



Protecting & Growing an Ottawa Urban Tree Canopy for Generations to Come

Input to Phase 1 Consultations, Urban Forest Management Plan

From the Tree Task Force

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Inputs from

Ecology Ottawa

Tree Ottawa

Members of Champlain Oaks

Members of Big Trees of Kitchissippi

Members of Community Association Forum for Environmental Sustainability

Members of Federation of Citizens Associations

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Our Expectation of Scope of the Urban Forest Management Plan

We applaud the City for the initiative and commitment to developing an Urban Forest Management Plan.

As we understand it, the “Urban Forest” refers to all trees within the urban boundary as defined in the Official Plan, whether they are on public, commercial, residential, or private lands.

Ottawa’s forest cleans our air, improves the health of our residents, beautifies our communities, and overall improves our quality of life.

The Urban Forest Management Plan should have 100 year time horizon – the life-cycle of a long-lived tree. We are making 100 year investments and look to plant, nurture and protect our trees to live for 100 years. The life-expectancy of trees planted by the City of Ottawa should increase as a result of the actions coming out of the Plan.

The Plan should:

- *sustain and create a tree-canopy of large and tall trees. This means paying particular attention to protecting established trees that make up the current canopy.*
- *create and sustain an urban forest that is diversified, healthy and resilient to the challenges of the urban environment, and able to withstand the challenges of climate change.*
- *enable a community that is engaged, with a culture, knowledge and awareness that advocates for trees.*
- *affirm laws that safeguard space for trees and protect trees, and the effective enforcement of these laws.*
- *recommend best technical practices to guide the planting, nurturing and protection of trees and forest, drawing on experience not only in North America, but also in Europe and Japan, where there are examples of thriving centuries-old urban forests and successful institutional arrangements to safeguard and sustain these heritage trees.*
- *think through and make recommendations relating to the institutions and internal urban planning and development processes relating to tree and urban forest outcomes in Ottawa, including Complete Streets, Infill policies and infrastructure life-cycle renewal projects.*
- *be ecologically grounded; looking to provide guidance in an ecosystem perspective, make recommendations for urban planning processes that protect and sustain healthy ecological spaces in the urban area, and take stock of storm water management, wetlands and wildlife relations.*
- *provide an economic valuation rationale for budgetary outlays and investments in forestry and green infrastructure.*

Our Policy Proposals

1. Know What We Have

We need to know the current status of Ottawa's Urban Forest to be able to set priorities for its management and demonstrate its value.

- a. Take a baseline inventory of the status, including risk assessment, of the existing urban forest in Ottawa on public, park and private land, including large/tall trees and trees of natural heritage value
- b. Establish baselines for measure(s) of the urban canopy and status quo life-expectancies of trees planted by forest services in different urban environments (parks, side street trees, main street trees, etc.)
- c. Perform an economic valuation of the benefits of Ottawa's urban forest, including annual ecological and financial benefits to the City from fruits and nuts, wood, and wildlife habitat.
- d. Undertake a critical assessment of current urban development policies and practices driving the loss of the urban forest canopy

2. Create Clear Targets and Expected Outcomes

The plan must have clear, measurable, and realistic goals and expected results. This will allow future management corrective actions and improvements in the Plan. It will also create the conditions for the public to hold the City accountable on the success of the plan.

- a. Develop an urban forest monitoring program with a focused set of performance indicators with associated targets
- b. The urban area should have a target tree canopy cover of 30% as per the Official Plan, from which there should be no net loss in tree cover once achieved
- c. Fully integrate urban forest canopy targets into the City's climate change plan

3. Engage and Educate the Public

The City should encourage public involvement and education, as our forest benefits all Ottawa's residents, whether they own land with trees or not. Education, communication and public engagement is necessary to motivate and inform the public, as well as to generate a culture of long term appreciation of the urban forest and support for its maintenance and management.

- a. Involve the public in the plan's development and implementation, including monitoring activities through a Citizen Science approach to data collection and analysis
- b. Increase public and private awareness of the ecological, commercial, economic, psychological, and health benefits of Ottawa's urban forest and correct widespread misunderstandings about conflicts between trees, buildings and infrastructure.
- c. Make the results of the monitoring program publicly available



4. **Manage Trees over their Whole Lifetime**

Too often, trees are planted and then ignored, and bylaws protecting existing trees are not enforced. Trees are a form of green infrastructure requiring maintenance just like other infrastructure.

- a. Adopt a 'dust to dust', 'seed to old-growth' or 'life-cycle' approach to trees and ensure that when trees are planted, they will be monitored and cared for over their whole lifetime and have adequate space for root and canopy development.
- b. Ensure that City trees have adequate budgets for maintenance costs.

