



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## EPA environmental justice grant to support MWRD restoration of Little Village brownfield



*An abandoned petroleum processing site near 31st and Kedzie Avenue will be restored thanks to new federal funding that is supporting MWRD efforts to revitalize the land with native plantings.*

A land restoration project led by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) has been selected to receive critical federal funding that will help the MWRD transform an abandoned brownfield into an attractive greenspace along the Little Village neighborhood waterfront.

The project, which is south of 31st Street along Kedzie Avenue near the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, was selected by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with an Environmental Justice Government to Government (EJG2G) grant. The brownfield restoration was one of 88 EJG2G projects selected across the country to receive funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to help underserved and overburdened communities across the country.

The MWRD plans to transform the abandoned former petroleum processing lot and replace it with regenerative soil supporting a native landscape and a passive recreational space that will be accessible to the public. This 4.5-acre site remediation will involve site



*Trash, weeds and invasive species are strewn across a concrete lot that will be converted to an urban greenspace thanks to new plans that the MWRD has developed with support from the Little Village community and an Environmental Justice Government to Government grant from the U.S. EPA.*

clean-up, restoration work and the infusion of new soils made with topsoil, sediment, and MWRD biosolids to enhance plant growth, and additional tree and native prairie plantings and landscaping.

“Thanks to the 2023 Environmental Justice Government-to-Government Program grant funding from the EPA, we can recover sustainable resources, mitigate flooding and protect the quality of our nearby waterways, including the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, while providing a greenspace for residents of the Little Village community,” said President Kari K. Steele. “In addition, the land restoration will help improve air quality for the well-being of residents.”

The MWRD is partnering with Mi Villita Neighbors and the Little Village Community Council, and also working with the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and The Ohio State University, the Chicago Department of Public Health and the Chicago Region Trees Initiative. The MWRD and *(continued)*

## EPA environmental justice grant to support MWRD restoration, *cont.*

partners plan to conduct public outreach and forums to gather community input from community groups and residents. The MWRD anticipates breaking ground in 2024.

“We are excited to be recognized with federal funding to help launch a transformative project that will benefit deserving residents of Little Village and our environment,” said MWRD Commissioner Eira Corral Sepúlveda.

“We appreciate the federal support of our partners, including the White House and the EPA, as well as the grassroots engagement in the Little Village community for championing this project and working together with us to see it come into fruition.”

Between the EJG2G program and the Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem Solving Cooperative Agreement, the EPA announced nearly \$128 million in total to fund 186 projects across the country. EPA officials said the funds will ensure disadvantaged communities that have historically suffered from underinvestment have access to clean air and water and climate resilience solutions in alignment with the Biden-Harris Administration’s Justice40 Initiative.

“Today’s historic announcement is one part of the Biden-Harris Administration’s commitment to ensuring all Americans have equal access to clean and safe communities,” said EPA Region 5 Administrator and former MWRD Commissioner Debra Shore. “Thanks to these transformative investments, EPA is empowering overburdened communities to address environmental or public health issues in their communities.”

The MWRD project was one of eight EJG2G projects selected in the EPA’s Great Lakes Region 5. EPA of-

ficials said that the project will benefit the lives of underserved community members by promoting greenspace in an area of heavy industrialization. It can also serve as a model for future brownfield restorations in underserved or vulnerable communities lacking critical resources.

“By providing these investments to community-led initiatives that will protect and clean up our nation’s air and water, we are helping protect the health and safety of all of America’s families,” said U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth. “As co-founder of the Senate’s first-ever Environmental Justice Caucus, I’m proud to see the Biden Administration continue to prioritize long-underserved communities that have been disproportionately saddled with pollution and abandoned infrastructure, by providing them with the ability to achieve the cleaner air and water they need and deserve.”

While known famously for wastewater treatment and stormwater management work, the MWRD also has a history of excelling in land restoration projects. In the 1970s, the MWRD revitalized a strip mine land reclamation project in downstate Fulton County by using organic soil amendments from the wastewater treatment process. The award-winning Prairie Plan site near Canton, Ill. has brought thousands of acres of wastelands into productive agricultural land combined with natural areas supporting habitat. The MWRD also worked with Chicago officials in transforming a former USX brownfield into a healthy turf site, participated in the Calumet Brownfield Collaborative, donated biosolids to a successful restoration for the Schmidt Sanctuary at the Alsip Boat Launch, and recently established research in the establishment of native vegetation for enhancing ecosystems and reducing soil contaminants in a brownfield with biosolids amendments.

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### ***Recovering Resources, Transforming Water***

*Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at [mwrld.org](http://mwrld.org).*