

Title Page

Applicant Name: City of Lincoln
Lancaster County, Nebraska
Lincoln Transportation and Utilities (LTU)

Project Title: WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Date of Submission: January 12, 2024
Applicant Name: City of Lincoln, Lancaster County, Nebraska
Lincoln Transportation and Utilities (LTU)
Applicant Category: Category A
Project Duration: 1 year
Project Start Date: 11/1/2024
Project Completion Date: 10/31/2025
Located on Federal Facility: No

Project Summary: LTU’s Watershed Management Division and Lincoln Water System will partner with each other, the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, and minority-based community centers, neighborhood associations, and others to expand its existing WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program to address the need for increased water conservation efforts in Lincoln, Nebraska. The Cost Share Program encourages property owners to remove water-thirsty lawns and replace them with drought-tolerant turf and/or drought-tolerant native grasses and forbs, reducing or eliminating the need to water lawns, reducing the strain on limited water resources. The program will target 14 Federally-identified disadvantaged Census Tracts (75/25 cost share) and provide opportunities for property owners outside the target area (50/50 cost share) to participate.

Presently, Lincoln is in the throes of a severe drought. During the summer of 2023, the City implemented the first phase of its Water Conservation Plan by asking residents to voluntarily limit watering of lawns and washing vehicles. By late May 2023, the Lincoln Water System’s monitoring data indicated that dry conditions had depleted the Platte River alluvial aquifer, which supplies Lincoln’s wellfield, to 65% of its capacity. In a typical year, the aquifer is replenished at 100%. Additionally, the Platte River flow was at its lowest since 1956. July rains helped some, but the need for water conservation continues to be critical.

The project supports the following Lincoln 2021-2027 Climate Action Plan (lincoln.ne.gov/resilient) objectives: 1) Meet the community water usage goal of 110 gallons of water per day per person or less. 2) Reduce irrigation needs by incentivizing conservation practices and native planting. 3) Encourage conversion of lawns to native grasses, vegetable gardens, and/or drought-tolerant landscaping.

Project Location:

The City of Lincoln is located in eastern Nebraska, south of the Platte River. With 292,627 (Census 2023) residents, Lincoln is the capital city of Nebraska and the county seat of Lancaster County. All funded projects will occur within the City of Lincoln. The project latitude is 40°48’33N and the longitude is 96°40’41W. The city lies on the western edge of the tallgrass prairie ecoregion, which has a humid continental climate. In recent years, drought conditions have placed a significant strain on the City’s water supply.

Technical Project Description

LTU requests Federal funds of \$100,000 to expand its WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program for Lincoln, Nebraska residents. The program will be matched with \$123,000 by participating property owners, the City of Lincoln (Watershed Management and Lincoln Water System), and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District.

Lincoln is a growing Midwestern city (1.76% since last Census). Population growth is putting pressure on its water supply. This has been further complicated by moderate-to-severe drought conditions occurring during five of the past 10 years. In the spring and summer of 2023, exceptional drought (D4) conditions forced the City to implement the first phase of its Water Management Plan to sustain essential services. The first phase of the plan focuses on reducing outdoor water use. Nearly two-thirds of the water Lincoln uses during the summer is for watering grass and other outdoor purposes.

