

City's carbon-credit plan is delayed but still a go January 5, 2024 | Taylor Wooten

A little more than a year ago, the City-County Council passed a resolution expressing support for the creation of a carbon credit program to finance green space acquisition and preservation.

Potential credits in [Eagle Creek Park](#) are the program's initial focus, but progress has been slow as the city struggled to find a cost-effective way to launch the plan, officials said.

The concept would allow the city to raise money by selling carbon credits to companies and other entities that wish to offset their greenhouse gas emissions. The city would use the revenue to fund carbon-reducing forestry protection or expansion projects and related initiatives.

Parks and Recreation Deputy Director Don Colvin told IBJ the carbon-credit program has been delayed by a decision to manage the program internally rather than hire a carbon-credit consultant, a move intended in part to save money.

The Office of Sustainability put out a request for proposals last year and received bids from six groups.

The city narrowed the list to three; two of those offered consulting for around \$70,000 a year.

The Hogsett administration decided to instead manage the program with existing staff, Colvin told IBJ.

He said that route would be cheaper, but a Department of Public Works spokesman said it's difficult to determine exactly how much cheaper.

"An exact comparison is difficult because of flat fees, variable staff rates for each organization and percentages of the credit system," spokesman Corey Ohlenkamp wrote in an emailed statement. "Given the capacity and knowledge base of existing staff



within the city, we saw a better value in administering this in-house instead of utilizing a third-party contractor.”

Ohio-based Davey Resource Group offered to provide carbon consulting for \$70,435, according to city documents. That would have amounted to about one-third of the revenue the group projected the city’s carbon credit program would generate, leaving about \$119,000 for the city’s forest-preservation efforts.

[Stantec Consulting Services](#)’ proposal requested \$69,500. The Indianapolis-based consulting firm did not detail the city’s projected revenue from the program in documents provided to IBJ by the Department of Public Works.

A third finalist, Carbon Neutral Indiana, offered to get the program up and running for free, then receive 10% of the revenue from carbon-credit sales.

Daniel Poynter, founder of not-for-profit Carbon Neutral, said his organization worked with Seattle-based carbon accreditor City Forest Credits to determine that Eagle Creek Park was viable for selling carbon credits.

According to Poynter, City Forest Credits notified him last January that at least 150 acres in the park were eligible as carbon credits.

He estimated that each acre contained about 110 credits, for a total of 16,500 credits that could sell for \$20 to \$40 apiece. Total revenue from the program at the low end of \$20 per credit would be \$330,000.

“Now they’re redoing all of that work, and I don’t know why,” Poynter told IBJ.

In an emailed statement, Ohlenkamp wrote that “in addition to cost, experience of the group and their available assets all played a factor in the scoring process used to narrow candidate selection.”

Carbon Neutral Indiana has only one full-time employee—Poynter—and has mostly dealt in carbon offsets for individual homeowners.

Environmental initiatives

Republican Mayor Greg Ballard kicked off efforts to make the city environmentally friendly by creating the Office of Sustainability in 2008. Democratic Mayor Joe Hogsett's administration has continued pursuing that goal. Below is an update on key efforts:

Curbside recycling

- ▶ Goal for **implementation** is January 2026.
- ▶ Louisiana-based solid waste consultant APTIM has been hired to advise on the **procurement process**.
- ▶ Requests for proposals for **disposal and processing** of solid waste, recycling and organics are in the public-comment period; they are scheduled for release Jan. 12. After review and negotiation, contracts are set to be awarded this summer.
- ▶ RFPs for **collection** of solid waste, recycling and organics are to be released this summer, with contracts awarded late this year or early 2025.

Thriving Buildings

- ▶ The city's program to encourage energy-efficiency has been phasing in since 2021 requirements for owners of large buildings to report energy usage.

Remaining targets

2024: Final compliance metrics in effect: all buildings 50,000 square feet or larger and city-owned buildings 25,000 square feet or larger. Energy scores for city-owned buildings will be available to the public.

2026: Scores for all covered properties will be publicly available.

Thriving Neighbors

- ▶ The Office of Sustainability has been awarded a **\$15,000 community engagement grant** from the Wisconsin-based not-for-profit Urban Sustainability Directors Network.
- ▶ The grant will fund **eight free workshops** this year at Indy Parks family centers. Topics will range from how to start composting to how to cope with climate anxiety. Virtual options and recordings will be available. Details to come.