5. **Improve Resilience through Diversity**

A lack of diversity leaves the forest vulnerable to climate change, diseases, and pests like the Emerald Ash Borer, and native species support local ecosystems.

- a. Plant native tree species and protect existing trees, to ensure that there is a diversity of ages and species of trees across neighborhoods and the city as a whole; and ensuring that there is no more than 5% of one tree species, 10% of one genus, and 20% of one family.
- b. Appropriately protect against invasive species (including through awareness raising)
- c. Divide the existing tree tender to promote the use of local tree seed sources and indigenous forest genetic diversity
- d. Plan for the long-term availability of a diversity of local supply for public and private buyers, using procurement tools and incentives such as longer term contracts and public-private partnerships as appropriate.

6. **"Take Back the Streets"**

The City must create strong policy incentives to plant and preserve trees on the streetscape (private yards and City right of way)

- a. Create mandatory standards for underground growing space volumes to allow trees to share the subsurface with infrastructure
- b. Modify the Trees in Trust Program so that replacement of city trees is done automatically, and not only upon residents request, and replacing trees with trees of equal or greater stature in order to grow the canopy, and implementing this administrative change retroactively i.e. replacing the trees that have been lost and not replaced over the past decade.
- c. Ensure that viable street trees are part of infill development and complete streets policies.



7. Integrate the Urban Forest Management Plan within the City's other Plans and Strategies

The City of Ottawa has many policies, programs, initiatives and regulations related to trees but is lacking a comprehensive, long-term vision and strategic direction for protecting and enhancing the urban forest.

- a. Identify all the areas where management of the urban forest overlaps existing plans, policies, guidelines and strategies. Examples include the "Design with Nature" component of the Official Plan, the recognition of the urban forest as a key component of urban community character during the Infill I and II consultations, the measures adopted by Council on May 9, 2012, which if implemented, would aid in protecting, preserving and enhancing the urban forest, and the references to tree protection, preservation and enhancement in *Design Guidelines*.

8. Make Trees an Enforcement Priority

Trees have long been given low priority in municipal decision-making, and are treated as incidental to new construction, hydro, and infrastructure. Enforcement of tree-related by-laws must be improved to ensure that developers design and build to preserve existing trees whenever possible and create space for the growth of new trees. To do so,

- a. Require that tree information be disclosed on building permits so that Forestry Services can consider trees before, not after, the approval of building permits.
- b. Rapidly develop a site alteration by-law to avoid unnecessary loss of trees
- c. Require that every new subdivision have a care and nurturing plan for the trees to replace those removed during building, and that every homeowner be given a copy of the plan

Immediate Actions

The City needs to create momentum and demonstrate willingness to implement pro-active changes to urban development policies and practices that will better preserve and protect Ottawa's Urban Forest.

Many of the above elements are immediately actionable and should not need to wait for completion of the Urban Forest Management Plan.



Our Expectation of Consultative Process for the Urban Forest Management Plan

There are knowledgeable and experienced tree and urban forest advocates in Ottawa, and a general public very concerned about the losses experienced in recent years. The consultative process for Ottawa's Urban Forest Management Plan should seek to capitalize on this interest, expertise and willingness to engage on tree and urban forestry issues. We would look for a consultative process that includes the following three stages and characteristics:

1. Scoping phase – Fall/Winter 2015
 - Listening to Ottawans: open to public and stakeholder organizations; invitation is wide and with adequate notice, inputs and suggestions received are documented.
 - Learning and documenting status quo in Ottawa: urban development policies and practices driving the loss of urban forests, tree-related by-laws, base-line inventory on public, park, private, NCC, provincial land, enforcement, health of urban forest, challenges, vulnerability & risks, etc.; input from different relevant departments in City, creating inventory of current documents relating to urban forest management in Ottawa.
 - Learning and documenting best practice elsewhere: technical literature review, peer outreach to cities around the world (not only northern North America); creating and sharing reference list and experts interviewed.
2. Design phase – Spring/Summer 2016
 - Proposed Plan Outline, building blocks/chapters of the Plan, expected outcomes and implementation of Plan: open public consultation with discussion in spirit of openness as document is not approved, set or fixed; invitation wide and with adequate notice, documentation of inputs and suggestions received.
3. Validation – Fall 2016
 - Share draft Urban Forest Management Plan using public electronic platform, and creating a moderated virtual forum where reactions and suggestions are shared.
 - Stakeholder workshop on implementation recommendations where community, experts, Forestry Services and other implicated city departments are consulted.

