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The ComEd Green Region Program

2021 PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Purpose

The Chicago metropolitan region is rich in diversity – both in our landscapes that include native prairies, wetlands, woodlands, and a vast network of streams and rivers, as well as in the 10 million people who call this region home.

Recognizing that open space in our communities is crucial to the quality of our lives, ComEd and Openlands have committed to supporting municipalities, townships, counties, park districts, conservation districts and forest preserve districts in northern Illinois with their ongoing efforts to protect or improve public spaces for the benefit of all. ComEd designed the [ComEd Green Region Program in partnership with Openlands](#) to assist local communities in these efforts by providing funding for some expenses towards these goals.

Underlying the program is ComEd’s endorsement of deliberate planning for open space protection as a means to encourage the wisest use of scarce resources.

Using this Document

These Program Guidelines, along with the [Program FAQ](#) available at www.openlands.org/greenregion, are intended to be a comprehensive resource for both prospective and current grantees in the ComEd Green Region Program. It is the responsibility of all applicants and grantees to review and utilize the information in the Program Guidelines and the FAQ. Please reach out to Openlands, the Green Region Program Administrator at greenregion@openlands.org if you have any questions.

Key Dates

Grant Cycle Opens: January 22, 2021, 9:00 a.m. Central Time
Application Deadline: March 26, 2021, 5:00 p.m. Central Time
Notification to all applicants: Late June–Early July
Grant Acceptance Deadline: Early August



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2021 Special Program Focus

Climate Resiliency and Pollinators

Since 2017, ComEd has emphasized the importance of pollinator conservation within the Green Region Program. Pollinators, especially insect pollinators such as bees, flies, beetles, butterflies, and moths, have been on the decline, exposed to human-influenced factors such as habitat loss, disease, parasites, and climate change. Pollinators can be thought of as a resource – one which is disappearing and requires our protection. The best way to conserve pollinators is to conserve their habitats, such as prairies, woodlands, and wetlands. These landscapes have other benefits too, including carbon sequestration and air filtration, watershed and hydrology stabilization, cooling and sheltering cities from hot climates or storms, mental health and social wellbeing, and more. Through the Green Region Program, we are committed to supporting the local preservation of natural lands within our communities to ensure they are resilient to climate changes.

This year, we are adding climate resiliency as a special focus of proposed projects. At ComEd, we are working with partners like Openlands, and moving towards a greener future by looking at local and regional nature-based solutions to climate change. We believe these solutions will reduce the impacts of climate change on a global scale.

Nature-based solutions will be needed for climate resiliency, which happens at both the local and global scale.

In this year's Green Region Program, special consideration will be given to projects that address both short-term local and long-term climate issues, especially those that protect habitat now while investing in a greener future. Depending on the volume of applications received, this may be accomplished by designating a special pool of funding within the 2021 grant cycle that will be applied specifically to projects combining climate resiliency components. The Green Region Program Administrator, Openlands, and ComEd reserve the right to modify this approach.

Examples of demonstrable benefits for local habitat include, but are not limited to, projects that 1) establish or enhance pollinator habitat, 2) create educational signage highlighting natural features or educating the public about habitats, and many more.

Examples of nature-based solution projects include, but are not limited to, projects that:

- Increase biodiversity and create habitat for wetlands and grasslands systems of concern. Examples: restore wetlands, savanna ecosystems, or prairies; plant pollinator gardens; install bug hotels; install proper landscape structure (over story canopy, shrub layer, and native plants).
- Protect water quality and manage water where it falls. Examples: build rain gardens, bioswales, or underground cisterns and french drains; plant climate resistant trees; replace non-porous surfaces with permeable surfaces.

- Build healthy soil. Examples: plant deep rooted, climate resilient prairie species to sequester carbon; promote mycorrhizal and macroinvertebrate development within the soil for proper structure, composition.
- Your project: you tell us how you can mitigate climate change through conservation, restoration and improved land management actions with a nature-based solution in your community's public, open space.

