

May 8, 2025

Dear Ms. Cato, Ms. Rupkey, and Commissioner Terry,

Thank you for your ongoing support of environmental initiatives in DeKalb County. Partnerships like this make it possible for Wylde Center to continue connecting children to nature. Wylde Center is pleased to share more information about our work in sustainability and environmental education.

Attached to this letter you will find an organizational summary, program description, program budget, and demographic information. Additionally, we enclosed our 2024 Impact Snapshot.

For an in depth understanding of our work, I extend an invitation for you and your staff to tour our recently renovated headquarters at the Oakhurst Community Garden. Since the completion of the renovation, even more students can enjoy exploring the outdoors through our field trips and the return of summer camps.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by phone at 404.371.1920 or email at jennifer@wyldecenter.org. I always welcome the chance to chat and share more about Wylde Center's community impact.

Sincerely



Jennifer Gerndt, Ph.D
Executive Director



PROPOSAL

PREPARED FOR:

Commissioner Edward “Ted” Terry
District 6

Mission and Vision

Wylde Center's mission is to support resilient communities by connecting people to nature through environmental education and public greenspace. Wylde Center provides communities with opportunities to connect with the natural world and appreciate its value now and in the future. We accomplish this through 1) Urban greenspace conservation and native habitat restoration in order to provide communities with access to nature in the neighborhoods where they live, 2) Environmental and science education programs for school-aged children, with a focus on under-resourced communities lacking access to greenspace, school enrichment programs, and/or fresh fruits and vegetables, and 3) Community gardening and sustainability education programs to foster a deeper understanding of environmental needs, community resilience, and the importance of biodiversity.

Established in 1997 as the Oakhurst Community Garden Project, the organization was founded as a space to garden, grow food, and experience nature in an urban environment, enhancing the lives of Decatur residents. Rebranded in 2012, today Wylde Center serves and improves the quality of life for the wider metro-Atlanta community with extensive educational programs that serve school-age children and beyond, public events that foster learning about and caring for the environment, and seven acres of public gardens for everyone to enjoy year-round at no charge.

With a focus on increasing equity, inclusion, and access to our gardens and programs, Wylde Center's vision is to lead communities in building resilience by fostering environmental stewardship, providing experiences in nature within the city, increasing exposure to locally grown food, and building skills in sustainable living.

Core Programs:

The following core programs occur on a year-round basis, following both the growing seasons and school calendars.

1. Urban greenspace conservation and native habitat restoration

Wylde Center manages five urban gardens and greenspaces in DeKalb County, preserving over 7 acres of land: Oakhurst Garden in Oakhurst (Decatur), Hawk Hollow in Kirkwood (Atlanta), Edgewood Garden in Edgewood (Atlanta), Sugar Creek Garden in Oakhurst (Decatur), and Mulberry Fields in Candler Park (Atlanta). Wylde Center's management of these greenspaces is coupled with impactful, hands-on environmental education for adults and youth, conservation efforts, demonstrations in the gardens, and community food production. Urban

greenspace conservation is critical to increasing biodiversity that is threatened by urban over-development.

2. Environmental science education for youth

Wylde Center has one of the largest environmental education programs in our region. Our programs reach school-aged children, with a focus on communities where youth lack access to outdoor recreation, and fresh fruits and vegetables. 70% of our youth program participants attend Title 1 schools with more than 90% qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Program activities include in-school learning and afterschool programs, as well as field trips and schoolbreak camps at Wylde Center greenspaces. Learning is rooted in STEAM curricula, designed to increase student knowledge in the fields of science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics as it relates to the environment. Additionally, our Farm to School program in the Atlanta and Decatur schools continues to be a leader in the field. Programs are accessible and abundant, culminating in over 20,000 student interactions each year at Wylde Center gardens and 20+ schools across metro Atlanta.

3. Community gardening and sustainability education for all

Wylde Center is a leader in metro-Atlanta for its robust community gardening and education programs. Wylde Center offers life-long learning opportunities to build environmental awareness, promote sustainability, support community gardening, and connect members of the public with biodiversity of the natural world. Through available community garden plots, engaging public events, hands-on workshops, and meaningful opportunities to volunteer, community members gain knowledge and skills in sustainable living. We offer nature and gardening programs for families, nature enthusiasts, and the curious novice. These programs bring value to the five greenspaces we manage, while also providing programs that reinforce gardening, having fun in nature, sustainable living, and environmental science.

Geography and Demographics:

Wylde Center's community programs serve 20,000 people annually from the metro-Atlanta region, primarily DeKalb County, including programs in affordable housing communities, under-resourced communities, and schools with 90%+ free and reduced lunch. Farm to School in APS serves nine Title 1 schools with over 90%+ of students on free or reduced lunch and 72% of students identifying as Black/African-American. Over the course of a school year, more than 3,000 K-12 students will visit one of Wylde Center's greenspaces and gardens for a standards-based field trip. Wylde Center afterschool programs serve the children

living in affordable housing communities [Decatur Housing Authority (DHA) and Amani Place apartments in Atlanta] where 100% of residents are low-income. Both Amani Place Apartments and DHA are in food deserts as defined by the USDA as located in a "low-income census tract where more than 100 housing units do not have a vehicle and are more than ½ mile from the nearest supermarket." Seven of nine of the schools participating in Farm to School are likewise located in a food desert.

DeKalb County Partnership Proposal

With \$5,000 in funding, Wylde Center will be able to support the education program's summer camps. This includes acquiring new materials such as yarn, construction paper, cyanotype paper, natural paints, paint brushes, owl pellets, soil tests kits, and healthy snacks. It also includes a small portion of educator time. Wylde Center summer camp programs are attended by approximately 70 children, including 10% scholarship recipients.

We believe every child deserves the chance to explore, discover, and fall in love with the natural world. Our nature camps offer a truly immersive outdoor experience, designed to connect children with the wonders of nature in fun, meaningful ways. Camps offer unplugged adventure, where screens are replaced by towering trees, buzzing bees, and endless skies. With five unique greenspaces to explore — Hawk Hollow Garden, Sugar Creek Garden, Oakhurst Garden, Edgewood + Coan Gardens, and Mulberry Fields Garden — campers will embark on exciting adventures in some of the most beautiful natural settings in DeKalb County. Each site offers unique ecosystems and experiences, from wildlife observation and plant discovery to open fields perfect for outdoor games and exploration.

Through hands-on activities, children will engage in arts and crafts inspired by nature, learn skills like shelter building and gardening, and develop confidence as they deepen their connection to the environment. Our camps foster curiosity, resilience, and a lifelong appreciation for the great outdoors. With endless adventures across our five greenspaces, Wylde Center camps are the perfect way to connect, explore, and thrive under the open sky.

Funds will be used in the following ways:

- \$3,150, Educator staff (150 hours at \$21/hour)
- \$600, Art supplies (paint, specialty paper, etc.)
- \$800, Garden supplies (soil test kits, owl pellets, small tools, etc.)
- \$450, Cooking supplies (kitchen tools, healthy ingredients)