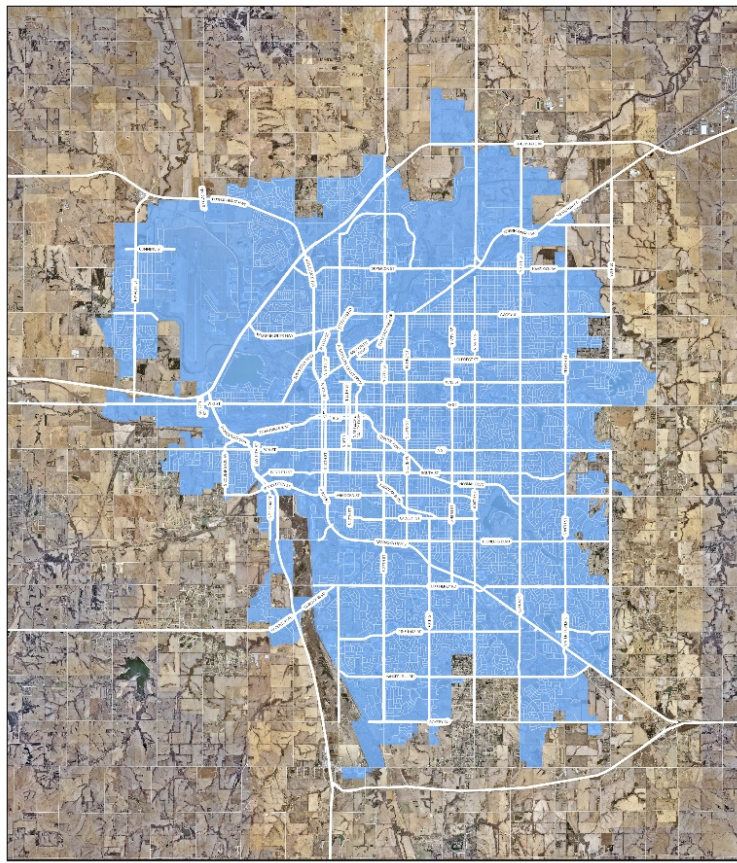
The City of Lincoln's Water Management Plan includes three phases: 1: Moderate Shortage – Voluntary Water Use Reductions by Designated Day, 2: Severe Shortage – Mandatory Water Use Reductions by Designated Day, 3: Critical Shortage – Limited Outdoor Water Use. The phases are based on Platte River flows and daily water usage rates. The phases can lead up to one or two designated days of outdoor water use or no outdoor watering, closure of car washes, etc. Enforcement is in accordance with the Lincoln Municipal Code Charter 17.26, which can lead up to \$300 fines, plus administrative fees for each infraction of mandatory water usage regulations and may include provisions of the Nebraska Civil Defense Act such as calls for water possibly stopping agricultural irrigation further up the Platte River. To reduce the likelihood of mandatory restrictions and related measures, the City of Lincoln's Watershed Management Division and the Lincoln Water System have implemented several water conservation programs, including the WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program.

The 2023 drought helped the City see the immediate benefits of expanding its relatively small Waterwise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program (18 households served in 2023), which engages the community in water conservation efforts by removing water-thirsty lawns and replacing them with drought-tolerant turf and/or native grasses and forbs. Reducing water demand, particularly during the summer months, allows the City to stretch existing water resources.

The proposed expansion of the WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program will provide funding for up to 75% of the cost, with a maximum of \$2,500 per project covered, for replacing a traditional turfgrass lawn with a drought-tolerant lawn and/or landscaping. The program will be open to Lincoln property owners. Applicants within disadvantaged neighborhoods, as determined by the Federal Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, will be eligible for a 75% discount on their lawn project and other participants will be eligible for a 50% discount. Eligible projects will consist of replacing high water use lawns with drought tolerant turfgrass or native landscaping and amending the soil (where applicable).

Applications for the program will be evaluated for watering plan, water savings, landscape plan, site suitability, and other factors. The project will serve 50 to 52 participant property owners, with over 58% located in identified disadvantaged neighborhoods. Once approved, participants of the cost-share program will sign an agreement with the City of Lincoln. The agreement will outline the parameters of the program, including the participating property owner agreeing to cover their share of the project. They will also agree to install the project within the cost share program timeline (one season or less).

All projects will be installed by an approved professional landscape company, or upon a City-approved plan to be completed by the property owner. LTU will ensure projects meet the criteria for the cost-share program and drought-tolerant lawn/landscaping projects are correctly installed, including complying with restrictive covenants (where applicable) and/or local ordinances. Projects will follow Small-Scale Residential Stormwater Best Practices. Property owners will also agree to provide before and after photos of their projects. After project photos will occur after lawns or landscapes are established within one year of planting. Photos may be taken by property owners or LTU staff.



Lincoln City Limits & Lincoln Water System Service Area

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Lincoln City Limits & Lincoln Water System Service Area



EVALUATION CRITERIA

E.1.1 Evaluation Criterion A – Project Benefits (35 Points)

Describe the expected benefits and outcomes of implementing the proposed project.

Individual Water Savings

Each project will be unique and, therefore, water savings can be more accurately estimated after the projects have been approved and installed. However, assuming the typical participant currently waters their lawn 1.5 inches per week during the summer months, conversion to a waterwise lawn or native landscaping could produce a water savings of up to 9 gallons* per square foot (sf) over that same period. Maximum water savings will not occur immediately but will increase over time as the plants mature.

