

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

June 19, 2006

To: Economic Development and Parks Committee

From: Brenda Librecz, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Subject: Progress Report on Initiatives to Improve the Urban Forest
All Wards

Purpose:

To report on progress that is being made to improve the urban forest and to present information about new initiatives which will assist Urban Forestry in meeting objectives.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

(1) in order to achieve one tree in front of every dwelling, the Committee of Adjustment be requested to impose a condition requiring that; on consent applications to create a new lot and on minor variance applications to permit construction of a new dwelling unit (e.g. detached, semi-detached, townhouse, etc.), where no street tree exists, the owner shall provide payment in an amount to cover the cost of planting a street tree abutting the site to the satisfaction of the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation;

(2) the following policy statement be endorsed:

“The City of Toronto has implemented by-laws to protect trees on both public and private lands in recognition of the multitude of social, economic and environmental benefits trees provide and as a means of protecting and enhancing the City’s natural heritage. Through its Official Plan policies and various tree protection by-laws, the City of Toronto has demonstrated its desire and intent to protect healthy trees. In particular, the City recognizes that long-lived, large-growing, tree species are an important component of a

healthy, diverse urban forest. These trees are therefore regarded and recognized as a priority for protection and staff will work in communities to encourage responsible development that protects these and other significant trees.”

- (3) the appropriate City Officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

Through various policies, programs and initiatives, the City of Toronto has consistently demonstrated a commitment to protecting and enhancing the urban forest. Among the most recent expression of this commitment was the passing of the harmonized citywide Private Tree By-Law by City Council at its meeting held on September 28, 29, 30 and October 1, 2004.

City Council at its meeting held on July 20, 21, 22, 2004, approved “Our Common Grounds”, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Strategic Plan which included, among other things, an identification of long-term goals and objectives and recommendations for action aimed at achieving objectives. Our goal is to expand the tree canopy from 17 percent to 30 to 40 percent.

Later, City Council at its meeting held October 26, 27, 28, 2004, approved the recommendations of the Service Improvement Priorities report, which puts the recommendations in “Our Common Grounds” into action. In approving the 2005 and 2006 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating and Capital Budgets, City Council provided the means by which Urban Forestry could begin to advance its objectives in the areas of increased tree planting and additional tree maintenance to reduce tree service delays. This report provides an update on progress that is currently being made in the Urban Forest.

Comments:

Work has been underway on many fronts towards protecting existing trees and the collective tree canopy that makes up the urban forest, improving conditions that are conducive to healthy tree growth and development, and increasing public awareness about the importance of the urban forest and the role individuals can play in keeping it healthy. This work cannot and is not being done in isolation as many City Divisions have a role in achieving an enhanced and sustainable urban forest. The following highlights some of the activities that are ongoing.

1. Collaborative Partnership Activities

Asian Long-horned Beetle Eradication Program:

The Asian Long-Horned Beetle (ALHB), which is native to Asia, was discovered in Toronto and Vaughan on September 8, 2003. This was the first and remains the only confirmed infestation in Canada. ALHB is a serious wood-boring insect pest of hardwood trees including all species of maple, horse chestnut, birch, poplar, elm, willow, London plane, hackberry and mountain ash. ALHB spends most of its life cycle as larvae inside the bole and branches of susceptible trees, where it creates tunnels that eventually kill the tree. Unlike many other Canadian long-horned

beetles that feed on dying or dead trees, ALHB attacks and kills healthy trees. There are no known controls in North America or Asia and infested trees must be removed and destroyed to prevent the spread of beetles.

Since its discovery, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) together with the City of Toronto, City of Vaughan and other federal, provincial and municipal partners implemented an aggressive campaign to control and eradicate this unwanted pest. The response team which was coordinated by the CFIA and is led by the City of Toronto includes management, administrative and field staff from all partners. On February 13, 2004, an Asian Long-Horned Beetle Infested Place Order was signed under the authority of the Plant Protection Act and Regulations, to define the ALHB Regulated Area. The quarantined area which was established is bounded by Highways 401/409, Highway 27, Rutherford Road, and Dufferin Street/William R. Allen Road. Under the Ministerial Order, the movement of woody material out of or through this area is regulated and requires a Movement Certificate issued by the CFIA.