Please note that 2021 grant cycle applications are not required to have a pollinator or nature-based solutions focus. However, all applicants are encouraged to consider how elements of climate resilience are supported by their particular project. Eligible applications for projects that meet regular Program Guidelines will still be accepted for consideration, regardless of whether they focus on pollinators or climate resiliency. For more information, visit www.openlands.org/planning/greenregion/focus.

Eligibility

Eligible Applicants

Eligible Applicants are townships, counties, park districts, conservation districts, forest preserve districts, and municipalities-including municipal entities, such as water reclamation districts- within ComEd's service territory in the following counties: Boone, Bureau, Carroll, Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Ford, Grundy, Henry, Iroquois, Jo Daviess, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, LaSalle, Lee, Livingston, Marshall, McHenry, Ogle, Rock Island, Stephenson, Whiteside, Will, Winnebago, and Woodford.

Before applying, please check ComEd's [service territory map](#) to ensure your proposed project is located within the service territory boundaries and that you are a ComEd customer. ComEd is unable to fund projects that are located outside the service territory boundaries. For more information, please contact greenregion@openlands.org.

Past grantees are eligible to reapply only if they have fully completed their grant requirements, including, but not limited to, submitting their final grant report with all required attachments (resolution, expense reports, etc.). Preference will be given to projects that have not previously received funding.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

****Please note that though past grantees are eligible to reapply, new project applications cannot be a continuation of a previously funded project. For example: An applicant received funding in 2016 for the planned Phase 1 ecological restoration of a certain area in a public park. Upon completing this work and submitting their final grant report, this applicant cannot submit a new grant application for the 2021 grant cycle to fund a related Phase 2 ecological restoration project in a different area of the same park.**

Non-profit organizations and all other units of government not listed above (such as schools, school districts, and housing authorities) are not eligible to apply, but are strongly encouraged to partner on joint projects with an Eligible Applicant. Please see the [Program FAQ](#) for answers to some common questions about eligibility.

Eligible Applicants must be in good standing with ComEd related to provision of utilities.

Eligible Activities

Priority is given to projects that demonstrate a) significant impact on the surrounding community by increasing the public's access to open space and encouraging their engagement with the project; and b) active partnerships within the community. Additional preference may be given to projects that support a special focus area that has been designated for the grant cycle. Eligible activities include:

- **Developing or updating open space plans.** Expenses may include consultant fees, costs associated with obtaining public input (hall rental, advertising, etc.), and publication costs.
- **Improving applicant-owned open spaces, including planning costs.** Funds may be used for habitat improvements such as installing or improving natural areas such as prairies, woodlands, wetlands, associated buffers, and other native natural communities. **The plans also may include the installation of capital improvements for passive recreation**, such as trails, boardwalks, kiosks, and observation platforms. Parking lots are not eligible for funding. Expenses related to capital improvements may include consultant fees for landscape architects, park designers, botanists, restoration specialists, engineers, etc.
- **Acquisition (by purchase or donation) of parcels of land to be used for open space.** Expenses may include land cost, legal or consultant fees, survey, environmental assessments, appraisals, etc.
- **Acquisition (by purchase or donation) of conservation easements** (also known as “development rights”) on parcels of land to be used for open space. Eligible expenses include legal costs to purchase development rights, consultant fees, survey, environmental assessments, appraisals, etc.

Ineligible Activities

- **Staff time and ancillary expenses for applicant's employees or interns, for any aspect of the project.** To avoid your application being marked as ineligible, please clearly describe any contractor expenses involved in your project, both in the application form and your budget attachments, to show these are not staff or intern expenses.
- **Relocation of owner or tenant, condemnation, or building repair or demolition.**
- **Expenses not directly related to the use of land for open space and/or passive recreation.** For example, construction of a parking lot or a public works garage on municipal parkland would not be considered an eligible expense.
- **Active recreation amenities** such as ball fields, golf courses, tennis courts, playgrounds, swimming pools, etc.
- **Any activities that are required in connection with regulatory compliance.**

