

HARTFORD

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Community Gardens Get Funding

HARTFORD — A new community garden at Earle and Barbour streets, complete with 10 fruit trees, will be built this spring with a federal grant.

"It's a wonderful thing in itself when people can grow their own food," said Ron Pitz, executive director of Knox Parks Inc. "(Hartford's) North End is a food desert, meaning if someone wanted to purchase

fresh fruits and vegetables they couldn't do that because they wouldn't be able to find [healthy food items] in the area, because the corner stores really just sell junk food."

Knox Parks provides members of the community who want to garden with the space, tools, seeds and expertise to do so. Knox Parks already provides 15 community gardens throughout the city, but none with fruit trees.

Knox Parks is one of 17 nonprofit organizations and municipalities that will

be reimbursed a total of \$81,425 from the America the Beautiful (ATB) Urban Forestry Grant Program. According to a press release, the program is made possible by funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protections Division of Forestry, is responsible for the administration of the ATB program and distribution of the funds.

"It's a small grants program that has been

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in existence for about 15 years," said Chris Donnelly, DEEP urban forestry coordinator. "The purpose of the program is to give an opportunity to communities to conduct forestry-related projects and also help people understand the importance of forestry, so projects may include inventory studies, pre maintenance and education."

The communities and organizations were chosen to receive money if the project reflects the needs of the community, demonstrates the need of the community's commitment to urban forestry, if the community has a full urban forest management plan and if the project that the community proposed is a step toward the implementation of that urban forest management plan, according to the DEEP. All approved projects must be completed by Dec. 15, 2012.

"What astonishes me the most is the degree of creativity that we see, I mean you would think after 15 years it would be pretty routine and they never are," said Donnelly.

Donnelly said Knox Parks' project stood out to him the most among the other 16 projects, because he said usually when someone thinks of urban forestry they think of street trees and shrubbery.

"This is part of the whole food network," he said. "This is

not the first one done like this but [Connecticut] does have food deserts in cities, so this is one great program that you wouldn't normally think of."

Trees are economically, environmentally and socially valuable to a community, according to Ryan O'Halloran, Knox Parks grant writer.

"If you plant a tree near a building it will shade a building lowering the cost of air-condition, and also during colder months trees break the wind, so heat bills would be lower," said Halloran. "Trees also act as a quarantine for carbon, which is the cause of global warming."

During the October nor'easter last year, Hartford alone lost 3,000 trees. Before the storm, Hartford was losing around 200 trees per year.

Other grants include \$8,000 for the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency to assess the urban tree canopy in New Britain and develop a plan to enhance and increase the benefits from having a healthy urban forest in an urban center.

Also, \$2,500 to the town of Rocky Hill for coordination with the Boy Scouts in an Eagle Scout project involving the planting of six sugar maples within Elm Ridge Park.

The town of Simsbury received \$1092.67. In the gazebo located in the middle of Schultz Park, a map has been painted on the ceiling identifying the location of trees planted in the park.

This grant will allow the town to refurbish the map within the gazebo and also place identifying tags in front of the trees noted on the map.