

Response to Councillor Enquiry – Forestry Operations

Date:	January 30, 2008
To:	Budget Committee
From:	General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

To report as requested on the issues raised in a November 5, 2007, communication from Councillor Suzan Hall to the Parks and Environment Committee, and to provide a summary of information that has been previously presented in an effort to reduce the urban forestry tree maintenance backlog.

The issues raised in Councillor Suzan Hall's letter, with respect to enhancing urban forestry's tree pruning operations and reducing their maintenance backlog have been well documented and requests for additional funding to address the issues have been put forward in recent reports to Committee and Council.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications resulting from this report.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Parks and Environment Committee received a November 5, 2007, communication from Councillor Suzan Hall, where she identifies a number of areas where residents would like to see enhanced tree maintenance. These include pruning to provide clearance from street lighting and hydro lines; removing dead trees that have the potential to fall and cause damage to persons or property; pruning to clear sidewalks for improved mobility and improved sight-lines; and improving the health of trees through proper maintenance. The matter was referred to the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and

Recreation for a report. As the concerns expressed relate to a budget matter, this report has been redirected to the Budget Committee for information.

There are a number of requests put forward by Urban Forestry to reduce the tree maintenance backlog and improve the health of Toronto's urban forest. With the approved funding, improvements to the health of the urban forest and a reduction in the tree maintenance backlog can be realized.

COMMENTS

The issues surrounding enhanced tree maintenance raised in Councillor Suzan Hall's November 5, 2007, communication to the Parks and Environment Committee have been identified as priorities by staff and addressed in previous reports to Committee and Council.

All of the issues raised in Councillor Hall's letter have been discussed and funding to address the issues has been requested in a report titled "City Owned Tree Pruning and Maintenance Strategy," dated September 19, 2007, which was before the Parks and Environment Committee on October 10, 2007. The report can be viewed at the following link and it provides a summary of information that has been presented to document Urban Forestry's efforts towards improving key aspects of its service delivery.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/pe/bgrd/backgroundfile-7187.pdf>

The following table outlines Urban Forestry's 2008 budget requests that are related to reducing the tree maintenance backlog.

Title of Budget Request	Description	Annual Operating Budget Impact (\$000's)	New Positions Required	2008 Operating Budget Impact (\$000's)	2009 Operating Budget Impact (\$000's)	Capital Budget Requested (000's)	Link to Council Report
Operating Impact of Capital - Maintenance of Newly Planted Street Trees - Phase 2	The goal of this program is to have trees pruned when they are young to establish good form, reduce long term pruning requirements and prolong their life.	\$668.2	7	\$502.1	\$166.1	\$1,015.0	http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/council/cc060925/edp6rpt/cl019.pdf
Emergency Storm Damage Reserve Fund	To establish a reserve fund which will provide resources to address the increasing volume of City tree failures and the associated increase in work volume related to severe weather without negatively impacting on the operating budget.	\$5,000.0	0	\$5,000.0			
Tree Hazard Abatement in Ravines	The purpose of this request is to provide funding to inspect ravines and natural areas to remove hazards. Trees represent a significant liability and safety hazard when not maintained in areas of pathways used by the public.	\$1,386.9	3	\$704.7	\$682.2	\$150.0	http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/pe/bgrd/backgroundfile-7857.pdf
Area Tree Maintenance	To perform proactive systematic maintenance of City owned trees moving beyond reactive service.	\$4,234.0	4	\$2,143.0	\$2,091.0	\$90.0	http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2004/agendas/committees/edp/edp041122/it018.pdf
Development and Construction Applications	Additional funding to review applications for construction near trees resulting in a failure to meet legislated tree protection requirements. Additional staff are required for improved by-law enforcement, tree inspection, development application processing and public education.	\$1,165.1	12	\$951.1	\$214.0	\$296.0	http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/council/cc060925/plt6rpt/cl019.pdf

Reducing the tree maintenance backlog is a priority for Urban Forestry. A reduction in wait times for service requests will reduce the frustration regarding timely tree service among Toronto constituents, as well as improve the health of the urban forest. Severe storms encountered in the early part of 2007 required the reallocation of urban forestry resources to emergency work. This resulted in an increase to the tree maintenance backlog.