Grant Amounts and Timing

- Grants will be for amounts up to \$10,000 and may be used to pay for **up to 50% of eligible activities**.
- **Matching funds must be in cash. In-kind services cannot be submitted as match.** The grantee must have either secured a source of matching funds or have submitted a pending application for such funds. The status of all matching funds, whether secured or pending, must be indicated on both the application form and in the required budget attachments.
- Grants will be awarded once per year.
- The online application system will close at 5:00 p.m. Central Time on March 26, 2021. **Incomplete or late applications will not be considered.**
- Applicants awarded funds for their projects will be expected to fully expend the grant award within 18 months of its receipt. A final grant report is due within two months of the full expenditure of funds. Please see the “Grant Conditions” section below and the [Program FAQ](#) for important information about final grant report requirements.
- Retroactive reimbursement for costs accrued between the application deadline and the grant award may be allowed on a case-by-case basis. All requests for such reimbursement must be made in writing to greenregion@openlands.org. It is not guaranteed that such requests will be approved.
- Awards are made based on the project presented in the application. Any major changes to the scope of a project must first be approved by ComEd and Openlands to avoid forfeiting the grant award. Contact greenregion@openlands.org if you anticipate there will be a major change to your project scope.

Grant Conditions

- The facility or property where the project is located must be open to the general public on a regular basis.
- If grant funds are used for acquisition of an interest in land, the applicant must demonstrate that a restrictive covenant, deed restriction, or similar instrument will be recorded against the property, stating that the property must be held in perpetuity for open space purposes. If the property is diverted from open space use, the grant recipient shall return to ComEd all Green Region Program funds received.
- ****Please note: The resolution must be completed and approved BEFORE the project begins and submitted along with the other grant materials. Within two months of the final expenditure of grant funds, the applicant must submit a final report summarizing the work accomplished with the grant.** Accompanying the final

report will be photographs or other documentation of the project. A resolution template can be found on the Grantee Resources page located at <https://openlands.org/planning/greenregion/resources/>.

The report must also include an explanation of accounting justifying the use of the grant funds, such as documentation of invoices, cancelled checks, recorded deeds, settlement sheets, etc., as necessary for the project.

Failure to submit a final grant report with all the required attachments by the posted deadline may prohibit applicants from participating in any future grant cycles. If you have questions about the final grant report and its attachments, please reach out to the Green Region Program Administrator at greenregion@openlands.org.

- During the grant period, award recipients will agree to participate in press conferences or events, to be quoted in ComEd literature describing the ComEd Green Region Program, and to identify ComEd as a funder in any materials produced to explain or promote the funded project.
- Recipients will agree to acknowledge the use of ComEd Green Region Program funds for the project, either through signage for capital projects or written acknowledgement in documents. Contact greenregion@openlands.org for more information about signage.

Application and Review Process

How to Apply

Applications are accepted on-line via <http://openlands.submittable.com/submit>. You will be asked to create a free profile to begin the submission process. For additional information regarding the submission process, please refer to the [Program FAQ](#). Upon submission of your application, you will receive a receipt confirming that your application has been successfully submitted.

The online application is the primary method for submissions. If for some reason you are unable to submit your application online, please contact the Green Region Program Administrator at greenregion@openlands.org.

Advisory Committee

Completed and eligible applications will be reviewed and ranked by a geographically-diverse advisory committee composed of county government officials and members of the region's land conservation community. Final decisions on award recipients and amounts are at the discretion of ComEd.

Announcement for Decisions

Decisions on grant awards will be announced between late June and early July 2021. All communication regarding your application, including notification of awards and distribution of grant funds, will be directed to the contact person listed on your application.

To avoid delays in receiving your notification of award or other important correspondence, **please contact greenregion@openlands.org right away if your contact person, address, or other important information changes after you submit your application.**

Administrator Contact Info

The administrator of the ComEd Green Region Program is Openlands, a non-profit conservation land trust protecting open space in the greater Chicago region for nearly 60 years.

We encourage you to review all available information for the 2021 grant cycle at www.openlands.org/greenregion before starting your application. If you are unable to locate an answer to your question on the website, please reach out to the Green Region Administrator at greenregion@openlands.org.