

Neighborhood Mowing Program Full Program Scope

Funding Request to the City of Rockford

Requested Amount: \$25,000

Executive Summary

Zion West Enterprises respectfully requests \$25,000 from the City of Rockford's REGROW Program to support the launch of the 2026 Neighborhood Mowing Program, a comprehensive 10-week summer employment, violence prevention, and neighborhood beautification initiative designed to serve 10 at-risk youth from Rockford's west side.

The program will provide participants with paid employment, mentorship, financial literacy education, entrepreneurship training, and practical workforce experience while improving the appearance and cleanliness of neighborhoods throughout the 13th Ward and surrounding west side communities.

Participants will work Tuesday through Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., totaling 18 hours per week for 10 weeks. Youth will earn \$15 per hour, while three adult mentors will supervise the program and provide workforce coaching and life-skills development.

The program aligns directly with the City of Rockford's REGROW framework by reinvesting resources into communities disproportionately impacted by disinvestment and creating opportunities for youth development, violence prevention, entrepreneurship, environmental stewardship, and community wellness.

About Zion West Enterprises

Zion West Enterprises is a Rockford-based community organization dedicated to neighborhood revitalization, housing rehabilitation, workforce development, and youth empowerment. Through partnerships with local government, law enforcement, faith institutions, businesses, and residents, Zion West Enterprises creates transformative opportunities that strengthen neighborhoods and expand economic opportunity.

The organization has extensive experience implementing community-based initiatives focused on housing improvement, workforce training, and community engagement. Its mission is rooted in restoring hope, rebuilding neighborhoods, and equipping residents with the tools needed to succeed.

Statement of Need

Many young people on Rockford's west side face limited access to structured summer employment, positive mentorship, and meaningful economic opportunities. During the summer months, some youth spend significant time unsupervised and may become involved in unsafe activities that place them at risk.

At the same time, many neighborhoods continue to experience blight, overgrown lots, litter, and deferred property maintenance. These conditions negatively impact neighborhood pride, public safety, and the perception of community well-being.

The Neighborhood Mowing Program addresses both challenges by employing young people to perform visible beautification work while equipping them with the skills, discipline, and support necessary to succeed.

Program Goals

1. Provide paid summer employment to 10 at-risk youth.
2. Reduce youth exposure to unsafe activities during the summer.
3. Deliver mentorship, life skills, and workforce development training.
4. Teach financial literacy and entrepreneurship.
5. Beautify neighborhoods and improve community cleanliness.
6. Reduce blight and strengthen neighborhood pride.
7. Create pathways to small business ownership.
8. Advance the goals of the City of Rockford's REGROW Program.

Program Structure

Duration

10 weeks (Summer 2026)

Participants

10 youth ages 14–21

Schedule

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday
9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Hours

18 hours per week

Total Hours Per Participant

180 hours

Youth Wage

\$15 per hour

Total Earnings Per Youth

\$2,700

Adult Mentors

3 trained mentors

Mentor Compensation

\$22 per hour

Daily Program Components

- Morning check-in and goal setting
 - Safety instruction
 - Lawn care and landscaping assignments
 - Litter removal and beautification work
 - Lunch and team-building
 - Financial literacy and entrepreneurship lessons
 - Reflection and mentoring discussions
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Neighborhood Beautification Scope of Work

Participants will:

- Mow vacant lots and overgrown properties
 - Trim weeds and brush
 - Pick up litter and debris
 - Maintain landscaped areas and flower beds
 - Beautify major corridors such as West State Street and Auburn Street
 - Assist seniors and residents unable to maintain their properties
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Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurship Training

Participants will receive instruction in:

- Budgeting and saving
- Banking and credit
- Goal setting
- Customer service
- Marketing
- Equipment maintenance
- Business planning

Graduates interested in launching lawn care businesses may receive donated equipment from local partners such as Walmart, The Home Depot, and Lowe's.

Crime Prevention and Public Safety Impact

Youth employment is one of the most effective strategies for reducing violence and increasing community safety. By providing structured work, positive adult relationships, and legal income opportunities, the Neighborhood Mowing Program reduces idle time and promotes personal responsibility.

The program will also strengthen relationships among youth, residents, law enforcement officers, and community leaders, creating a more connected and safer community.

Alignment with the City of Rockford REGROW Framework

The program advances several REGROW priorities, including:

- Youth Development and Violence Prevention
 - Workforce Development
 - Entrepreneurship
 - Neighborhood Stabilization
 - Environmental Justice
 - Community Wellness
 - Economic Opportunity
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Partnerships

The program will be implemented through collaboration among:

- Zion West Enterprises
- Alderman Tamir Bell and the 13th Ward Office
- Rockford Police Department
- Rockford Community Healing Center/Irving Strong House
- Local businesses and corporate sponsors
- Faith and community organizations
- Residents and neighborhood volunteers

Budget Summary

Youth Wages

10 × \$15/hour × 18 hours/week × 10 weeks = **\$27,000**

Mentor Wages

3 × \$22/hour × 18 hours/week × 10 weeks = **\$11,880**

Uniforms and Safety Gear

\$1,500

Equipment and Supplies

\$3,500

Snacks and Meals

\$1,200

Total Program Cost

\$45,080

Requested from the City of Rockford REGROW Program

\$25,000

Zion West Enterprises and Partner Match

\$20,080

Expected Outcomes

- 10 youth employed
- 1,800 total youth work hours completed
- 180 hours of work experience per participant
- More than 100 properties and public spaces maintained
- Financial literacy and entrepreneurship training delivered
- Improved neighborhood cleanliness and appearance
- Reduced blight and stronger neighborhood pride
- Pathways to employment and business ownership

Sustainability

Zion West Enterprises will leverage community partnerships, corporate sponsorships, equipment donations, and volunteer support to sustain and expand the program in future years.

Funding Request

Zion West Enterprises respectfully requests \$25,000 from the City of Rockford's REGROW Program to support the implementation of the 2026 Neighborhood Mowing Program.

This investment will provide young people with meaningful employment, strengthen neighborhoods, improve cleanliness and beautification, and advance the City's commitment to equitable community reinvestment.