

GA Delegation, Environment and Climate Change Committee, June 20, 2023
Update on the Urban Forest Management Plan

We welcome this first report on the status of the UFMP at the end of its first four-year planning period. We offer these comments on the report itself, both in terms of content and on substance.

First, a report such as this one, which is focused on process and the internal functioning of the plan, while necessary, needs to be accompanied by an outwardly focused report on the state of the urban forest itself. Even if the information is at this time incomplete, the report must somehow take note of and give account of major external events that have put pressure on the urban forest. The 2022 derecho, the 2023 ice storm and continuing development pressure must be acknowledged and addressed in terms of their impact on urban canopy cover and tree inventory.

A major development over the planning period was the adoption of the tree protection bylaw in 2021. While qualitative statements are made as to the efficacy of the bylaw, the report would benefit from concrete examples and data on the impact of the bylaw. How many distinctive trees were preserved, how many permits to remove them granted? How many fines were levied for contravening the bylaw? How many large developments were assessed under Part 4 of the bylaw (Trees on private property larger than 1 hectare), how many Tree Conservation Reports were processed, and what percentage of tree cover was conserved in those large developments? Even if this type of data has not yet been completely developed, specific examples of the operation of the bylaw under its different parts would be instructive. How the bylaw failed should also be reported on, a case in point being the Tewin deforestation. A loss of this magnitude during the reporting period should not pass under silence. Steps taken to address the shortcomings of the bylaw should also be reported upon.

Another major development over the planning period was the adoption of a new Official Plan, with new policies directly relevant to the UFMP. In particular the commitment to developing a new Urban Forest and Greenspace Masterplan, which would provide a policy anchor for the UFMP, is critical to its sustainability. The lack of progress in this regard and the steps taken to address it should be included in this report.

We understand that external weather shocks, the pandemic and senior management turmoil and turnover have had a significant impact on the City's ability to carry out all of the planned activities over the reporting period. Given the importance of the plan and its exposure to all these pressures, it would be wise to institute annual reporting to this Committee on progress made and obstacles encountered so as to make adjustments and keep on track.

We strongly support the UFMP and believe it is key to the development of a healthy and sustainable urban forest. We urge you to keep it high in your priorities and to fund it appropriately through the budget process and otherwise.

