In late June, the city contracted with a nearby landscaping company, Pine Valley Contracting, Inc. from Savannah, to complete the tree planting package associated with the overall Blacksnake Creek Stormwater Separation Improvement Project. By next summer, a total of 1,185 trees will be planted along Maple Leaf Parkway, Corby Parkway, Northwest Parkway, Northeast Parkway, Remington Nature Center, Heritage Park and other locations in northern St. Joseph.

As of mid-October, over 880 trees have already been planted. The trees range in size from 6-inch whips to 2.5-inch caliper trees standing over eight feet tall. The trees come from Marshall Trees & Nursery in Kearney, with varieties that include six species of oaks, 11 species of maples, three species of elm, birch, cypress, lilac, five species of crabapple along with others. Apple and peach trees will be planted near the Second Harvest Food Bank.

Once the trees are planted, Pine Valley Contracting, Inc. will care for them for the next year. Each tree will be mulched, staked and watered. At the end of the year of maintenance, the city will accept the trees and take over maintenance of them.

The largest concentration of trees will be planted at Northside Complex and along the recently realigned Northwest Parkway and Karnes Road. In this area alone, over 190 trees will be planted. By using larger 2.5-inch caliper trees, the plantings look as if they have been there for years, with some of the maples already adding fall color.

Pine Valley Contracting, Inc. will also be installing several bioretention cells along the new trail extending along the old railroad corridor from Northside Complex to south of the Second Harvest Food Bank. Each bioretention cell will be excavated to a depth of three feet. Next, an underdrain system will be installed and surrounded with drainage rock. Above the rock, a special bioretention soil mixture will be placed. Finally, native plant plugs such as Swamp Milkweed and Little Bluestem will be installed. Each bioretention cell will capture stormwater runoff and filter any pollutants before releasing the water to the recently constructed stormwater conveyance, which ultimately flows to the Missouri River.

The tree planting package is a small component of the larger Blacksnake Creek Stormwater Separation Improvement Project. The main objective is to remove pollutants from our waterways to protect public health and water quality. Currently during rainstorms, rainwater overwhelms the combined stormwater and wastewater sewer system. If the city is unable to treat the increased stormwater, then untreated sewage can bypass the treatment plant and overflow to the Missouri River. State and federal regulations require the city to reduce the frequency and volume of sewage overflowing to the Missouri River as part of a national effort to clean up our nation’s waterways.

Once online, the new tunnel system will eliminate two million gallons of dry weather flows from going to the treatment plant every day in addition to storm events. Separating the Blacksnake Creek flows from the combined sewer system will reduce treatment and maintenance costs and reduce the amount of sewage overflows to the Missouri River. The overall goal for the project is good for the economy and good for the environment.