With the approval of the funding requested in the reports noted above, Urban Forestry can improve service delivery time as it relates to tree maintenance which, in turn, will lead to an overall healthier urban forest.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Brenda Librecz
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Briefing Note – Urban Forestry Emergency Storm Response
(July 5, 2007)

Briefing Note – Urban Forestry Emergency Storm Response as at July 5, 2007

Purpose: To report on Forestry's financial and service delivery impacts associated with tree failures for the 1st and 2nd quarters of 2007.

Financial Implications:

- Cost incurred to date associated with tree failures is \$4,916,000 (\$3,550,000 staff & \$1,366,000 contractors)
- The cost estimate to address emergency response and all follow-up maintenance which must still be performed is \$5,705,880 (\$1,452,000 staff & \$4,253,880 contracted services)
- \$2,190,000 is the potential over expenditure above the allocated budget in 2007. This relates to the current expenditure pattern for emergency related overtime (\$80,000), funding for 4 additional clerks for the remainder of the year to assist with responding to calls from the public and data inputting backlog (\$110,000), and contracted tree maintenance (\$2,000,000).

Service Delivery impact:

- Emergency response results in the deferral of all other work for the Forestry Operations and Data Management Center.
- It is projected that in the absence of additional resources, the current service delay will increase from 2-12 weeks for inspections to 6-16 weeks and from 12 months for tree maintenance to 21 months.

Issue/Background:

- Over 6,000 Service requests have been generated in 2007 related to City tree failures. Most of these failures occurred during storms with high winds on March 1st, June 8th and June 19th. On average there are 2,500 tree failure related service requests generated each year.
- The increase in the number of City tree failures can be linked with the current service delay, deferral of requested additional funding to address service delays, and an increase in the frequency and severity of storms.
- Emergencies commonly include; broken trees/branches that could fail at any time, branches/trees on cars/houses/hydro wires, and branches/trees blocking roads/sidewalks, and driveways.
- Wide scale tree failures associated with storms results in;
 1. Emergency response with associated dramatic increases in overtime and contractor costs
 2. Post emergency follow-up maintenance. On average relative to the number of calls received; 20% result in large tree removals, 65% in large tree pruning, and 85% in follow-up inspections.
 3. Deferral of routine tree maintenance work

Key Points:

- The number of City tree failures YTD is 2.4 times what is normally received in a year. If the current pattern continues the number of City tree failures will be almost 5 times what is normally received in one year.
- Additional funding is required in 2007 in order provide for prompt responses to address emergencies, perform follow-up maintenance and to avoid a dramatic increase to already unacceptable service delays. Without additional funding it is estimated that the volume of tree failures incurred YTD will result in an increase in the service delay by 9 months. Any additional severe storms will result in additional costs and service delays.
- Appropriately skilled tree maintenance contractor resources are limited. The cost estimate for 2007 will require re-tendering and sole sourcing (in order to mitigate public risk in a timely manner).
- Additional clerical staff is required for the data management center in order to deal with the volume of calls from the public and data inputting backlog. Current data backlogs create inefficiencies and poor public service.
- The volume of calls received from the public year to date is almost equal to the total call volume for all of 2006. This dramatic increase in the number of calls is directly linked with the storms that have hit the City. This has had an impact on Forestry's ability to answer calls. The percentage of calls answered has gone from 89% in 2006 to 56% in 2007.
- Previously requested and new funding requests to address service delay and enhanced service levels must be submitted for the 2008 budget process.
- An insufficient resource base to maintain the Urban Forest results in an ever increasing service delay, which is significantly compounded by the impact of storms. The increased service delay results in poor service to the public and increased liability as hazards are not addressed in a timely manner. A significant service delay generates its own volume of work in that there is an ever increasing percentage of repeat calls from the public and politicians demanding to know when the required maintenance will be performed.

Recommendations:

- \$2,190,000 in additional funding be provided to Urban Forestry for the 2007 budget year or authorization to go over budget by the same amount be approved.
- Forestry be authorized to sole source emergency work where it happens on a broad scale over a short period of time.
- A contingency fund be established for future years where the number of emergency calls exceed 2,500.

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Date: **July 5, 2007**