



Executive Summary

Community Green Infrastructure Grant Program — 2024 Report to the Legislature

Introduction

The 2024 report to the Oregon Legislature, submitted by the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) on behalf of the Advisory Committee on Green Infrastructure Investment, outlines the creation and progress of the Community Green Infrastructure Grant Program (CGI Program). The full report can be accessed at: www.oregon.gov/lcd/cgi.

Legislative Context

House Bill 3409 (2023) established the CGI Program within DLCD to fund green infrastructure projects that provide social, environmental, and economic benefits to communities across Oregon. Green infrastructure is infrastructure that mimics natural systems, such as urban green space and trees. The CGI Program prioritizes projects that benefit environmental justice communities—those that are historically underserved and disproportionately affected by environmental challenges. The legislature allocated an initial \$6.5 million to make grants, establishing four grant categories:

- 1. Community Green Infrastructure Projects** – These projects focus on environmental justice communities, such as low-income neighborhoods, and provide social, environmental, or economic benefits. Examples include tree planting to combat extreme urban heat and air pollution, replacing pavement with green spaces, and school-based projects that educate students on green infrastructure.
- 2. Green Infrastructure Economic Development Projects** – These projects employ community members to carry out the work, providing both employment and skill development opportunities.



Shady cottages in Salem: Green infrastructure, such as urban trees, can help reduce stormwater runoff and lower cooling costs, control air and noise pollution, and protect people from extreme heat.



3. **Native Seed Banks and Plant Nurseries** – Funding for this category helps increase the availability of native plants, which are crucial for green infrastructure projects.
4. **Green Infrastructure Master Plans** – Grants support local governments in creating or implementing plans such as urban forestry, stormwater management, and public green space plans.

The bill also authorized the creation of an Advisory Committee on Green Infrastructure Investment, responsible for overseeing the program's implementation and reporting to the Legislature every two years.

Program Design and Implementation

In the first quarter of 2024, DLCD hired key staff and initiated the design and implementation of the CGI Program. The early steps included forming the Advisory Committee, consulting with other state agencies, and mapping.

Advisory Committee Formation and Work

The Advisory Committee was formed through a comprehensive recruitment process. The committee met multiple times over the summer of 2024 to provide input on program design, application requirements, review criteria, and other critical elements. The committee's feedback was instrumental in ensuring the program's accessibility, particularly for under-resourced applicants and environmental justice communities, which are communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes and adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards (defined in ORS 182.535).

State Agency Collaboration

DLCD collaborated with several state agencies, notably the Oregon Department of Agriculture, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), to design and implement the CGI Program. These partnerships were crucial in establishing program requirements, coordinating project efforts, and sharing resources. For instance, DLCD worked closely with ODF to develop the criteria for Green Infrastructure Improvement Zones and to use ODF's grant management system.

Mapping and Designation of Priority Areas

The CGI Program mandates specific funding allocations, including 30 percent for economic development projects; 30 percent for tribal, rural, remote, or coastal communities; and 40 percent for Green Infrastructure Improvement Zones. The designation of these zones was critical for ensuring equitable fund distribution and prioritizing communities most in need. These areas align with the state's goals of addressing environmental disparities in high-poverty and underserved communities. ODF and DLCD collaborated to map the Green Infrastructure Improvement Zones, which were determined based on poverty levels and a lack of tree cover and green space. Additional mapping efforts identified rural and remote areas, further refining the program's focus on equity. Rural and remote areas were identified using USDA rural-urban commuting area codes.

Current Status and Conclusion

DLCD is finalizing the program framework and preparing to open the online portal for grant applications in late September 2024. The application period will run through November 2024, with awards announced early in 2025. The CGI Program is uniquely positioned to address gaps in existing natural resource grant programs by focusing on urban tree canopy and green infrastructure projects that benefit environmental justice communities. Through these efforts, Oregon's communities will be better equipped to combat climate change and its impacts.