To prevent the spread of ALHB, more than 15,000 trees were removed from the quarantined area in Toronto and Vaughan between November 2003 and March 2004. An additional 12,000 trees were removed in 2005 from residential, commercial and industrial properties, including a cemetery. A total of 9,935 trees were removed in Toronto, of which 1,553 were on City property and 8,382 were on private property. Approximately 450 replacement trees have been planted so far this year on City property in addition to over 1,300 trees that were planted in 2004 and 2005. Replacement tree planting will continue in future in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the CFIA. Trees planted are non-host species to the ALHB and the resulting diversity of species being planted in the area will make this area one of the most diverse areas in Toronto's urban forest.

The staff assigned to the ALHB project are highly skilled in the eradication of the ALHB. Of the 58 people that are currently assigned to the ALHB project, 24 are Urban Forestry staff. The knowledge and information that has been gained in the past few years through the detection and eradication efforts has been invaluable and has contributed to better understanding of the ALHB. Urban Forestry continues to be a very active and leading participant in the development of the first national Training Guide on Detecting Signs and Symptoms of ALHB and on the development of the Canadian Emergency Response Guide. These resources, once published, will be recognized by the national forestry community and will greatly increase the chances for early detection, successful eradication and prevention of further spread of the beetle.

In 2004, Urban Forestry was part of a team that received the Ontario Federal Council's "Leadership Through Collaboration Award" in recognition of its contribution to the Emerald Ash Borer and ALHB Response Teams. As documented in a previous report to the June 12, 2006, meeting of the Economic Development and Parks Committee, the Urban Forestry Branch is once again being honoured with an award from the Ontario Federal Council. The Urban Forestry Branch is part of a Collaborative Science Group for Insect Eradication which also includes the CFIA, the Canadian Forest Service, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the University of Toronto and the United States Department of Agriculture. This group was recently awarded the 3rd Annual "Leadership in Science and Sustainable Development Award" in recognition of their

emergency eradication plan to control the spread of the ALHB. It was indeed an honour to have the co-operative work of the team recognized.

Commitment to eradication of the beetle remains strong and staff continue to work at a highly productive and efficient level in cooperation with the CFIA to perform ground and aerial surveillance monitoring for the beetle. The program has been recognized nationally as a success with an achievable target of full eradication.

Standards and Design Issues:

Work in consultation with other divisions and agencies is underway with a view to improving conditions for tree planting and establishment. For example, work is ongoing in consultation with Technical Services, Transportation, Urban Design, Toronto Public Utilities Co-ordinating Committee (TPUCC), and the Trees and Parks sub-committee of the Round Table on a Beautiful City to develop improved designs for commercial street tree planting to increase growth and life expectancy of trees. Forestry staff actively contribute to the TPUCC and its various committees to ensure that standards for utility placement and integration in the right of way do not prevent future planting and healthy growth of trees.

Staff are also mindful of the need to manage wet weather flow. Streets and tree planting designs that give consideration to reducing storm water runoff are developed in collaboration with Toronto Water and Urban Design. Urban Forestry agrees that many environmental benefits can be achieved by increasing infiltration and controlling the runoff of rain and snow melt water to storm drains.

The Inter-Divisional Tree Committee includes Urban Forestry, City Planning (Policy and Research and Urban Design), Transportation, Toronto Water, Technical Services and Public Health. This team collaborates on policy matters and on efforts to ensure that Divisional objectives are mutually supportive with respect to expanding the urban forest canopy. Opportunities to improve communication of initiatives among Divisions and to promote and link mutually compatible initiatives and programs to the public and community at large are being reviewed.

In addition, Urban Forestry has participated in development of the "Toronto Green Development Standards 2006". The Toronto Green Development Standards details principles, targets and practices for site and building design aimed at encouraging more "green" development in the City. The document encourages innovative development and identifies, among other things, core or minimum requirements that a development must meet to reach the Standard. Urban Forestry will continue to support City Planning as it leads this initiative to undertake further work to refine the standards that will guide future development.