*1.5 inches = 0.935 gallons/sf, 0.25 inches = 0.156 gallons/sf
0.935 gallons /sf - 0.156 gallons /sf = 0.779 gallons /sf x 12 weeks = 9.35 gallons /sf

The City waterwise website indicates the average size of a lawn in Lincoln is 5,000 square feet (sf). City staff have indicated the average size of a lawn in disadvantaged Census Tracts to be approximately 3,000 sf. For the purposes of this proposal, the waterwise project estimates the average lawn to be 4,000 sf for both disadvantaged CTs and other areas. The project plans to convert 52 lawns, average size 4,000 sf, with a water use savings of 9.35 gallons/sf for a total water savings of 1,944,800 gallons seasonally once the lawns and/or native landscapes have been established.

Water Supply Delivery System

Lincoln Water System pumps its water from its two water treatment plants near the Platte River to Lincoln. The water supply, treatment, and transmission system have the capacity to treat and distribute nearly 120 million gallons per day (MGD) during normal Platter River flow conditions. Lincoln Water System installed a fourth horizontal well that became operational in December 2018 that provides an additional 10 MGD during extended drought conditions and low river flows.

From website:

<https://www.lincoln.ne.gov/City/Departments/LTU/Utilities/LWS/Conservation/Water-Management-Plan>

Water Supply Reliability

Lincoln is a growing Midwestern city (1.76% since last Census, current population: 292,627). Population growth is putting pressure on its water supply. This has been further complicated by moderate-to-severe drought conditions occurring during five of the past 10 years. Presently, Lincoln and Nebraska are in the throes of a severe drought. By late May 2023, the Lincoln Water System's monitoring data indicated that dry conditions had depleted the Platte River alluvial aquifer, which supplies Lincoln's wellfield, to 65% of its capacity. In a typical year, the aquifer is

replenished at 100%. Additionally, the Platte River flow was at its lowest since 1956. July rains helped some, but the need for water conservation continues to be critical.

During the summer of 2023, the City implemented the first phase of its Water Conservation Plan by asking residents to voluntarily limit watering of lawns and washing vehicles. The first phase of the plan focuses on reducing outdoor water use. Nearly two-thirds of the water Lincoln uses during the summer is for watering grass and other outdoor purposes.

The City of Lincoln's Water Management Plan includes three phases: 1: Moderate Shortage – Voluntary Water Use Reductions by Designated Day, 2: Severe Shortage – Mandatory Water Use Reductions by Designated Day, 3: Critical Shortage – Limited Outdoor Water Use. The phases are based on Platte River flows and daily water usage rates. The phases can lead up to one or two designated days of outdoor water use or no outdoor watering, closure of car washes, etc. Enforcement is in accordance with the Lincoln Municipal Code Charter 17.26, which can lead up to \$300 fines, plus administrative fees for each infraction of mandatory water usage regulations and may include provisions of the Nebraska Civil Defense Act such as calls for water possibly stopping agricultural irrigation further up the Platte River. To reduce the likelihood of mandatory restrictions and related measures, the City of Lincoln's Watershed Management Division and the Lincoln Water System have implemented several water conservation programs, including the WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program. As drought conditions continue to affect the area, the City of Lincoln will likely see more water restrictions. By expanding the Waterwise Cost Share Program from 18 participants in 2023 to 52 participants by accessing federal infusion of funding through this grant proposal, participants will create more drought-tolerant landscapes that require less water to maintain, saving 1.9 million gallons of water, helping Lincoln respond to future drought conditions and a warmer climate.

Geographical Scope of Benefits (Local, Sub-Basin, Basin)

The proposed project will take place in the Salt Creek Watershed, which is part of the Lower Platte River Basin. By reducing outdoor water use in the City of Lincoln, the program will reduce demands on water supplies in the Lower Platte River Basin.

Benefits to Local Sectors and Economies

All projects will be installed by an approved professional landscape company, or upon a City-approved plan to be completed by the property owner. The landscape company will be expected to utilize local or regional suppliers and nurseries as much as possible to acquire materials and drought-tolerant plants. No data exists for the WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program to show economic impact. However, the similar Rainscaping Lincoln Cost Share program for installing rain gardens and similar projects had a total combined project cost of \$64,637 in 2022. That same year, the City reimbursed \$27,928 to participants. This means that every dollar the City invested into the cost share program generated more than twice the amount of economic activity. Not included in these numbers is the money invested by participants toward ongoing maintenance of their projects, which will create additional economic activity well into the future.

Increased Collaboration

The WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program will be a collaborative effort between Lincoln Water System and Watershed Management – two divisions of Lincoln Transportation and Utilities (LTU). These divisions have overlapping goals, including promoting more sustainable landscapes throughout the community. Since waterwise lawns and native landscaping provide benefits relevant to both divisions, it is in their best interest to work with each other toward this common goal.