Federal grants

- ▶ The Office of Sustainability submitted or supported **more than \$42 million** in federal grant applications last year.

The two largest

- ▶ Lead applicant for a U.S. Department of Transportation/Department of Energy Charging and Fueling Infrastructure grant. If successful, Indianapolis will receive **\$15 million** for electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- ▶ Contributed to a coalition application for an Environmental Protection Agency Solar for All grant. If successful, Indianapolis will receive **more than \$17 million** to put solar on rooftops of qualifying homes.

Source: Indianapolis Office of Sustainability

Local competition

The city is pursuing its own contract with the not-for-profit City Forest Credits to assess Eagle Creek's credit situation. Colvin said the accreditor will determine whether the forested areas in Eagle Creek Park constitute a feasible market for the sale of carbon credits and just how many credits the park's 3,900 acres contain.

City Forest Credits specializes in preserving urban forests; it has assisted with 54 similar assessments across the country.

"Nothing's been definitive at this point, other than we're trying to find out if we even have credits," Colvin said.

Ohlenkamp said the project would be a pilot. If the city determines a full-blown program is worth pursuing, it will seek a third party to sell the carbon credits. Colvin said that request for proposals process could take another year.

But another local carbon credit project is further along and will soon be courting some of the same corporate buyers. In New Palestine's 77-acre Jones Forest, the Central

Indiana Land Trust sees an opportunity to preserve 22 acres with help from City Forest Credits.

Cliff Chapman, president and CEO of the land trust, said conversations with City Forest Credits began in October 2022.

Throughout last summer, the accreditor did plot studies to determine how many trees exist per acre and the forest's composition. The program has been in a holding pattern while the land trust tackles other projects, but Chapman said the last paperwork has been turned in for City Forest Credits to issue the credits by the end of this month.


As with the Eagle Creek project, the prospect of buying credits from Jones Forest will be pitched to local companies.

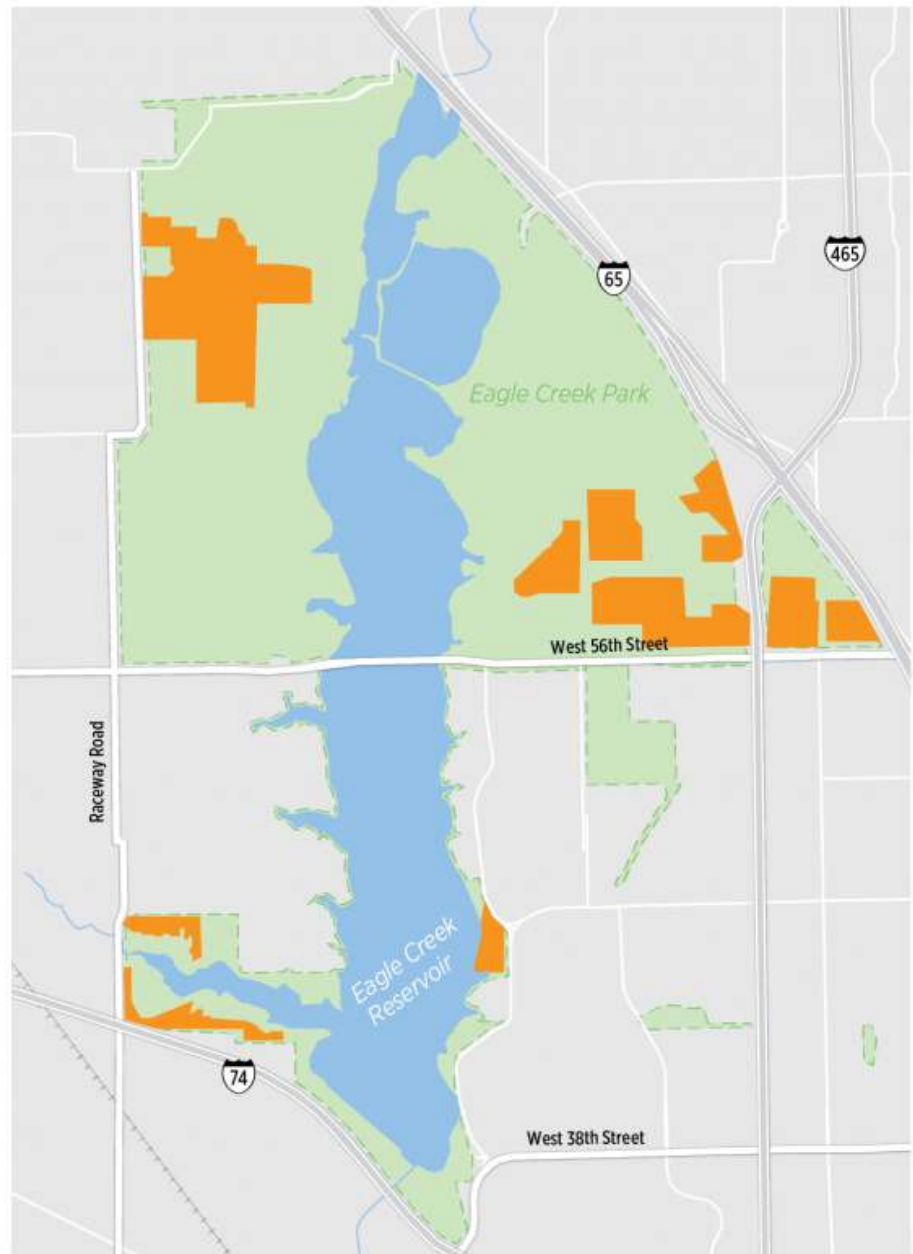
"We would definitely like to work with an Indianapolis company to do that before, you know, going beyond Indianapolis, or then going beyond Indiana to sell the credits," Chapman said.

