

Management report to Council**Agenda item 6.1****Urban Forest Fund Grants Program – Round Five****Council****Presenter:** David Callow, Director Parks and City Greening**30 April 2024****Purpose and background**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Council endorsement of the recommended funding allocation for the Urban Forest Fund Grants Program Round Five.
2. The Urban Forest Fund (the Fund) offers an annual, matched-funding grants program to support new green spaces in the private realm.
3. Grant applications are reviewed under a rigorous assessment process which includes:
 - (i) internal eligibility screening
 - (ii) internal subject matter expert pre-scoring which considers technical feasibility, strategic alignment and environmental benefit
 - (iii) assessment panel review (including community representation from the Parks and Gardens Advisory Committee) which considers community benefit, amenity and value for money
 - (iv) management Steering Group review and approval.
4. For further background information about the Fund and Round Five please see Councillor Briefing Paper '[Urban Forest Fund Grants Program – Round 5 \(2023\)](#)', from 12 September 2023.
5. To date, the Fund has provided \$1,747,149 over four rounds of funding for greening projects valued at \$10,029,476. This investment has provided 7,129 square meters of new greening in the private realm, returning almost five times Council's grant investment.

Confidentiality

6. Confidential information is contained in Confidential Attachment 2 of report from management, as circulated in the confidential section of the agenda. The information in this attachment is deemed to be confidential in accordance with Section 66(2) (a) and the definition of 'confidential information' in Section 3(1)(g) of the *Local Government Act 2020*. The information relates to private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that—
 - (i) relates to trade secrets; or
 - (ii) if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.
7. If discussion of the confidential information in the attachments to this report is required for Council to make a decision, Council may resolve to discuss the matter in a confidential session or to defer the matter to the confidential section of the agenda.

Key issues

8. A total of 12 applications were submitted as part of Round Five of the Urban Forest Fund Grants Program, of which 10 projects were eligible for further assessment. Four high-impact greening projects are recommended for funding:
 - (i) Project Cultivate Phase 1C – enhancement of open green space and biodiversity at Melbourne General Cemetery (full funding of \$500,000 to The Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust)
 - (ii) Make Room Rooftop Space – creation of a therapeutic rooftop garden to support individuals experiencing homelessness at 602 Little Bourke Street, Melbourne (partial funding of \$423,098 to Unison Housing)
 - (iii) Southern Cross Station Urban Forest (Stage 1) – greening Southern Cross Station ground-level concourse (full funding of \$500,000 to Department of Transport, contingent on approval by Council Officers of a revised design to maximise public benefits)

- (iv) Melbourne SkyFarm Stage 2 – expansion of a recently established rooftop urban farm located on a carpark at Siddeley Street, Docklands (full funding of \$400,000 to Melbourne SkyFarm, contingent to the applicant agreeing to participate in a project case study and creation of publicly accessible guidelines for an urban rooftop agriculture model)
- 9. The total recommended allocation of funding in Round Five is \$1,823,098 across four greening projects, valued at approximately \$3,851,379. This is an anticipated return on greening investment of approximately 1.1:1.
- 10. Of the 10 eligible applications assessed, six were unsuccessful. Refer Attachment 2 of report from management for details about each application. Funding refusal is based on suitability of applications rather than restriction on the total funding pool.
- 11. Three applications were received for laneway greening projects, but none were recommended for funding. Refer Attachment 2 of report from management for further details.
- 12. The proposed total allocation for Round Five grants exceeds the allocated amount (\$825,000). This reflects the high calibre of applications and can be accommodated within the existing budget.

Recommendation from management

- 13. That Council:
 - (i) endorses the allocation of funds to four successful applicants for Round Five of the Urban Forest Fund Grants Program:
 - 13.i.1. 'Project Cultivate Phase 1C' (\$500,000)
 - 13.i.2. 'Make Room Rooftop Space' (\$423,098)
 - 13.i.3. 'Southern Cross Station Urban Forest' (Stage 1) (\$500,000)
 - 13.i.4. 'Melbourne SkyFarm' Stage 2 (\$400,000).

Attachments:

- 1. Supporting Attachment (page 3 of 6)
- 2. Recommendations from the Assessment Panel and Steering Group (Closed) (page 4 of 6)

Supporting Attachment

Legal

1. Following Council endorsement, funding agreements will be entered into with the successful applicants. The agreements will include project milestones, payment structures, quality standards, maintenance, public access requirements, liability and outcomes in the event of business failure, project property sale or change of use. Legal advice will be sought as required.

Finance

2. The available balance in the Fund and the associated Tree Removal Fund is sufficient to cover the amount of funding proposed for Round Five.
3. Successful applicants will receive grant payments in instalments, as specified in funding agreements and subject to demonstration that agreed milestones have been met.

Conflict of interest

4. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a material or general conflict of interest in relation to the matter of the report

Health and Safety

5. Greening and access to green space has been shown to have significant benefits for health and wellbeing. The Fund increases greening throughout the city for the benefits of employees and the broader community. Funding agreements include the responsibility for grant recipients to comply with all relevant OH&S legislation when delivering the project.

Stakeholder consultation

6. Three community members from the Parks and City Gardens Committee are Panel members of the Fund, they scored the applications and were part of the panel discussion. The Fund Steering Group includes representation from key stakeholder groups within City of Melbourne.

Relation to Council policy

7. The Fund Program sets out to expand the work of the Urban Forest Strategy, Nature in the City Strategy, Open Space Strategy and Climate Adaptation Strategy.

Environmental sustainability

8. Environmental sustainability is a key driver for the Fund, with a specific focus on improving urban ecosystems by increasing green cover within The City of Melbourne.