The project will also partner with the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (LPSNRD). LPSNRD is comprised of a six-county area in southeastern Nebraska. It includes over one million acres and 350,000 residents, including the City of Lincoln. The mission of the LPSNRD is to maintain a sustainable environment through the conservation of land, water, and wildlife. LPSNRD is governed by a 21-member elected board and has taxing authority. LPSNRD has previously partnered with the City's Watershed Management and Water System, providing \$15,000 toward the cost share program. LPSNRD has indicated that they will continue that commitment (see Letters – Attachment).

LTU is accredited with the American Public Works Association (APWA). During its last recertification, the City's Rainscaping Lincoln Cost Share Program (i.e., rain gardens) was selected by the APWA to serve as an example to other cities pursuing accreditation. Through the APWA, LTU was able to show real-life examples of sustainable landscaping projects to others and, hopefully, inspire them to develop similar programs of their own. The project will encourage APWA to feature our proposed expansion of WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program as another project worth replicating across the country.

In addition, the Waterwise Cost Share Program will provide LTU the opportunity to collaborate with neighborhoods, minority-based community centers and cultural centers in Lincoln. The cost share program will target Federally identified disadvantaged Census Tracts for project participation. Community-based organizations will serve as a valuable resource for reaching the project's target audience.

Targeted EPA-Identified Disadvantaged Census Tracts

The project will target 14 EPA-identified disadvantaged Census Tracts. This includes CTs: 3, 4, 5, 8, 17, 18, 20.01, 20.02, 21, 22, 30.03, 31.03, 31.04, and 32.02. These CTs generally are adjacent to downtown and include a couple of CTs from some very early suburban neighborhoods. They are typified by higher rates of poverty and negative environmental impacts as compared to other CTs in Lincoln. Previous WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program experience has indicated that having residents of disadvantaged CTs pay for all supplies and/or vendor services upfront when removing a water-thirsty lawn and replacing it with drought-tolerant turf and/or native grasses and forbs is a barrier to participation. Additionally, the cost itself is a barrier. To address these barriers, the expanded cost share program will pay upfront costs and bill participants in disadvantaged CTs for the remainder. The remaining will be less because the project will cover 75% of costs with property owners covering 25%. Lawns tend

to be significantly smaller within the target area, also helping to reduce costs to the property owner. If the property is a rental, participants will gain permission from the property owner to participate with the property owner covering 25% of the cost. Project participation will reduce ongoing costs for the property owner and/or lessee by reducing water usage and its cost, while beautifying the property and neighborhood.

Additional Benefits

In addition to the water savings-related benefits, the WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program will have stormwater benefits. Drought-tolerant turfgrass and native plants have deep root systems that help more water soak into the ground when it rains. Some projects may also require soil amendments such as compost or topsoil. Adding organic matter to a lawn or landscape increases the soil's ability to capture and retain water. More water soaking into the ground means less stormwater runoff during rain events. This, in turn, helps reduce water pollution and stream bank erosion, which can negatively impact the Salt Creek Tiger Beetle, a Federally endangered species located in and adjacent to Lincoln.

Other benefits of native landscaping include habitat for pollinators, increased biodiversity, and neighborhood beautification. Furthermore, having waterwise landscapes throughout the city demonstrates to residents that they can have attractive lawns or landscaping that do not require a lot of water to maintain.

E.1.2 Evaluation Criterion B – Planning Efforts Supporting the Project (25 Points)

Describe how your project is supported by an existing planning effort.

In 1994, the City of Lincoln adopted the Water Management Plan. The plan outlines potential causes for water use restrictions, as well as the different phases of drought-related restrictions based on the flow level in the Platte River. The plan also addresses the importance of water conservation practices that residents can take every day and it cross-references the Water Conservation webpage on the City of Lincoln's site, which features a guide for planting waterwise.

<https://www.lincoln.ne.gov/City/Departments/LTU/Utilities/LWS/Conservation/Water-Management-Plan>

More recently, the Climate Action Plan for 2021-2027 identified several natural solutions that the City of Lincoln will maximize. This includes encouraging citizens to meet individual water usage goals, planting more trees, responding to the Salt Creek Resiliency Study, and more. The Plan also includes several objectives relevant to the Waterwise Cost Share Program. Item 79 states: *Continue to provide grants and incentives to developers, homeowners, and business owners for the emplacement of green infrastructure.* Item 101 addresses the need for incentivizing water conservation and native planting, and Item 102 encourages the conversion of lawns to native grasses and drought-tolerant landscaping.

