

Policy Development and Urban Design

Land Use and Natural Systems

Meeting Summary

August 26, 2015

10 AM to Noon

Rm. 3107, City Hall, 110 Laurier Avenue West

Topic: Significant Woodlands: Scoping of Issues and Questions

Chair: Nick Stow

In Attendance: Nick Stow (City), Marica Clarke (City), Martha Copestake (City), Graham Saul (Ecology Ottawa), Josee Brizard (SNCA), Matt Leblanc (SNCA), Mike Yee (RVCA), Eva Katic (National Capital Commission), James Brown (National Capital Commission), Erwin Dreessen (Greenspace Alliance), Owen Clarkin (Greenspace Alliance)

- 1) The participants introduced themselves. Nick summarized the purpose of the meeting:
 - a) To scope the issues of concern for the City and the environmental stakeholders with respect to significant woodlands policies.
 - b) To identify issues and questions that should be raised in discussions between the City and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF).
- 2) Agenda. There were no changes to the agenda. However, the participants acknowledged that the discussion would like stray from the sequence of items in the agenda.
- 3) Nick summarized the reasons why the City is reviewing its significant woodland policies:
 - a) To bring the City's Official Plan policies into conformity with the Provincial Policy Statement 2014 (PPS).
 - b) To resolve issues that have arisen in the application of the significant woodland policies to urban expansion study areas.
 - c) To consider the implications of the significant woodlands policies for other related Official Plan policies and strategic initiatives.
- 4) Nick described some linkages to parallel or complementary initiatives
 - a) Greenspace Master Plan (GMP)
 - b) Urban Forest Management Strategy (UFMS)
 - c) Building Better and Smarter Suburbs (BBSS)
 - d) Urban Natural Features Strategy
 - e) Street Tree Manual
- 5) Nick described some of the preliminary, high level options for significant woodlands:
 - a) Do nothing
 - b) Blanket adoption of Natural Heritage Reference Manual 2010 (NHRM) criteria

- c) Segregated significant woodlands definitions and policies (*e.g.* rural, agricultural, urban expansion study areas, urban expansion candidate areas, existing urban/villages)
- d) Rural only. Urban through the GMP and UFMS.
- e) Complete natural heritage system review and revision
- 6) Stakeholder comments and concerns (*organized by theme, not order of discussion*)
 - a) Provincial Policy Statement and Natural Heritage Reference Manual guidelines for significant woodlands
 - Greenspace Alliance. The Province says that “local factors” can be considered in the identification of significant woodlands. The City should ask the MNRF what this means. City comment: we currently do not identify significant woodlands in the urban area, but identify an urban greenspace network instead. We need to ask the MNR if we need a more explicit reference to urban significant woodlands.
 - Greenspace Alliance. The PPS sets a minimum standard for protection, not a maximum standard. Municipalities have the ability to go beyond the PPS in protection natural heritage. Ottawa should do so. The PPS establishes Council as the primary decisions maker on these issues, and the OMB should be respecting Council’s authority and decisions.
 - Greenspace Alliance. Given the extent of forest loss, all woodlands should be considered significant.
 - Greenspace Alliance. The NHRM criteria require further work to allow proper implementation: *e.g.* establishing thresholds for many of the criteria, clarifying the meaning of some terms (what is “edge” with respect to interior forest?), how will adjacent lands be defined, what is meant by “no negative impact”, etc....
 - Greenspace Alliance. We advise against Option D. Deferring the issue of significant woodlands to the Urban Forest Management Strategy would be to rely upon a strategy that hasn’t yet been written, let alone approved by Council or translated into policy.
 - Greenspace Alliance. The significant woodland criteria should consider conservation of genetic diversity of native tree species, especially those adapted to areas south of the Canadian Shield. Due to the extent of forest loss in Southern Ontario, the genetic pool for many species has been substantially depleted.
 - b) Forest Cover Targets
 - All participants. Does the City have forest cover targets?
 - Answer: yes, a target of 30% forest cover city-wide (both urban and rural), 16 to 20% of urban lands in publicly accessible greenspace (includes non-natural areas) or 4 ha per 1000 population in the urban area, and 100% of residential households within 400 m of publicly-accessible greenspace.
 - When last measured in 2011, the City had approximately 32% forest cover city-wide and 20% forest cover in the urban area, including the Greenbelt.

- One question for consideration in the Urban Forest Management Strategy is whether the City should continue with a forest cover target, or focus more on best practices.
- Follow-up question: is the City reporting on these targets? Answer: we have reported on forest cover under Council Strategic Initiatives, but not consistently.
- Ecology Ottawa. We don't want forest cover to become a moving target.
- National Capital Commission. Didn't the Air Quality and Climate Change Management Plan set higher forest cover targets?
 - Answer. No, the AQCCMP uses the 30% forest cover target, but notes that the 20% forest cover for the urban area falls short of this target. It recommends a "no net loss" of forest, wetlands and grasslands.
- c) National Capital Greenbelt
 - National Capital Commission and the Greenspace Alliance. The Greenbelt should not be counted toward the City's urban forest cover targets.
- d) Building Better and Smarter Suburbs
 - Ecology Ottawa. This initiative will highlight the inherent conflict between increased intensification and conservation of greenspace.
 - National Capital Commission. The City's desire for greater intensification and land use efficiencies should not assume that the need for recreational opportunities can be met by Greenbelt lands. It shouldn't push recreational uses and user on to the Greenbelt.
 - National Capital Commission. BBSS should provide an opportunity to evaluation how significant woodland policies would work in the urban area. It will be a "litmus test" of conservation planning in an urban context.
- e) Clay Soil Policies
 - Greenspace Alliance. The City should consider expanding its list of approved species for clay soils. There should be more native species that would be suitable. Also, the City should be more careful in the selection of non-native species. For example, both Amur Maple and Japanese lilac are considered by some experts to be invasive species.
- f) Other Comments
 - RVCA. Once a development is proposed within a significant woodland, we have already lost the battle. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is really a justification for clearing part or all of a woodland. We need to, "get out of the EIS box."
 - RVCA. Can we create incentives for developers to retain woodlots?
 - RVCA. Can we focus more on the valued environmental benefits and ecological functions of woodlots?
 - RVCA. In terms of technical application of evaluation criteria, dealing with interior forest is always a challenge. Almost every development, even small ones, tends to reduce interior forest.
 - Ecology Ottawa. Please join Ecology Ottawa for our September 16 event, "Vancouver's Green Revolution Comes to Ottawa."
- 7) Next Steps
 - a) Meeting with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry in early September.

- b) Completion and posting of a discussion paper.
- c) More targeted consultation on the discussion paper.