Community Green Infrastructure Grant Program 2024 Report to the Legislature

Submitted by the Department of Land Conservation and Development on behalf of the Advisory Committee on Green Infrastructure Investment.

September 13, 2024

Legislative Context

In 2023, the Oregon Legislature passed [House Bill 3409](#). It responds to the state's climate crisis through various programs and measures implemented by state agencies. Sections 22 through 28 of the bill established the Community Green Infrastructure Grant Program (CGI Program), to be designed and administered by the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD or department). The bill also created the Community Green Infrastructure Fund, with an initial allocation of \$6.5 million for grants.

These funds are separate from the department's biennial budget allocation and carry over into the following biennia. Additionally, the bill authorizes DLCD to appoint an Advisory Committee on Green Infrastructure Investment. The committee must submit a report on the implementation of the program by September 15 of each even-numbered year. The CGI Program is codified in [Oregon Revised Statutes \(ORS\) 197.468 through 197.472](#).

The legislature defined the purpose of the CGI Program as providing direct social, environmental, and economic benefits to communities across Oregon through green infrastructure ([ORS 197.468\[1\]](#)). Green infrastructure is infrastructure that mimics natural systems, such as urban green space and trees.

The CGI Program offers grants in four categories:

- **Community green infrastructure projects** developed through a collaborative process and benefiting an environmental justice community (defined in [ORS 182.535](#), see box below).
 - This category provides funds for projects that provide social, environmental, or economic benefits to an environmental justice community. For example, a project could fund tree planting in low-income neighborhoods, which typically have less tree cover than more wealthy areas. This will help protect people in those low-income communities from heat, lower their cooling costs, reduce noise pollution, and improve air quality. Other examples of potential projects include replacing pavement with green space, which provides habitat, while filtering stormwater; or projects at schools with a curriculum component to teach students about green infrastructure and career opportunities.

Environmental justice community (ORS 182.535) includes:

- communities of color,
- communities experiencing lower incomes,
- communities experiencing health inequities,
- tribal communities,
- rural communities,
- remote communities,
- coastal communities,
- communities with limited infrastructure, and
- other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes and adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards, including seniors, youth, and persons with disabilities.

- **Green infrastructure economic development projects**, which are community green infrastructure projects that employ members of a community that benefits from the project.
 - Economic development projects hire people from the community to do the project work. This helps them develop skills in the green infrastructure field while earning a paycheck.
- **Native seed banks or native plant nurseries.**
 - This category helps nurseries and seed banks expand the production of native plants to address the current shortage and make it more feasible for people and organizations to acquire natives for their projects.
- **Green infrastructure master plans**, such as urban forestry, stormwater management, and parks and public green space plans.
 - Many local governments lack green infrastructure plans or have elements of existing plans that they have not been able to implement. This category will fund new plans and implementation of current plans. For example, a grant could pay for amendments to a city's street standards to allow planting more street trees, amend a city parks plan to ensure every resident can walk to a park, or fund a community's first urban forestry plan. This planning will help communities ensure equitable implementation of green infrastructure in all neighborhoods.

Program Design and Implementation

DLCD recruited for program staff late in 2023 and filled the positions in early 2024. Program members include a program administrator, program support, procurement, and accounting. As directed by statute, initial steps to establishing the grant program were to consult and coordinate with other state agencies and form an advisory committee.

Advisory Committee

[ORS 197.472](#) authorizes DLCD to appoint an Advisory Committee on Green Infrastructure Investment. The committee must have at least one representative from each of twelve interests, covering a range of different institutions (e.g., local governments, special districts, and schools), as well as green infrastructure subject matter experts.

Recruitment and Appointment

DLCD appointed advisory committee members after an open recruitment and application process. The department conducted extensive outreach during the spring of 2024 to identify and invite members of each required interest to apply to serve on the committee. The department also sought to achieve a committee membership that reflects the demographic and geographic diversity of Oregon. After the application window closed in late April, some required interest categories were still not filled, so DLCD expanded the search and reached out directly to additional potential committee members in order to fill those categories and to improve the committee's demographic and geographic diversity.