<https://www.lincoln.ne.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/2/projects-programs-amp-initiatives/resilient-lincoln/documents/climateactionplan.pdf>

E.1.3 Evaluation Criterion C – Project Implementation (20 Points)

Project Schedule

Lincoln, Nebraska has a short growing season, from May through early September. The proposed project takes our growing season into consideration for a realistic project schedule.

Major Tasks	Start Date	End Date
Notification of Award	9/1/2024	
Contact Project Partners	11/1/2024	11/15/2024
Primary Partners Convene & Finalize Planning	11/15/2024	12/31/2024
Initiate Project Marketing Campaign	1/2/2025	Ongoing till 8/1/2025
Project Applications Accepted	2/15/2025	Ongoing till 8/1/2025
City Reviews Applications to Ensure Project Appropriateness, etc.	3/15/2025	Ongoing till 8/15/2025
City Reviews Project Completion/Cost Share Component	5/15/2025	Ongoing till 9/15/2025
Project Photos/Post on City Website Project Results	6/1/2025	Ongoing
Complete Reporting to Funding Source/All Report Submitted	11/1/2025	10/31/2025

Budget/Budget Narrative

Activity	Federal	LWS	Watershed	LPSNRD	Owners	Total
Target Area Cost Share: 75/25 Average Cost per Lawn: \$3,333 x 30 Lawns (Ave. Cost to Owners: \$833)	\$40,000	\$10,000	\$13,000	\$15,000	\$25,000	\$103,000
Outside Target Area Cost Share: 50/50 Average Cost per Lawn: \$5,000 x 22 Lawns (Ave. Cost per Lawn to Owners: \$2,500)	\$55,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$55,000	\$110,000
Project Marketing: Website, Water Bill Inserts, Facebook Ads, Fliers, PSAs, etc.	\$5,000	\$3,000	\$2,000	\$0	\$0	\$10,000
Total	\$100,000	\$13,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$80,000	\$223,000

The target area will be the 14 Federally identified disadvantaged CTs. Target area property owners will pay only 25% of their project costs. Lawns within the target area are typically 3,000 sf; thus, be lower cost. The City requests \$40,000 in federal funds. The City's Water System will provide a \$10,000 match. The City's Watershed Management will provide \$13,000 in match. LPSNRD will provide a \$15,000 match. Property owners will provide \$25,000 match through the cost share. Total cost of target area will be \$103,000.

Outside the target area will pay 50% of their project costs. Suburban lawns are typically larger, averaging 5,000 sf; thus, will cost more. The City requests \$55,000 in federal funds. Property owners will provide \$55,000 match through the cost share. Total cost outside the target area will be \$110,000.

Project marketing will include the City's website (\$0), water bill inserts (7.5 cents per insert x 115,930 households = \$8,695), Facebook ads (\$10 x 50 = \$500), fliers/posters posted at minority-based community and cultural centers and neighborhood associations (50 cents per fliers x 500 = \$250, \$2.00 per poster x 20 = \$40), PSAs developed by the City's Citizen Information Center (\$0), and incidental cost to air PSAs on community radio (\$515). The City requests \$5,000 in federal funds. The City's Water System will provide \$3,000. The City's Watershed Management will provide \$2,000. Total project marketing will be \$10,000. Total project costs are \$223,000. Project costs are reasonable and will result in saving approximately 1,944,800 gallons of water on an annual basis.

Permits, Engineering and Design, Environmental and Cultural Compliance, and Policies

LTU does not anticipate any permits being required since all of the work will take place on private property and little disturbance to the land is anticipated. If permits are needed, it will be the responsibility of the vendor or property owner to secure. Applicants will sign an agreement with the City of Lincoln, which will grant permission for the project to be installed on their property. No new policies or modifications to existing policies will be necessary, aside from the City's approval and execution of the grant agreement with Reclamation. Environmental and Cultural Resource compliance, if needed, will be coordinated upon the grant being awarded. Engineering is not an aspect in lawn removal and replacement. Project designs will be up to property owners and will be reviewed and approved by City staff, following design requirements as posted on the City's website.

