their intended use plans are already green projects. "Green projects" is defined per EPA. No state match is required (never any project level match)

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## **Partners & Other General Policy Ideas**

- Expand criteria under the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) to encourage investments in green community redevelopment efforts. Integrated neighborhood planning and efforts that promote the creation of green collar jobs should all receive specific and additional credits in compliance with the CRA.
- Senators Kerry and Snowe have previous bills directed at helping SBA that may align well.
- Preliminary outreach to the US Conference of Mayors and American Nursery & Landscape Association indicates that they'd be willing to voice support for this program again. ANLA is pursuing having this administered by the USFS and even NUCFAC.
- New York State, including New York City, greatly benefited from this program. Since the original funds were allocated by population, New York State received a generous amount each year. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation approved hundreds of local grants, using approximately \$4 million under the program until it was discontinued.

- Potential Partners and Models:
  - Scott Jamieson alerted Greater North Michigan Avenue Association (GNMAA) in Chicago to Kathy Wolf’s research. They have since used it to realize that plantings and trees in their retail district drives business. They even created a garden event on the Avenue to bring people into downtown to enjoy world class shopping among the trees and landscape beds lining the streets.
  - Retailers in Chicago paid into a fund to help supplement the care of the streetscapes in the city. Scott Jamieson says that a special tax was implemented to make sure it was happening. Also, vigorous fundraising was done to create private funding for the streetscapes. Their biggest worries were planters and landscapes that would go unmaintained when funding dried up. So far this hasn’t happened.
  - Main Street USA program would be an ideal fit to partner with to gain support from mayors.
  - US Conference of Mayors would probably be willing to voice support in some way for SBA grants, unless it is perceived to conflict with other small business initiatives they care about. The benefit is that it is free grant money for business district improvements, goes to the States, and then local government, nonprofits, and downtown business associations can apply for the SBA grants from the State Forestry Agency.
  - American Nursery and Landscape Association, since the SBA grants create funding for plant purchase, contract services etc.
  - <http://www.stateforesters.org/node/666>
  - <http://openlibrary.org/b/OL1986617M/Small-Business-Natural-Resource-Development-and-Employment-Opportunity-Act--H.R.-4123>
  - [http://books.google.com/books?id=37cVAAAAIAAJ&source=gbs\\_View\\_API&pgis=1](http://books.google.com/books?id=37cVAAAAIAAJ&source=gbs_View_API&pgis=1)

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