The statute requires DLCD to invite all nine of the federally recognized tribes in Oregon to join the advisory committee. DLCD invited them via letter and followed up the formal invitations with telephone calls to ensure the right Tribal staff members knew about the opportunity.

DLCD successfully formed a demographically diverse committee that included representatives from every required interest category and two tribes (Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians; and Burns Paiute Tribe). The

Advisory Committee Membership (per ORS 197.472):

- City governments
- County governments
- Special districts, irrigation districts, or transportation districts
- School districts
- Environmental justice communities
- The Oregon nursery industry
- Educational institutes that train professionals in horticulture, urban forestry, or other green infrastructure professions
- State or local parks and recreation agencies
- Individuals with expertise in designing, constructing, and maintaining green infrastructure
- Individuals with expertise in the public or community health benefits of green infrastructure
- Individuals with expertise in green workforce development or social enterprise models
- Individuals with expertise in green infrastructure projects in tribal, rural, remote, or coastal communities

committee is also geographically varied, with members from Eastern Oregon, Central Oregon, the Portland Metro area, the Willamette Valley, and the Coast.

Committee Work

The advisory committee met online four times during summer 2024 to provide direction on overall CGI Program design, specific application requirements, review criteria, definitions of ambiguous terms, maps, and other program details. DLCD received additional input from committee members via email, online surveys, and one-on-one meetings and telephone calls. The advisory committee provided valuable feedback that meaningfully influenced the design of the program. Of particular value was input that helped DLCD ensure that application requirements met the letter and intent of statute, while not imposing undue burden on applicants. This is particularly important in order to facilitate applications from under-resourced applicants and environmental justice communities. DLCD will continue to seek feedback and advice from the advisory committee as the CGI Program progresses.

State Agency Consultation and Collaboration

As authorized by [ORS 197.470](#), DLCD established points of contact and consulted with the Oregon Health Authority, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, the Department of Environmental Quality, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, the Department of Agriculture (ODA), the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), and the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) to seek assistance on the design and implementation of the program. Most of DLCD's interagency collaboration has been with ODA, ODOT, and ODF.

Oregon Department of Agriculture

ORS 197.470(9) requires community green infrastructure projects to include partnerships with green communities nurseries to the maximum extent possible. Green communities nurseries are Oregon nurseries that comply with certain standards for nursery stock and labor practices and will be certified by ODA ([ORS 571.252](#)). ODA has not yet established the certification, so in the initial round of grant funding, applicants will not be able to partner with green communities nurseries. DLCD continues to work with ODA to ensure that the green communities nurseries certification is available for future funding rounds.

Oregon Department of Transportation

DLCD and ODOT are collaborating to implement the CGI Program, including finding ways to ensure the success of community green infrastructure projects along the rights-of-way of state highways. Based on ODOT input, the CGI grant application requires applicants to notify and coordinate with ODOT on projects that impact state transportation facilities. DLCD and ODOT will continue to work together to help promote green infrastructure that is compatible with and enhances state transportation facilities.

Oregon Department of Forestry

ODF is the state agency with which DLCD has had the closest working relationship in designing and implementing the CGI Program. The two agencies meet regularly to further the development of their respective urban-forestry-related grant programs. (ODF

manages a federally-funded Urban and Community Forestry Subaward Program.) The Oregon Legislature directed ODF to designate Green Infrastructure Improvement Zones (discussed further below) and directed DLCD to award at least 40 percent of CGI grant funds in those zones. DLCD and ODF jointly established the criteria to map the zones.

DLCD and ODF have also signed an agreement to enable DLCD to use ODF's online grant management system, which manages all aspects of the grant process from application through closeout. By making use of this shared resource, DLCD will be able to dedicate more funds to making grants rather than to administration.

