



AGENDA MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 30, 2025

TO: Forest Preserve District Planning & Utilization Committee

FROM: Jennifer Rooks-Lopez, Director of Planning & Land Protection

SUBJECT: Presentation and Approval of a Contract with Wight & Company for Professional Design Services for an Urban Ecology Field Station at Arlene Shoemaker Forest Preserve

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the Committee with information to consider the approval of a contract with Wight & Company of Darien, Illinois, for professional design for an Urban Ecology Field Station at Arlene Shoemaker Forest Preserve in Aurora.

BACKGROUND:

The proposed urban ecology field station was included as a key project for the 2024 Land Acquisition & Preserve Improvement Referendum. It includes the construction of a nature center in Aurora. Patron data suggests that school groups, community groups and the general public in Kane County's urban centers, especially Aurora, need a nearby nature center that has programs, educational exhibits and outdoor infrastructure relevant to their unique urban ecology. Arlene Shoemaker Forest Preserve is situated within the heart of Aurora, with connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods and walking trails to a nearby elementary school. In addition, the Illinois Prairie Path Aurora Spur runs along the northern boundary of the Preserve. An urban nature center here will allow the District to better reach under-served communities, at-risk youth, and low-income families that reside and attend school in Aurora. In addition, the urban ecology focus will fully support the District's mission.

The District plans to seek funding assistance from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Park and Recreation Facility Construction Grant (PARC) which, if awarded, could reimburse 75% of the project cost up to \$2,800,000. A successful PARC grant application will require a site plan as well as preliminary facility design and costs for the Urban Ecology Field Station.

To help with the design, permitting and grant preparation for this unique project, the District utilized a request for qualifications process to select a consultant. Twelve firms responded; Wight & Company was selected. A scope of work was developed and a total fee of \$50,000 was established. Additionally, \$5,000 shall be set aside as contingency to cover any unanticipated additional costs that may arise during design, for a total contract price not to exceed \$55,000.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Funds totaling \$50,000 were budgeted in the 2025/26 fiscal year for engineering, design and grant assistance, in account # 03-35-35-7050; Project # 31023, for this portion of the project. Additional funds of \$23,000.00 are available from savings realized in the Wildlife Observation Platform at Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve professional services and grant assistance contract project #31021.ZZ; account 03-35-35-7050.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of a contract with Wight & Company of Darien, Illinois, for professional design and grant assistance services in the amount of \$50,000, plus a contingency of \$5,000 to cover any unanticipated additional costs that may arise, for an amount not to exceed \$55,000.

ATTACHMENTS:

Arlene Shoemaker Location Map

Arlene Shoemaker Site Map

Referendum Project Presentation

Proposal for Urban Ecology Field Station Professional Services: Wight & Company