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December 1, 2021

To: Councillor McKelvie and Members of the Environment and Infrastructure Committee

**Re: Environment and Infrastructure Committee Meeting, 2 December, 2021.**

**Item IE26.6 Actions to Reaffirm Toronto's Tree Canopy Target**

The Cliffcrest Scarborough Village SW Residents Association (CSVSWRA) supports actions that will protect, preserve and augment Toronto's existing tree canopy. CSVSWRA is a non-profit organization that works in Wards 20 and 24 in Scarborough. The neighbourhoods where we operate are characterized by generous lots which support mature trees. To bring awareness to the importance of preserving the tree canopy CSVSWRA launched a Tree Ribbon Campaign. This link provides information about our campaign:

<https://cliffcrestscarboroughvillagesw.ca/data/documents/FINAL-CSVSWRA-Tree-Ribbon-Campaign-Poster-with-impbedded-map-link.pdf>

Our neighbourhoods are also targets of significant growth and development, and specifically by developers who routinely apply for minor variances to push the limits with oversized houses.

Everyone is well aware that there is a worldwide climate crisis. Municipalities which do not maintain a healthy tree canopy are the major contributors to the destabilization of global temperatures. Every municipality is well aware that a healthy urban tree canopy mitigates and helps to control our global increasing temperature. A healthy and growing urban tree canopy will:

- reduce and prevent flooding
- clean and purify migratory ground water
- reduce the heat island effect
- control pollution
- stabilize slopes and prevent erosion in areas of water migration
- reduce heating and cooling of buildings and structures
- reduce energy consumption

- beneficial for the mental health of members of the community
- contribute to healthy business environments and improves the value of properties
- lastly, but most importantly, provide us with clean air to breathe.

Unfortunately, oversized development comes at the expense of the tree canopy. Unscrupulous developers have no qualms in cutting down mature trees without permits. The paltry fines are considered the cost of doing business. These activities often occur on weekends and holidays when it is impossible to reach inspectors. Over and over again at Scarborough Committee of Adjustment hearings, residents plead for refusal of applications because beloved mature trees will be destroyed to make way for someone's "dream home".

These applications are almost always approved despite Toronto's Official Plan Chapter 3:

*d) new development will be located and organized to fit with its existing and/or planned context. It will frame and support adjacent streets, parks and open spaces to improve the safety, pedestrian interest and casual views to these spaces from the development by:*

*ii) Preserving existing mature trees wherever possible and incorporating them into landscaping designs (3.1.2 Policy 1)*

Toronto's Strategic Forest Management Plan 2012-2022, includes expanding the forest canopy from 28%-30% to 40%. This plan indicates:

*"One of the fundamental aspects of increasing tree canopy coverage across the city is protection of the existing resource. Tree protection is currently accomplished through implementation of various tree and natural feature protection by-laws which provide opportunities to educate the public on the benefits of trees. Efforts to protect trees need to be improved." (Executive Summary p. xi)*

Toronto declared a climate emergency in 2017; in October 2020, Mayor John Tory accepted the Champion of Trees Award on behalf of the City of Toronto from the Arbour Day Foundation. This prestigious award should come with a responsibility to the City's existing tree canopy.

CSVSWRA recommends the following:

- The Graffiti bylaw makes the property owner responsible for its removal. Our trees deserve the same protection as buildings. The property owner needs to be responsible for ensuring their trees are healthy and not destroyed and fined where deliberate damage occurs;
- Implement a system of fines for removal of trees that extends beyond user fees and cost recovery. Some developers and property owners will continue their unscrupulous activities without significant deterrents;
- Explore tree fines in other jurisdictions. For example, some progressive European countries have implemented a fine system based on the overall income of an individual or business.

- Mature trees which are not hazardous, invasive or in decline, should be given protection and precedence over applications which require injury or removal of healthy trees. Design and development applications should adapt to the environment of the subject site. A talented designer can easily adapt architectural plans to accommodate mature trees. The site should not be subjected to plans which deem the site “carte blanche”.
- Tree protection should not only be augmented to the part of the tree above ground but also to the roots below the ground. Too many healthy trees are killed slowly by construction activities which ignore the proper requirements for root zone protection. Site remediation should be required to restore and replenish all development sites to a proper, healthy, growing environment.
- Inspectors need to be immediately available to investigate incidents and respond in a preventative manner. The current response time is inadequate. Contravention inspections taking 24 and 48 hours to complete are too long and do not protect trees.
- Require an annual report from Forestry listing the number of tree destruction permits issued, types of trees destroyed and reason for the request by ward;
- Make it mandatory for tree size, species and location to be identified on all submitted plans for minor variance applications. Applications which do not comply will be deemed incomplete. The members of the Committees of Adjustment do not place adequate weight on the value of mature trees, and need to be trained on the tree references in Chapter Three of the Official Plan, since one of the four tests for minor variance approval is that the intent and purpose of the Official Plan be maintained.
- Minor variance applications that involve destruction of mature trees need to be refused, if the City of Toronto is truly committed to resolving the climate emergency.

We urge the members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee to strengthen and enforce tree protections to preserve and promote our City’s Tree Canopy.

Sincerely,

Cliffcrest Scarborough Village SW Residents Association

Janet May, Director

Yvonne Di Tulio, Director

Marina Tadenc, Director

Tony Lombardi, Director

Alan Burt, Director

Tom Kasanda, Director

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