Mapping

[ORS 197.471](#) establishes required funding allocations for the CGI Program. Under this provision: 30 percent of the funds must go to green infrastructure economic development projects; 30 percent to tribal, rural, remote, or coastal communities; and 40 percent to entities or projects in Green Infrastructure Improvement Zones. These allocations are not mutually exclusive, and some projects may count towards meeting multiple allocations. Two of these allocation categories are based on geography, which required the creation of maps to define the areas.

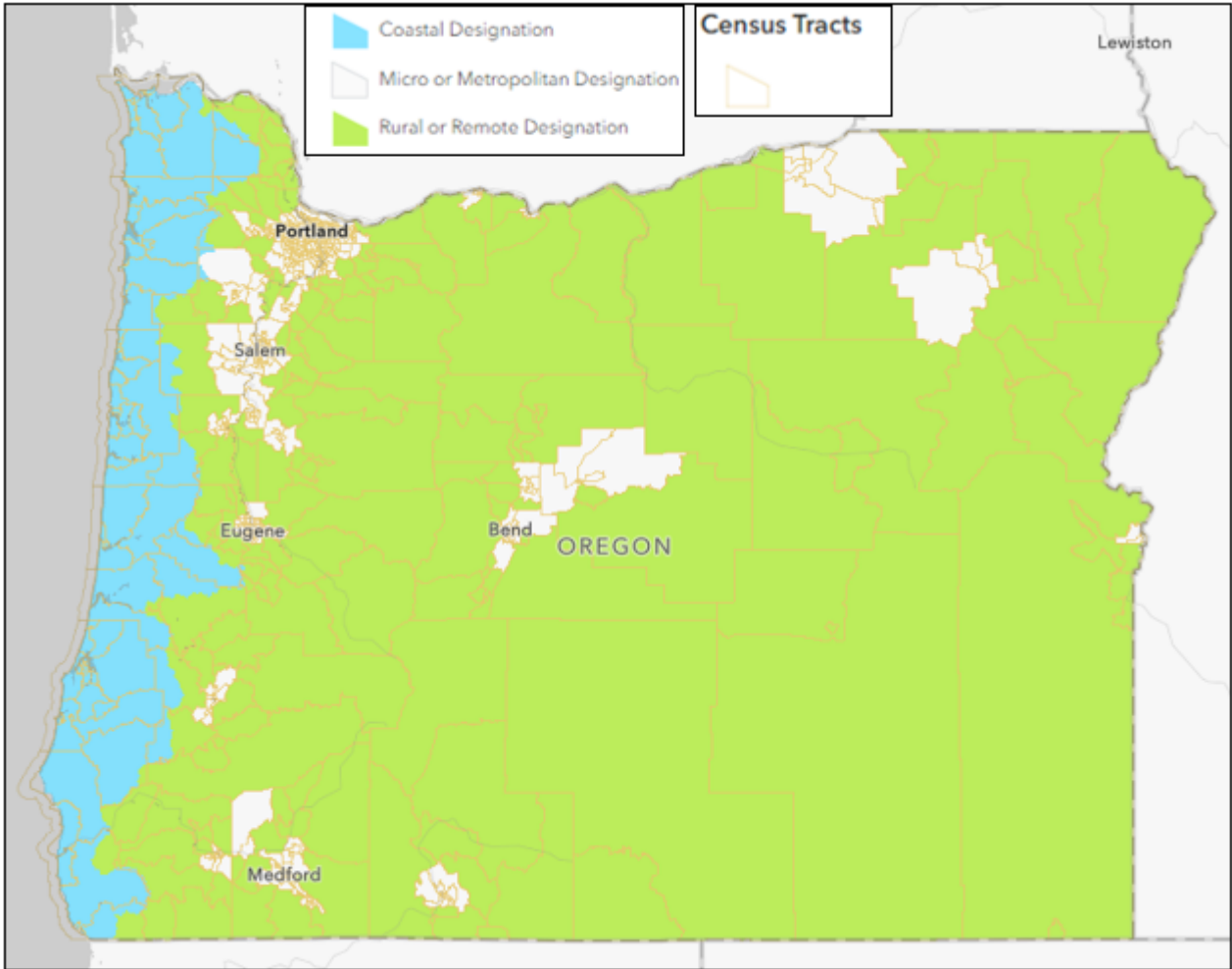
Tribal, Rural, Remote, and Coastal

Projects qualify as occurring in a tribal community if they are on the reservation or trust land of a federally recognized tribe in Oregon. Each tribe will confirm whether a project is on its reservation or trust land, so it was not necessary to map those areas. However, it was necessary to define and map rural, remote, and coastal areas to ensure the proper allocation of funds and help applicants understand which areas are priorities for the program.

