



Memorandum

TO: Kevin J. Jackson, Village Manager 

FROM: Lindsey Roland Nieratka, Chief Sustainability Officer 

FOR: Village President and Board of Trustees

DATE: July 30, 2026

SUBJECT: **Climate Ready Canopy Pilot Program Results and Next Steps**

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to summarize the impact of the Climate Ready Canopy pilot program and provide recommendations for continuation of the program in 2027 and beyond.

Background

The Climate Ready Canopy program was developed in 2026 to advance the resilience and tree canopy goals outlined in the *Climate Ready Oak Park* (CROP) plan and the *Urban Forest Management Plan* (UFMP).

Currently, the Village's tree canopy is 36%. This percentage represents the percentage of the Village covered by tree canopy from an aerial view. The UFMP's goal is to increase the tree canopy to 38%. The Village manages the trees that are within the Village's parkways and on other Village properties through the Department of Public Works Forestry Division (Forestry). Parkway in the Village are fully planted. Forestry's work focuses on maintenance and replacement of trees, but there is little opportunity to expand the tree canopy on village-owned property.

To achieve an expansion in tree canopy, more trees will need to be planted on private land. Both the CROP plan and UFMP identify the need to develop programs that help

expand tree canopy coverage on private property (CROP action TC03). For several years, Forestry has supported the Wild Ones West Cook fall plant sale to subsidize the cost of trees and shrubs purchased by Village residents. In 2026, the Climate Ready Canopy program was designed to expand on this work and further support homeowners in planting trees on their property. The Board approved \$70,000 for FY2026 to pilot this program.

Program design

The Climate Ready Canopy program in 2026 consisted of two main components:

- 97 Large trees (10 gallon) delivered to and planted in yards located in areas of the Village identified as highly vulnerable.
- 120 small trees (1 gallon) given away at community events, including A Day in Our Village and the Farmer's Market.

"Highly vulnerable" areas were identified using the Village's climate vulnerability assessment. Village staff created a metric that evaluated flood risk, extreme heat risk, and existing canopy coverage to prioritize sections of the Village that could most benefit from additional tree canopy. Based on this metric, the project team established specific priority areas in Northeast and South Oak Park:

- Northeast Oak Park: Bounded by North Avenue (north), Ridgeland Avenue (west), Augusta Street (south), and Austin Boulevard (east).
- South Oak Park: Bounded by Jackson Boulevard (north), Harlem Avenue (west), Roosevelt Road (south), and Austin Boulevard (east).

Focusing on these vulnerable areas meets the Village's Public Climate and Sustainability Dollars Goal established by Resolution 22-183 by which a minimum of 40% of public climate and sustainability dollars must go to the most vulnerable and climate impacted community members.

In January 2026, targeted postcards were mailed to every single-family and small multi-family (under 4 units) residence within these priority zones to announce the program and encourage applications. The program was also promoted in the January OP/FYI newsletter and on social media. Staff, when evaluating applications, would prioritize applicants in these areas first. Applicants outside the priority areas would be eligible to participate should there be additional capacity after priority areas were served. Initially, Staff planned to pilot the program with 50 trees. Due to significant interest in the program, that number was expanded by 50 raising total program

capacity to 100 trees. Ultimately, 97 trees were delivered and planted including 94 within the priority areas and 3 outside the priority areas.

In addition to the large tree drop off program, small trees were given away for free to any interested Oak Park resident. Staff were able to source these saplings from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) for free. The tree giveaway was advertised as part of the Farmer's Market opening day and remaining trees were given away at A Day in Our Village and the Farmer's Market green days in May. The Village is eligible to receive 200 free trees from MWRD annually and, of the 200 were able to give away approximately 120 trees.