Project Impact to Surrounding Environment

The Waterwise Cost Share Program will not have a significant environmental impact. Although the soil will be disturbed during the process of removing an existing lawn and installing a waterwise lawn or native landscaping, the professional landscaping company or property owner performing the work will be required to use best management practices to minimize any soil erosion and subsequent water pollution that could occur during the transition period. Since the projects will take place on private residential property, there will be no significant impact to air or wildlife habitat.

Project Impact to Threatened or Endangered Species

In 2020, the US Fish and Wildlife Service determined that the monarch butterfly meets the listing criteria for the Endangered Species Act. Although not Federally endangered yet, the monarch butterfly is a candidate for being added to the list in the near future. In addition, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) recently announced that the monarch butterfly has entered the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as Endangered.

Native landscaping provides habitat for urban monarch butterflies. Many native plants provide food for adults and milkweed (a native plant) is the host for monarch butterfly caterpillars. The Waterwise Cost Share Program will increase the amount of pollinator habitat available within the City of Lincoln.

Additionally, the Salt Creek Tiger Beetle is a federally endangered species located within and adjacent to Lincoln near Salt Creek, which bisects Lincoln. Reduced run-off due to drought-tolerant turf and/or native grasses and forbs will positively impact water quality in Salt Creek and other streams, helping to improve the Salt Creek Tiger Beetle's environment.

Project Impact on Wetlands and Surface Waters

The Waterwise Cost Share Program will not negatively impact any wetlands or surface waters since the projects will take place on private residential property. Since the projects do provide some stormwater benefits, there will be a reduction of stormwater runoff and associated pollutants from entering local waterways, resulting in a positive impact.

When Water Delivery System Constructed

Although Lincoln Water System has been serving customers since the late 1800s, the current water delivery system was not constructed until the 1930s when Lincoln sought a new water source. The groundwater in the Lincoln area is naturally salty. To supply water to the growing population, the City built a water treatment facility near the Platte River and pumps water approximately 30 miles to Lincoln Water System customers. In 2014, the City identified the need for a second water source to continue supplying water to meet the demands of the growing city.

<https://app.lincoln.ne.gov/city/ltu/water/second-water-source/phase1-task1-final-report.pdf?final>

Project Impact on Irrigation Systems

Depending on the project, existing residential irrigation systems may be modified. This would include capping off sprinkler heads that are no longer needed. No modifications will be made to large-scale irrigation systems or structures.

Project Impact on Historical Places

There are several sites in Lincoln listed on the National Register of Historic Places. However, the program will not affect any of these buildings or structures.

Project Impact on Known Archeological Sites

There are no known archeological sites within the project area.

Project Impact on Low-Income or Minority Populations

The program will be open to all Lincoln property owners and will not adversely affect low-income or minority populations. In fact, the project seeks to reduce barriers to participation among low-income and/or minority communities.

Project Impact on Sacred Site or Tribal Lands

The program will have no impact on Indian sacred sites or tribal lands.

Project Impact on the Spread of Noxious Weeds or Non-Native Invasive Species

The cost share program will only allow the installation of native or non-invasive, regionally adapted plants. Noxious weeds are prohibited under the Lincoln Municipal Code and failure to remove or control them can result in action by the Lancaster County Weed Authority.

E.1.4 Evaluation Criterion D – Nexus to Reclamation (5 Points)

There are several Reclamation Projects in Nebraska. The closest projects to this project are located on the North Loup River, which provides a high percentage of the baseflow that sustains Lower Platte River flows during drought conditions. This area is covered by the Lower Platte Drought Contingency Plan, which was funded in part by a WaterSmart Grant. Lincoln Water System (a division of LTU) is part the Lower Platte River Consortium and helped develop the Contingency Plan. The first increment of the Contingency Plan was to establish a framework for coordination and communication amongst Consortium members to address droughts in the Lower Platte River Basin. Therefore, efforts in the City of Lincoln to conserve water, particularly during drought conditions, will benefit other communities within the Lower Platte River Basin (and vice versa).

https://dnr.nebraska.gov/sites/dnr.nebraska.gov/files/doc/water-planning/lower-platte/LPBasinWide/Coalition/20191031_LPRDCP_Final.pdf

