

Outlook for Greenspace Issues with the newly elected Council

City Council will be called upon in the next term of Council to deal with a number of policies, by-laws and plans concerning greenspace in Ottawa. The Urban Forest Management Plan will need to be funded through budget appropriations, the Site Alteration By-law, adopted by the current Council, will be reviewed in two years to evaluate its effectiveness. The Urban Tree Conservation Bylaw will be updated and the Official Plan 5-year review will provide an opportunity to review the Greenspace Masterplan, which has not been updated since 2003.

In its recent survey of candidates for City Council, the Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital asked specific questions on each of these issues, seeking to ascertain where the prospective councillors stood on these issues. This report focuses only on the candidates who were actually elected to Council.

Eleven of the 23 elected councillors participated in the survey. Five of the seven new councillors responded, with only Jenna Sudds and Laura Dudas missing, while six of the incumbent councillors also responded. They are Mathieu Fleury, Tobi Nussbaum, Catherine McKenney, Jeff Leiper, Riley Brockington and Stephen Blais.

Urban Forest Management Plan

This 20 year plan, made up five 4-year slices, was approved by the current council. However, funding to undertake the activities identified in the plan needs to be secured on an annual basis. Candidates were asked:

Funding of the UMFP has only been approved by council for the first year. If elected, will you support the funding of years two, three, and four of the Urban Forest Management Plan?

All eleven participating councillors responded in the affirmative. This issue was also considered the most important by respondents so there seems to be very good prospects for continued full funding of this plan in the next term of Council.

Site Alteration By-law

In its adoption of the Site Alteration By-Law, the current Council directed staff to report back two years on its effectiveness in preventing site alterations that are deleterious to drainage, soils and vegetation cover. Candidates were asked:

The by-law will come back to council in two years to assess how well it has been working. The current method of enforcement is a complaint based system. The City of Ottawa is the only municipality in Ontario with a Site Alteration by-law that does not include a permit based system. As an elected official, would you consider moving from a complaint based system (after the fact) to a permit based system (in advance)?

Ten of the eleven responding councillors indicated that they were open to considering a permit system to ensure compliance with the by-law, with only Councillor Blais disagreeing. It should be noted however that candidates for rural wards were less likely to support a permit system.

Significant Woodland Policy

The Significant Woodland Policy was adopted by the current Council through an Official Plan Amendment. It sets out the rules for recognizing woodlands that are significant in urban and rural areas, according to criteria that are suited to each. The question asked:

This policy (OPA 179) is under appeal and may return to council for consideration in 2019. As an elected official will you support the approval of the current Significant Woodland Policy?

All eleven responding councillors expressed support for the current policy. This bodes well for maintaining the spirit of the policy should it need to be redrafted as a result of the appeal decision.

Tree Conservation By-Law

One of the activities foreseen in the Urban Forest Management Plan is a review of the Tree Conservation By-Law. This review has already been undertaken by staff and will come to Council for consideration in the new term. The review is an opportunity to deal with a number of shortcomings in the current By-law. Some key ones were identified by environmental organizations, including the Greenspace Alliance, and recommendations were made to staff through the stakeholder consultations. The views of candidates on these recommendations were tested in the following questions:

Extend the scope of the By-law to trees of 20 cm in diameter, down from 30 cm

Ten of the eleven responding councillors agreed with extending the scope of the bylaw. Respondents in rural areas were less likely to agree, including Councillor Blais.

Expand and clarify the definition of Distinctive Trees

Nine of the eleven responding councillors agreed while councillor Blais disagreed and Councillor Brockington skipped the question.

Significantly increase penalties for breaching the By-law

All eleven responding councillors agreed with this measure.

Greenspace Master Plan

The Official Plan will be reviewed during the next term of Council, including the Greenspace Master Plan, which has not been updated since 2003. As an elected official, would you support the greenspace objectives set out in the Greenspace Master Plan and Official Plan?

Ten of the eleven responding councillors support the objectives laid out in the Greenspace Master Plan, with Councillor Blais skipping the question.

Conclusion

Based on these responses, it would seem that there is sufficient support on Council for the greenspace issues addressed in the questionnaire to get a full and favourable hearing over the next term of council.