Project Outcomes

The 2026 Climate Ready Canopy program cost \$13,409.53 and resulted in the following outcomes:

- 97 large (10-gallon) native trees planted throughout Oak Park
- 21 volunteers planting 28 trees for Oak Park residents
 - 10 youth and 5 adult volunteers from Oak Park trained and engaged
 - 6 Treekeeper volunteers engaging with Oak Park residents
- Approximately 120 oak saplings given to the Oak Park residents
- Significant environmental benefits over the next 40 years (calculated using iTree)
 - 111,203 pounds of CO₂ sequestered;
 - 377,768 gallons of stormwater runoff avoided;
 - 21,796 sq ft increase in tree canopy coverage at maturity;
 - 720 pounds of air pollutants removed; and
 - \$19,258.33 in avoided pollution and runoff costs.

Next Steps

Staff received positive feedback on the Climate Ready Canopy pilot program and recommend continuing the program in future fiscal years in order to meet the CROP goals and help achieve the UFMP's target of 38% tree canopy in the Village.

The 2027 Climate Ready Canopy program design will incorporate some lessons learned from this pilot year.

1. **Expand or change priority areas each year.** During the pilot year the program focused on two areas of high vulnerability. Future program years can expand to include additional areas of the Village to allow access to the benefits to more residents. In 2027, staff plan to expand the priority neighborhood boundary in South Oak Park to Madison as those areas experience similar levels of vulnerability.
2. **Keep the annual number of trees for the delivery program at 100.** From the pilot year, Staff estimate that 100 trees is an appropriate capacity for future program years. Staff need to reserve trees from the nursery. From the interest and results in this pilot year, 100 is an appropriate number to reserve to meet interest from residents and volunteers without risking unclaimed trees. Further, spreading the program over multiple years will support creating a canopy with a healthy diversity of both species and ages.
3. **Modify the species list annually.** To ensure species diversity in the resulting canopy, the Village will vary the species offered each year. Doing so will help staff respond each year to preferences expressed by residents, such as a desire for smaller tree varieties, flowering trees, fruiting trees, or other varieties. The varieties offered annually will also reflect the inventory available at our partner nurseries in each given year.
4. **Purchase saplings directly from partner nurseries.** In 2026, staff identified the MWRD as a resource for free saplings. Utilizing this resource meant that staff did not have control over the quality of the trees or the tree species selected. The trees provided by MWRD were oak species, which many residents indicated were too large for their space. Of the 200 trees received, approximately 80 were determined to be either dead or in such poor condition as to not be included in the tree giveaway. Staff will continue to evaluate the selection available from MWRD and direct residents to MWRD as a resource for free saplings and consider sourcing a variety of saplings from a partner nursery.
5. **Support the Wild Ones West Cook fall plant sale.** Currently, the Forestry Division provides support to the Wild Ones West Cook fall plant sale to subsidize trees purchased by Village Residents. Staff recommend folding this support under the Climate Ready Canopy program.
6. **Consider expanding the types of properties which may receive trees.** In 2026 the Climate Ready Canopy Program focused on residential properties only. Staff will consider opportunities to expand the program to more property types such as non-profit organizations, houses of worship, and larger multifamily properties. This aligns with CROP TC01.

Financial Impact

The Board approved \$70,000 in FY26 to pilot the Climate Ready Canopy program. These funds are in GL#2310.41020.101.570859.0000. Inclusive of marketing costs, tools, mulch, watering bags, and delivery, the pilot program cost \$13,409.53. Staff plan to request a budget of \$20,000 for fiscal year 2027. This amount will allow staff to make some of the identified improvements to the program, maintain an appropriate annual program capacity, and incorporate the Forestry department's support for the Wild Ones West Cook fall plant sale.

For questions, please contact Malcolm Mossman, Sustainability Coordinator, via email at sustainability@oak-park.us or by phone at 708-358-5770.