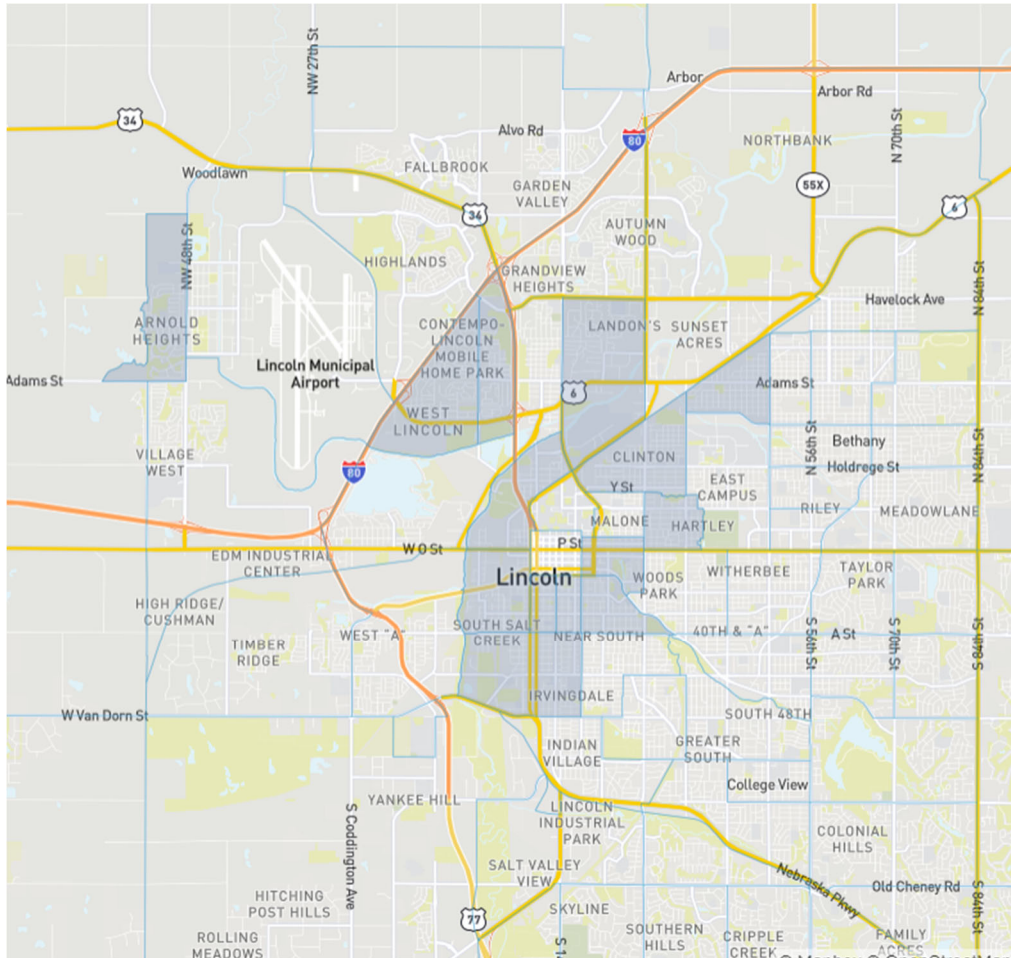
E.1.5 Evaluation Criterion E – Presidential and Department of Interior Priorities (15 Points)**Climate Change**

Each project installed through the cost share program will not have a significant impact on climate change. However, waterwise lawns and native landscaping require less input (fertilizer, water, mowing, etc.) than conventional lawns. Cumulatively, low input landscapes can reduce climate pollution and increase resilience to the impacts of climate change. The more landscapes converted, the greater the impact overall. Programs such as the Waterwise Cost Share Program will help encourage the conversion of more landscapes.

In addition, waterwise landscapes can help strengthen water supply sustainability by reducing overall demand for outdoor water use, particularly during the summer months. Less watering translates to less stress on the water system and allows it to be more resilient during times of drought.

Disadvantaged or Underserved Communities

Although the cost share program will be open to all Lincoln property owners, the City is targeting the 14 disadvantaged CTs, as identified by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool. Barriers to participation such as cost will be reduced by picking up a greater cost share of 75% and by eliminating upfront payment of the vendor and/or other costs by target area property owners. Within the disadvantaged CTs, existing housing is among the oldest in Lincoln, and a significant amount of the residential area suffers from an abundance of vacant lots and poor housing. The area has a higher density of low-to-moderate income households, and a significant portion of Lincoln’s 100-year floodplain falls within its boundaries. The graphic below indicates the location of the disadvantaged CTs.



LETTERS OF PROJECT SUPPORT – See attached.

OFFICIAL RESOLUTION – The City will complete the resolution process upon award.

