

6,000 new trees could help revive Rochester's urban forest

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Sen. Chuck Schumer (D) joins Mayor Malik Evans (D) and others to plant a tulip tree on a street corner in Upper Falls, Rochester, on Monday.

On a street corner in Upper Falls, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer joined local

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It was there that they announced an effort to bring more foliage to urban landscapes across the country – and Rochester could be one of the first cities on the list.

“It's time to make the long-held vision of a greener, healthier, and more equitable Rochester finally take root and blossom,” Schumer said.

The plan is to plant 6,000 trees between now and 2025; that could look like 2,000 newly planted trees per year. The goal is to cover 85% of the spaces where a tree could grow in Rochester’s neighborhoods.

It would cost about \$5 million to pull it off. Most of that money would come from the Federal Inflation Reduction Act, which was passed last year. The rest would come from the city of Rochester.

Mayor Malik Evans said the focus is on equity in a city where the poorest neighborhoods have little to no tree canopy while wealthier neighborhoods have an abundance.

“I want to ensure that every street in Rochester has the same amount of trees that bud in the spring, offer a lush canopy in the summer and signal the changing of fall,” Evans said. “And we're able to do that with this program.”

According to the [National Library of Medicine](#), exposure to trees and green space is associated with reduced stress, improved mental and emotional well-being and decreased psychological distress, particularly for teenagers.

The city is expected to apply for funding through the U.S. Forest Service’s Urban and Community Forestry program this month.

“The city will focus, wherever possible, on planting species of trees that are native to New York to conserve and protect our environment as well as provide food and shelter to our native birds and insects in ways that only native trees and plant species can do,” Evans said.

Part of the city's approach, aside from planting native trees, is to avoid planting monocultures, or rows of the same species of trees next to each other.

"If anything, Dutch elm disease back in the '50s and '60s taught us that streets lined with just one species of a tree, if something invasive comes in and wipes them all out, now we're starting all over," said Brian Liberti, the city's director of buildings and parks. "So if we intermix with different species, if something comes into impact one species, it's not much of an impact on the actual street."

In a letter to the U.S. Department of Agriculture in support of Rochester's bid to bridge the divide in tree disparity, Schumer said Rochester was home to one of the nation's first gardening and nursery centers in the 1800s. But that legacy isn't visible now in the city, where disproportionately there are fewer trees in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods than in affluent, predominantly white neighborhoods.

"The (Urban and Community Forestry Program) funding will enable the City of Rochester to not only plant 6,000 trees but to take a step towards ending this inequity," Schumer's letter reads. "I fully support this effort and ask that you look favorably on this application."

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