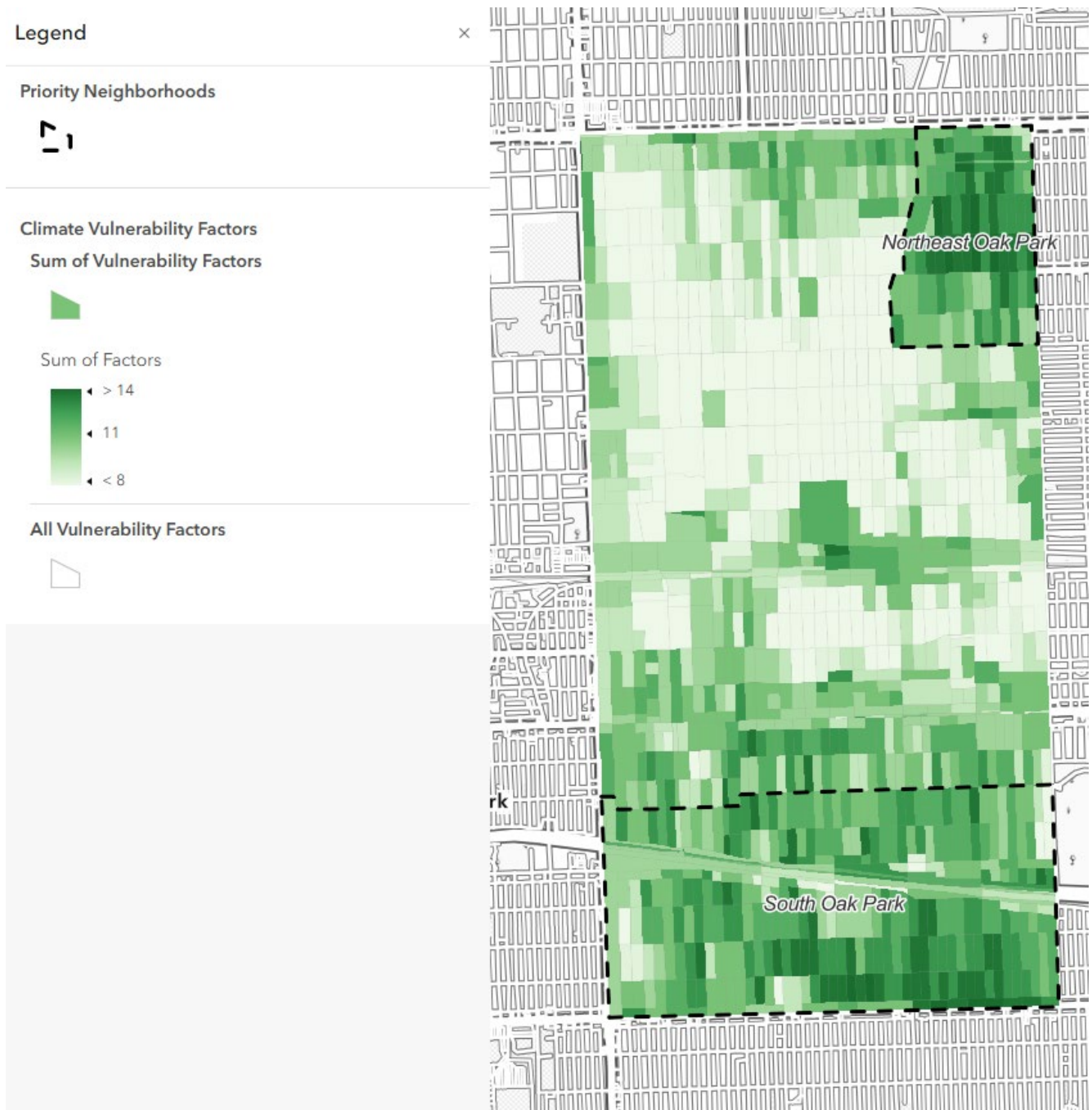
Attachments:

2026 Climate Ready Canopy Maps

cc: Lisa Shelley, Deputy Village Manager
Ahmad Zayyad, Deputy Village Manager
Jack Malec, Assistant to the Village Manager
Malcolm Mossman, Sustainability Coordinator
Rob Sproule, Public Works Director
Grant Jones, Forestry Superintendent
Christina M. Waters, Village Clerk

Attachment 1: 2026 Climate Ready Canopy Maps

Figure 1: Priority areas for the 2026 Climate Ready Canopy



Attachment 1: 2026 Climate Ready Canopy Maps

Figure 2: 2026 Climate Ready Planting Locations