The CGI Program uses [Oregon's official coastal zone definition](#), established by the Oregon Legislature in 1971.

There is no statutory definition of "rural" and the definition of "remote" ([ORS 182.535](#)) is not precise enough to map. Therefore, DLCD worked with the Advisory Committee on Green Infrastructure Investment and partners at the Oregon Health Authority to map these areas, which are defined primarily by their low population and distance from urban-level amenities and services. DLCD is ensuring that the areas identified as rural and remote are truly the types of isolated, underserved communities the legislature intended to serve.

The resulting map uses [USDA rural-urban commuting area codes](#), which classify U.S. Census Bureau tracts based on population, urbanization, and daily commuting. Census tracts in and around census-designated metropolitan and micropolitan areas are qualified as urban. Census tracts outside coastal and urban areas are qualified as rural and remote.



Map of coastal and rural or remote areas.

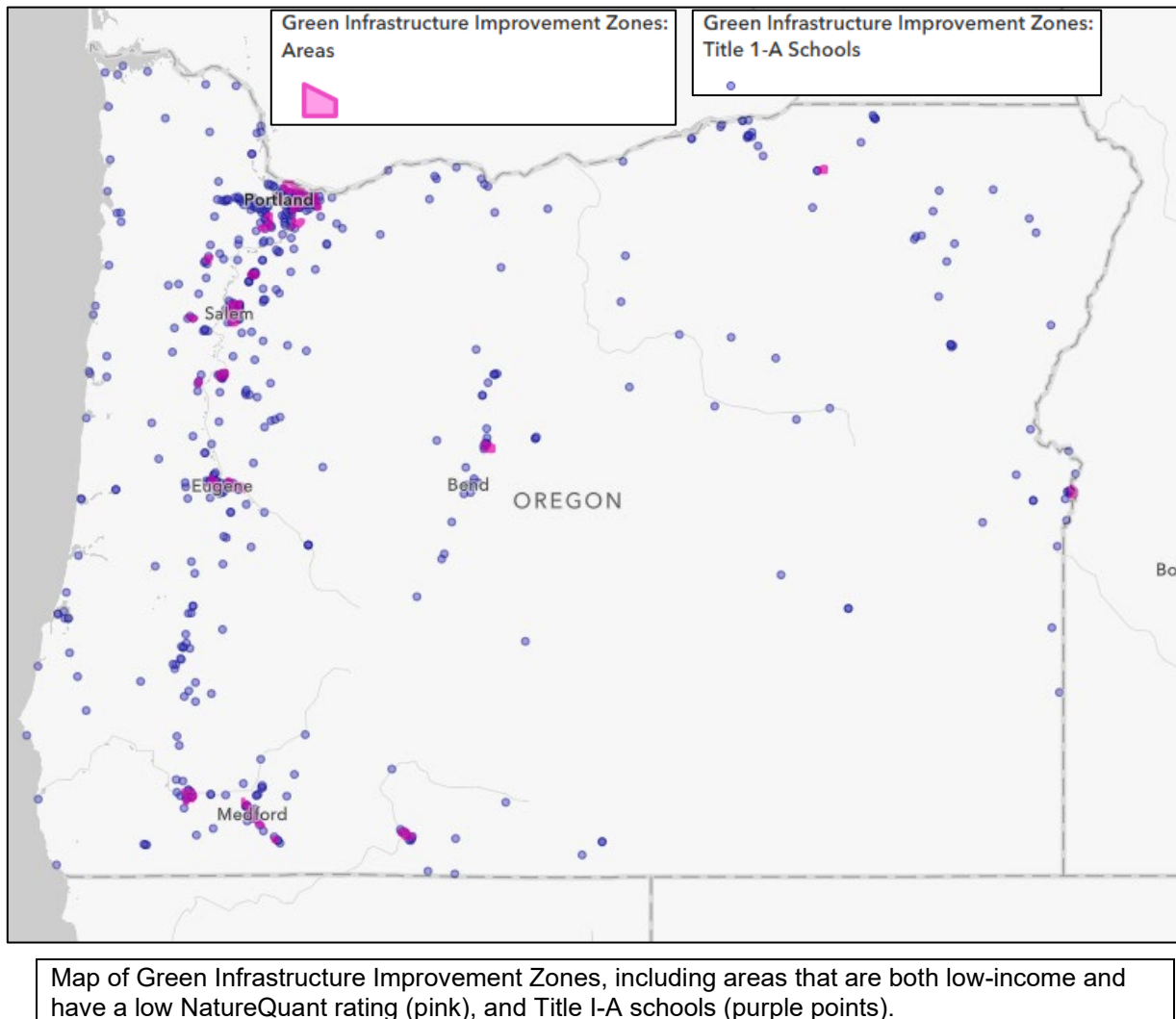
Green Infrastructure Improvement Zones

HB 3409 directs ODF to acquire and maintain a publicly-accessible urban tree canopy geospatial mapping tool ([ORS 526.520](#)). ODF is directed to use that tool to designate Green Infrastructure Improvement Zones, which are areas that have a high level of poverty and low tree canopy or other vegetation deficiencies or risks. Due to procurement delays, the urban tree canopy tool was not available soon enough for ODF to use it to designate the Green Infrastructure Improvement Zones. Because those zones needed to be designated and published by the time the CGI Program’s application period opens, ODF and DLCD found alternative but equivalent data sources to create the zones.

The Green Infrastructure Improvement Zones comprise all census tracts in Oregon that have both a high level of poverty — as established by the federal government’s [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#) — *and* a “nature adequate” or lower score according to [NatureQuant](#), a research and technology company that uses factors such as tree canopy, land cover, and park data to generate its scores. In addition, Green

