



BLACKS IN GREEN

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Blacks in Green Receives \$1.5 Million Inaugural Grant from the Bezos Earth Fund for Urban Greening

The Earth Fund commits a total of \$10.1 million to the Chicago area to enhance communities with more parks, trees, and community gardens

CHICAGO, IL — July 17, 2023: Today, the [Bezos Earth Fund announced](#) the selection of Blacks in Green (BIG) as one of the Chicago-based non-profits to receive a \$1.5 million grant to support urban greening in the Chicago region. The [Greening America's Cities](#) initiative is a new \$400 million commitment to create more equitable access to urban greening in underserved U.S. communities.

“Having resources to scale BIG’s Sustainable Square Mile system means the West Woodlawn Botanic Garden, Village Farm & Arboretum can soon begin feeding households, training neighbors, launching businesses, and managing stormwater at village scale — building a horticulture economy along the way. Over time, here in the age of climate crisis, system outcomes will include increased household income and buffers of resilience,” said Naomi Davis, founder and CEO of Blacks in Green and creator of the Sustainable Square Mile. It will be America’s first Black square-mile, neighborhood-based horticultural touring and teaching Botanic Garden and certified Arboretum.

BIG’s Sustainable Square Mile program implements its 8 Principles of Green-Village-Building – a whole-system solution for the whole-system problem common to Black communities everywhere, and considered the gold standard for Black community economic development, where African American families walk-to-work, walk-to-shop, walk-to-learn, walk-to-play, own the businesses, own the land and live the conservation lifestyle — considered the beautiful life.

Before the Bezos Earth Fund grant, BIG struggled to keep pace with our horticultural vision and needs, managing a substantial portfolio of ecological parcels with no program funding for staff, equipment or materials. We survived on thousands of volunteer hours and hundreds of thousands squeezed from our general operating funds over 10 years.

This grant will support our Sustainable Square Mile efforts by further developing green spaces, purchasing vacant neighborhood properties, hiring full-time staff from the neighborhood and

beyond, acquiring vehicles and equipment, and advancing our sustainable green infrastructure plan through BIG's 8 Principles of Green-Village-Building.

BIG has been implementing a rich concentration of sustainable gardens, parkways, and greenways with a range of leading-edge green infrastructure practices that are designed, installed, and stewarded to achieve high-performance characteristics for the neighborhood, including rainwater infiltration, urban cooling, biodiversity, healthy food, and beauty.

Together with economic elements, these practices embody our paradigm of GOD: Garden Oriented Development – our green infrastructure program which cultivates commercial corridors, family properties, open spaces, green careers and enterprises. To advance natural solutions while building neighbor wealth and awareness within our Sustainable Square Mile, our BIG Botanic Garden, Village Farm and Arboretum social enterprise is preparing to bring mitigation and adaptation tools and materials to the general public.

“Blacks in Green serves as a national example of how community experts are in the best position to imagine and implement local solutions,” said Caroline O’Boyle, Trust for Public Land’s Associate Vice President, and Illinois State Director. “Trust for Public Land is pleased to play a role in BIG’s success and looks forward to our continued partnership.”

"Green spaces are critical for people and the planet. The Bezos Earth Fund is proud to partner with local communities and government to expand urban green spaces," said Andrew Steer, President & CEO of the Bezos Earth Fund. "In partnership, this new initiative will support historically underserved communities, supporting their health and well-being."

There is clear [evidence](#) that "greening" U.S. cities with more — and better — parks, trees, and community gardens can improve physical and mental health, increase local resilience to climate impacts like extreme heat and reduce energy consumption. Health benefits come from improved air quality, more physical activity, reduced heat, the stress reduction effect of green spaces, and the opportunities green spaces create for social interaction.

Historic systems of segregation, exclusion, and land dispossession have led to many communities living in nature-deprived areas. Consequently, these communities often do not benefit from nature’s benefits, like air and water purification, climate mitigation, or biodiversity.

The Earth Fund’s Greening America’s Cities initiative starts with community projects in five cities: Albuquerque, Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Wilmington, Delaware. It will extend through 2030 and expand to new communities, building on its earlier \$300 million in funding to climate and environmental justice groups in the U.S. For more information, visit www.BezosEarthFund.org.

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About Blacks in Green

Blacks in Green (BIG) is an environmental economic development non-profit that serves as a bridge and catalyst among communities and their stakeholders in the design and development of green, self-sustaining, mixed-income, walkable villages within Black neighborhoods with its Sustainable Square Mile system – designed to ensure that every household can walk-to-work, walk-to-shop, walk-to-learn, walk-to-play, own the businesses and the land, and live the conservation lifestyle. Learn more on our website at www.blacksingreen.org.