



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

Input to Phase 2 Consultations, Urban Forest Management Plan

From the Tree Task Force

November 22, 2016

Inputs from

Ecology Ottawa

Tree Ottawa

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Members of Big Trees of Kitchissippi

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Introduction

We warmly welcome the opportunity to provide input to the Phase 2 Consultations on the Draft Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP). The following comments are organized around the 8 policy recommendations made by this group in a document dated November 24, 2015 and submitted to the City of Ottawa.

Overall assessment

The member organizations of the Tree Task Force are overall quite appreciative that the City has sensibly taken into account its input in the development of the Urban Forest Management Plan. We are hopeful that it will lay the foundation for the effective long term management of the Urban Forest, one of its, if not the most, precious green assets. We would point out however that the notion of asset is one of the gaps or lack of emphasis in the draft plan. There is little that addresses the economic value of the urban forest, and the treatment of green infrastructure on a par with other city assets is lacking. We are also concerned that the mechanics of monitoring the status of the urban forest is not spelled out and seems to be taken as a given. The plan will stand or fail on an effective monitoring function, adequately resourced, so it is important that it be specifically addressed. This brings us to our last concern, the lack of a price tag for the overall plan. While all the recommendations are tagged as being funded within existing resources or requiring additional funding, there is no dollar value assigned, even notionally. It would give us comfort, and we would think also assist the decision makers, to see even notional dollar costs associated with the specific recommendations. Doing so would make the UFMP seem more like a real, realizable plan and less like a set of good ideas.

1. Know What We Have

Addressed by Recommendations #3, #4, #18

We are pleased that the City of Ottawa is planning a baseline inventory and risk assessment of the status of Ottawa's Urban Forest within the management period of 2017-18. We think that the self-assessment of the current situation by City staff and the consultants may be overly optimistic, but recognize that data availability presents limitations. Therefore we welcome the work that is planned to collect further data on the canopy and on private property. In addition to the criteria and indicators for the baseline assessment provided in the plan we suggest the following be added:

- Life-expectancy of trees planted by the City in different urban environments (parks, side streets, main streets, etc.)
- Economic valuation of the benefits of Ottawa's urban forest, including annual ecological and financial benefits to the City and residents.
- Attention to human and wildlife uses of fruit, nuts, wood and habitat created by trees.

We also encourage the City to be more proactive about engaging citizens in the baseline inventory, especially with respect to trees on private property. This could involve a much earlier than planned

public engagement process that lays out how community tree inventories can be feed into the City-managed tree inventory process.

2. Create Clear Targets and Expected Outcomes

Addressed by Recommendation #3

Appendix 2, Criteria and Indicators, V1 - V7, M1 - M3

The draft UFMP has proposed an urban forest monitoring program which includes key objectives, indicators and targets. In our view, even though they are purposely so, the objectives and targets are too general. A more explicit performance measurement framework is needed with more precisely defined objectives and targets. For example, we believe the plan should maintain *the* canopy cover target of 30% overall, despite not having a precise current measurement. Moreover, the equitable distribution of the canopy cover, a principle we strongly support, should provide specific canopy cover targets in all parts of the city to avoid “canopy deserts” in some areas.

While the adaptive management approach proposed depends on continuous monitoring, the plan does not specifically address the nature and characteristics of the monitoring system that will be used. How will the tree inventory be maintained? How will threats be identified and recorded? What is the role of the residents in monitoring the status of the urban forest? There should be an explicit description and costing of the urban forest monitoring system.

3. Engage and Educate the Public

Addressed by Recommendations #24, #25, #26, #27, #28

While comprehensive and appropriate, our view is that the draft plan’s proposal to act upon engaging the public starting in the 2nd Management Period only is much too late to be effective or meaningful. It should be started in the 1st Management Period. Best practice for urban forest policy development and implementation (for example, Vancouver) is to establish strong and immediate avenues for community action early in the process.

4. Manage Trees over their Whole Lifetime

Addressed by Recommendation #12, #13, #16

These recommendations will help ensure that trees are managed over their whole lifetime, which we strongly support.

