Resilient Cities Catalyst
Resilient Cities Catalyst & City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Overview

- **Awarded Recipient**: Resilient Cities Catalyst (RCC)
- **Collaborating City**: The City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- **Collaboration Period**: January 2023 – December 2024
- **Program Name**: Resilient Cities Catalyst and City of Pittsburgh

Program Purpose & Key Objectives

Resilient Cities Catalyst (RCC) seeks to use detailed property-level climate risk data and ecosystem benefits calculations to work with the City of Pittsburgh to develop a new data-informed community and neighborhood forestry methodology. This methodology would provide city decision makers with the ability to more effectively and equitably target green infrastructure and urban canopy investments. Working closely with city officials in forestry, data and GIS, and city planning, as well as with nonprofit and community partners, RCC will develop a methodology for urban forestry that thoroughly considers highly detailed climate data and environmental justice. The approaches, learnings, and outcomes from the project in Pittsburgh will be scaled regionally and can be implemented by other cities.

Achievements

Throughout the process and with the support of engaged and proactive partners, RCC made significant progress towards completing the work in Pittsburgh. RCC benefited from significant buy-in from several City partners over the last 18 months, and some City partners have taken great initiative in helping move the project forward. For example, the Chief Data Officer initiated a conversation with a key nonprofit partner about routinizing some of the data and spatial considerations made during tree plantings during the ICLEI USA Action Fund project into the nonprofit's own plantings, effectively lending the City's data resources and expertise to the great work that the nonprofit is already doing. **Creating the connections necessary for sustained commitment to data-informed urban canopy investments** was a major goal that ensured the project's outcomes and learnings would be formalized well beyond the end of the project period.

In addition, RCC supported **four tree planting events and several tree adoption events**, both of which serve as opportunities to plant trees and speak with residents about climate risks, urban canopy benefits, and how they can work with the City and other partners to improve their neighborhoods. These events were all successful and engaged many residents, community groups, and partners. In one case, a former resident of the neighborhood drove over an hour with his family to take part in the tree planting, emphasizing the importance of framing green investments in terms of investments in communities and people.

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Challenges and Solutions

One of the challenges faced during the project is the reality that community forestry includes many considerations beyond trees. We aimed to work in neighborhoods that lacked canopy and faced disproportionate climate risks. Particularly when working in these neighborhoods, investments in community forestry often involve significant other work. In our case, many of the streets where we identified a need for additional canopy had other challenges, including sidewalks that had fallen into disrepair and were largely unusable. Other sites were similarly at times unsuitable due to lack of maintenance and investment. The budget had to accommodate additional expenses in site preparation and sidewalk maintenance to address the state of disrepair and to ensure that future residents would be able to fully enjoy the investments made in the neighborhood. Residents at a tree planting event expressed appreciation for the considerations and desire for similarly comprehensive approaches be taken near their homes.

Partner Feedback

RCC has worked closely with the Division of Forestry, City Data and GIS teams, and the Department of City Planning. Our partners have expressed a great interest in this work, as it addresses some challenges that they have had since before this project. For example, City officials have been seeking methods to make urban forestry investments in a more coordinated and effective manner to address climate risks and environmental justice. Through this program, City of Pittsburgh partners have been able to work more closely together and coordinate their resources and expertise.

> It is my priority to make Pittsburgh a 'City for All'," said Mayor Ed Gainey of Pittsburgh. "This project will allow the City to identify residents who are becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather.
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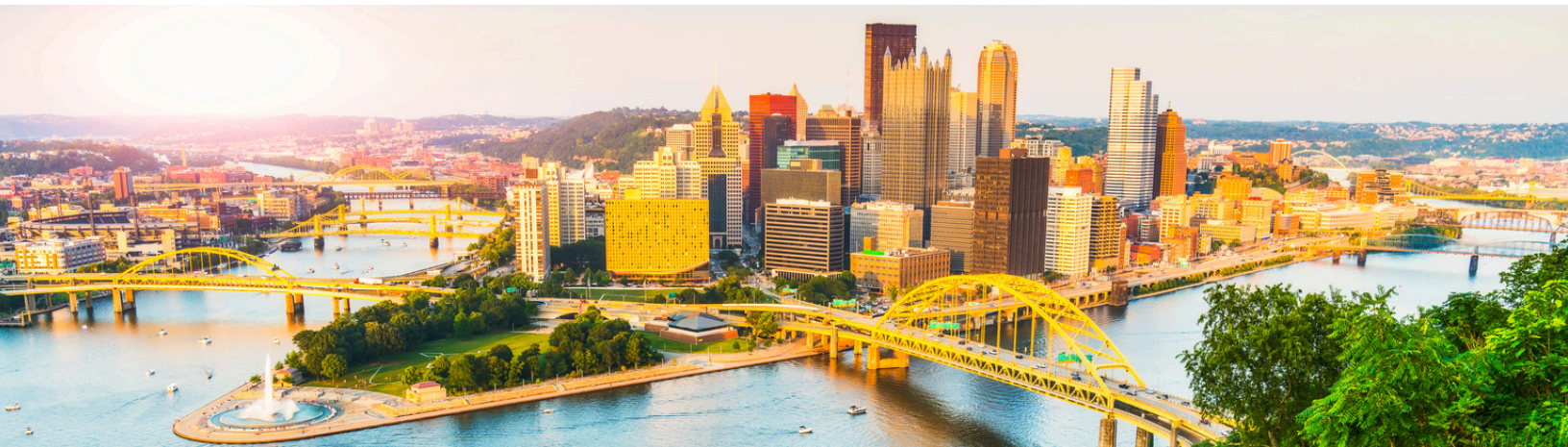> — **Mayor Ed Gainey of Pittsburgh**

Next Steps

Since the award in November 2022, RCC has accomplished several achievements and will continue to:

- Design and support outreach campaigns aimed at addressing longstanding challenges in urban forestry in Pittsburgh, including issues related to lack of awareness of climate risks, lack of clarity around how to implement green investments, and concern about trees near homes and utilities.
- Implement two levels of scaling of the approach.
  - The first will be in the greater Pittsburgh area with a nonprofit partner that works closely with smaller towns and cities.
  - The second will be in another US city (to be confirmed) and will involve direct dialogue with Pittsburgh-based partners about implementing investments in the urban canopy.

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Conclusion

In four public tree planting events, RCC and project partners such as the Department of City Planning, Tree Pittsburgh, and UrbanKind Institute engaged closely with local residents and other community members to plan engaging and educational events that opened a dialogue about climate risks the benefits of urban canopy. These tree planting events were pilots of a data-driven methodology developed in partnership with forestry, planning, and data teams in the City of Pittsburgh and nonprofit partners. The methodology prioritizes investments in the urban canopy that consider climate risks and environmental justice. By institutionalizing these considerations and this process into the City of Pittsburgh's planning and implementation, this project will increase the effectiveness and resilience co-benefits of the city's urban canopy investments.

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