"And certainly, the site is in Hancock County, but it's only a half-mile outside of Marion County, so it's within the Indianapolis metro area."

Study area

The city's Parks and Recreation Board has approved a proposal for Seattle-based not-for-profit City Forest Credits to analyze how many carbon credits exist within portions of Eagle Creek Park and the credits' value. The City-County Council approved a resolution supporting such a project over a year ago, but progress has been slow.

 proposed areas for review by City Forest Credits



Source: Indy Parks and Recreation © Mapcreator | OSM.org | © MapTiler

Indy's next steps

If Eagle Creek Park turns out to be a feasible market for carbon credits, proceeds from the sale of those credits—preferably to local companies—will fund maintenance of the park's forest, Colvin said. That maintenance includes removing invasive species and controlling the deer population.

Local environmental organizations offered mixed reviews on the progress of the carbon credit program.

Evan Robbins, a spokesman for the Indiana Forest Alliance, was surprised to hear the program was only now beginning more than a year after the special resolution passed.

“I really would hope we’d be further along than this,” Robbins said. But he said the alliance is excited about the program and sees progress from Democratic councilors John Barth and Dan Boots.

In 2021, Barth established the council’s Environmental Sustainability Committee. He said it has served more as a space for councilors to learn about sustainability efforts than as a conduit for legislative action.

However, the committee’s activities did lead to the council’s passage of the carbon-credit resolution.

“The idea being to dig into the policy to pull it apart, put it back together, and then make a decision: Do we as a community, as a council, need to do a proposal to ensure that the policy agenda we have proceeds?” Barth told IBJ.

When it comes to potential carbon-offset customers, the Forest Alliance’s Robbins said companies seeking to become carbon-neutral or to otherwise lower emissions are likely looking elsewhere at this point, especially if they have a target date.

“So hopefully we don’t wait too long, and we’re still competitive,” he said.

The Indiana Forest Alliance is pushing for more land acquisition by the city beyond parks, Robbins said. Just 15% of Marion County’s forested areas are currently parks, according to an analysis by the alliance.

“So there’s a lot that are not protected [from private development],” he said. “At any point, as long as they’re not owned by the city in some capacity, they’re at risk of being cut down and, you know, mini malls going there.”

A different organization, the Hoosier Environmental Council, gave Indianapolis kudos for having dedicated staff within the Office of Sustainability to implement forestry-protecting programs.

Delaney Barber, outreach, energy and climate coordinator, said the organization is currently just monitoring the Indianapolis project.

In order for the program to be successful, Barber said, it should improve or add to urban green spaces in order to increase the amount of land in the city that absorbs carbon dioxide. •