5. Improve Resilience through Diversity

Addressed by Recommendations #21, #22

Criteria and indicator V4

The draft UFMP rates tree diversity as “moderate” in the City of Ottawa, an assessment of the current situation we consider overly optimistic. We propose increasing the diversity to promote resilience of the tree population while protecting and maintaining existing native tree species. Recommendation 21, which deals with nursery stock, should be further strengthened to change the tender process to favour

locally sourced seed and local growers. The goal should be to ensure the conservation of locally adapted forest genetic diversity and stimulate development of local tree businesses and expertise for both public and private buyers.

Even though Guiding Principle #7 deals specifically with the importance of large trees, there is no specific recommendation regarding the special measures that need to be taken to foster and maintain them. A separate recommendation under the section “Maintaining and growing the urban forest” should be added calling for establishment of a Heritage Tree Program to recognize and protect trees with significant Natural Heritage value.

6. “Take Back the Streets”

Addressed by Recommendations #9, #10

The City of Ottawa has created policies for preserving trees within the downtown areas of the city at a broad level. In our view the plan needs to also call for higher technical standards for infrastructure affecting underground space for tree development. We also recommend more urgent steps be taken to develop better solutions for urban hardscapes and infill areas, and for emergency responses to periods of extended drought affecting newly planted City trees. As regards the infill policy, it is our understanding that it supersedes all other city plans and policies. If that is the case, we believe this must be changed to ensure its requirements do not supersede the UFMP.

The draft UFMP should also address the modification of the Trees in Trust Program so that replacement of city trees is done automatically and not only upon residents’ request. It should also require replacing trees with trees of equal or greater stature in order to grow the canopy. We believe this administrative change should be implemented retroactively i.e. replacing the trees that have been lost and not replaced over the past decade.

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

Addressed by Recommendations #2, #5, #6, #8, #11, #29

The UFMP contains many observations and recommendations regarding the need to integrate the UFMP within the broader framework of City plans and policies. However, it takes the form of many individual recommendations, such as those listed under this heading, in the absence of a high level view of how it all fits together. We believe it would be worthwhile to lay out in specific terms the connections and interdependencies between and among all of these policy instruments. All of the following come to mind:

- a. The integration of the UFMP and the City’s Climate Change program is not addressed, and should be.
- b. The positive linkages between a healthy urban forest and healthy human population should also be established by integrating the UFMP with the Human Services Plan addressing Public Health.
- c. In Ottawa's Official Plan and Management Plans, Secondary Plans and CDP's, numerous policies recognise the links between the environment, biodiversity, and human health. The following is a list of Plans and Strategies with which the UFMP needs to be integrated: Official Plan;

Greenspace Master Plan; Transportation Master Plan; Infrastructure Master Plan; Ottawa Cycling Plan; Ottawa Pedestrian Plan; Environmental Strategy; (Parks and Recreation Master Plan to be developed); Air Quality and Climate Change Management Plan; Human Services Plan; Investment Strategy for Sustainable Economic Prosperity (a Strategic Objective of which is *Inclusive and Sustainable Communities* – The City will strive to balance business prosperity with social equity, environmental responsibility and cultural expression.) The UFMP must be integrated with these plans and strategies.

8. Make Trees an Enforcement Priority

Recommendation #7

Important steps have been taken to enforce the Municipal Trees and Natural Areas Protection By-law and the Urban Tree Conservation By-law following adoption of policy changes by the City Council on May 9, 2012. The City has implemented a new Infill and Urban Trees Conservation Program which requires Tree Disclosure Information on the grading plan submissions for Building Permits, and a \$700 refundable deposit to replace trees that are lost due to development. This will be helpful in protecting trees on the subject property when only a Building Permit (no severances, no minor variances) is required. Trees on abutting properties will also have some protection. Vegetation protection measures will be incorporated into the Site Alteration Bylaw currently under development.

The draft UFMP should acknowledge this progress but also call for better integration of tree permitting with the Committee of Adjustment process. In particular, changes are needed to ensure that the Committee of Adjustment has the tree disclosure information that it needs in order to make its Decisions on Applications for Severances and Minor Variances related to renovations and infill projects. At present, the Urban Tree Conservation By-law cites Committee of Adjustment approval as sufficient reason to obtain a permit to remove a tree, an administrative oversight that weakens CoA rulings. Note that trees and greenspace have long been recognised by the CofA and the OMB as significant contributors to community character and are factored into their Decisions, but only if tree permits have not already been granted. The next step is to finish implementing the process changes passed in 2012, to ensure that the Committee of Adjustment has the information it needs to make appropriate decisions.