UNIQUE ENTITY IDENTIFIER – H6DFKBPHK6U6



OFFICE OF MAYOR LEIRION GAYLOR BAIRD
555 South 10th Street, Suite 301 | Lincoln, NE 68508
402-441-7511 | mayor@lincoln.ne.gov

January 12, 2024

M. Camille Calimlim Touton, Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Dear Commissioner Touton,

I strongly support the Lincoln Transportation and Utilities (LTU) Department's request of \$100,000 in federal funds for its proposed expansion of the WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program. Nearly two-thirds of the water used in Lincoln during the summer is for watering grass and other outdoor purposes. This type of consumer use poses significant challenges as Lincoln increasingly experiences drought conditions, having contended with moderate-to-severe drought during five of the past ten years. By funding this proposal, the Bureau of Reclamation will help Lincoln to replace water-thirsty lawns with drought-tolerant turf, helping our community to make better use of our limited, precious water resources.

By late May 2023, U.S. Geological Survey data indicated that dry conditions had depleted an alluvial aquifer along the Platte River, which supplies the Lincoln wellfield, to 65% of its capacity. Typically, the aquifer would have been 100% replenished. In the spring and summer of 2023, exceptional drought conditions forced the City to implement the first phase of its Water Management Plan to sustain essential services. The first phase of the plan focuses on voluntary outdoor water use reductions. Fortunately, July had enough rain that Phase II mandatory water restrictions were not implemented.

To avoid such extreme measures, the City's Watershed Management and Lincoln Water System (both divisions of LTU) are partnering with the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (LPSNRD), minority-led cultural centers, and neighborhood associations to expand the WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program from approximately 20 participants annually to 50. The cost share program will target disadvantaged neighborhoods identified by the federal Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool by covering 75% of the cost of replacing water-thirsty lawns with drought-tolerant turf and/or native grasses and forbs up to \$2,500 per lawn. The program will also be open to property owners outside the target area with the program covering 50% of the cost up to \$2,500 per lawn.

The program supports multiple Lincoln 2021-2027 Climate Action Plan objectives: 1) Meet the community water usage goal of 110 gallons of water per day per person or less. 2) Reduce irrigation needs by incentivizing conservation practices and native planting. 3) Encourage conversion of lawns to native grasses, vegetable gardens, and/or drought-tolerant landscaping. As evidence of the City's commitment to these goals, our Watershed Management division will provide \$15,000 and the Lincoln Water System will provide \$13,000 in cash match. The project also will be supported by LPSNRD with a \$15,000 cash match. Property owners will provide \$80,000 in cost share match.

In closing, I urge your fair and full consideration of this proposal. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. We appreciate the agency's leadership in water conservation and drought resiliency efforts nationwide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Leirion Gaylor Baird". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L".

Leirion Gaylor Baird
Mayor



LOWER PLATTE SOUTH natural resources district

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January 12, 2024

Camille Calimlim Touton, Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Dear Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton:

I am writing in support of the City of Lincoln's proposed expansion of its WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program. The Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (LPSNRD) has partnered for several years with the City's Watershed Management with the Cost Share Program to encourage property owners in Lincoln to replace water-thirsty lawns with drought-tolerant turf and/or native grasses and forbs. These efforts help reduce the strain placed on Lincoln's water system by reducing the use of outdoor watering during the summer months.

LPSNRD is comprised of a six-county area in southeastern Nebraska, consisting of about one million acres and 350,000 residents. The mission of the LPSNRD is to maintain a sustainable environment through the conservation of land, water, and wildlife. LPSNRD is governed by a 21-member elected Board.

The City's WaterWise Sustainable Landscapes Cost Share Program typically covers 50% of the cost of replacing a bluegrass lawn with a sustainable drought-tolerant turf for 18 to 20 property owners annually. The proposed expansion will help 50 to 52 property owners and target 14 Census Tracts identified by the federal Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool as disadvantaged for 75% of lawn replacement costs up to \$2,500. The project also be open to property owners outside the target area, covering 50% of costs up to \$2,500. The project seeks to reduce other barriers that low-to-moderate income property owners experience in replacing their lawns with drought-tolerant turf.

LPSNRD will support the proposed expansion by continuing to dedicate \$15,000 as a cash match toward the program and offer technical assistance support, as needed.

In closing, LPSNRD finds the City's proposed expansion to be critically needed as Lincoln has experienced drought conditions five out of the last ten years and outdoor watering during the summer is a core cause of strained water resources. We have found the City's staff to be knowledgeable, friendly, and easy to work with. We are confident that if the proposed expansion is funded, the project will be a success.

Sincerely,

Mike Sousek
General Manager