Infrastructure Improvement Zones include the campuses of all [Title I-A schools](#), which are schools that have a student body with a high level of poverty.

DLCD and ODF will work to update and improve the map as ODF's urban tree canopy mapping tool comes online and as additional data become available to map new threats to Oregon's urban tree canopy, such as emerald ash borer and Mediterranean oak borer.



Interactive versions of the two above maps can be accessed at the following link:
<https://www.oregon.gov/lcd/CGI/Pages/maps.aspx>

Current Status and Conclusion

The work outlined above established the framework for the CGI Program. The next step is to accept applications. DLCD is currently working with ODF to use its grants management

platform and begin accepting applications. Applications for the first round of funding will be accepted from late-September 2024 through November 2024. DLCD is connecting with potential applicants by using the extensive contact lists compiled while recruiting for the advisory committee and by leveraging the networks of partner state agencies and non-governmental organizations, especially to reach out to environmental justice communities. Additional outreach will be done through press releases, social media, and conferences.

DLCD has begun the process to appoint a grants review committee, which will begin its work in December 2024. Awards will be announced in early 2025. Some grantees will be able to start work immediately, while others will need to wait for the appropriate season. For example, it is generally better to plant trees in the fall.

The CGI Program will help environmental justice communities, including communities that are high-poverty and suffer from life-threatening heat, air pollution, noise pollution, and experience mental and physical health problems due to lack of urban tree canopy and other green infrastructure. The program fills a gap in other existing natural resource grant programs by focusing on urban tree canopy and green infrastructure that benefits environmental justice communities. Through the four types of grants funded by the program, Oregon's communities will be better prepared to meet the challenges of climate change.