2. Urban Forestry Service Improvements

Tree Service Delay:

Urban Forestry's tree maintenance service delivery is prioritized in order to mitigate public risk and reduce liability. Service is directed firstly to control or eliminate hazards; secondly to the oldest work orders; and thirdly to grouping work in local geographic areas with a goal of minimizing travel time. Through the Divisional review of service priorities in 2004, it was widely apparent that in order to reduce the tree service delay, additional operating funds were required.

Of the \$3.2 million annual Operating Budget increase that was requested in 2005, City Council awarded an increase of about \$1 million in additional operating funds for the purpose of shortening the wait time for service delivery. An implementation team was established with a distinct mandate to focus on completing the oldest work orders as a first priority. As well, a number of changes were made to improve the effectiveness of our Urban Forestry staff and the way in which we contract external tree service providers. Specifically, changes to our request for quotation were made, which refined the requirements for tree services and allowed flexibility of crew and equipment configurations. In addition, these refinements enabled services to be obtained at varying rates for work done at different times of the year. The contract changes enabled Urban Forestry to increase the number of work orders completed.

Of the \$2.2 million which had been annualized as an increase for the 2006 Operating Budget, Urban Forestry received \$1 million in operating funds to continue with this initiative.

The program has shown great results and our tree service delay was reduced significantly from over an 18-month backlog to a 9-month backlog. Thousands of work orders dating as far back as 2000 were completed. However, wind storms in 2005 and 2006 generated a large number of work orders with hazard priorities. As a result, the tree service delay has rebounded to 12 months. The implementation team continues to work toward a targeted objective of reducing the service delay to 6 months which could be achieved if additional funding that has been requested is added in the 2007 Urban Forestry Operating Budget.

Tree Planting:

The amount of tree planting that is occurring under the direction of Urban Forestry has greatly increased since 2000, when the Tree Advocacy Program was first initiated to promote the importance of trees. The program seeks to leave a legacy of trees for future generations by initiating tree planting along City streets, arterial roads, neighbourhood parks and in ravines. Since its inception, the Tree Advocacy Planting Program has planted over 300,000 trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants at over 250 locations across the City. In 2006, the Tree Advocacy Program will provide about 1,112 large calliper trees, and 12,285 smaller trees and shrubs. In addition, community volunteers will plant about 15,000 trees and shrubs as part of the Parkland Naturalization Program and Trees Across Toronto events, with funding provided through the Tree Advocacy Program and other sources.

Urban Forestry will also plant over 8,600 trees and shrubs on City boulevards, in residential neighbourhoods, along arterial roads and in naturalized plantings near stream headwaters using Capital funds that have been assigned to Urban Forestry by Toronto Water and Transportation Services. Of these 8,600 trees and shrubs, approximately 3,200 are large calliper trees and the rest are smaller trees and shrubs. This effort focuses on large growing species that will grow to enhance tree canopy in all areas planted.

Each year Urban Forestry will also plant approximately 6,000 to 8,000 bare root trees on public right of ways along residential streets. In addition, approximately 1,200 large calliper trees are scheduled for planting on streets to replace dead or declining street trees in commercial areas. In conjunction with the planting of these street trees in commercial areas, a watering and maintenance program has also been implemented.

Natural Resource Management staff plant about 7,500 trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants as part of Urban Forestry's annual ravine restoration and management efforts. This planting is in addition to site monitoring and specialized maintenance activities such as the control of invasive, non-native vegetation aimed at improving the ecological health of the City's ravines and forests.

In 2006, Urban Forestry will plant about 13,000 large trees and 40,000 smaller trees and shrubs. Through the Private Tree By-law and Ravine Protection By-law, conditions of permit approval include the requirement to plant many more trees on privately owned lands. Also, approved planning applications generally require trees to be planted on streetscapes. The goal to increase tree canopy coverage from 17 percent to 30 to 40 percent will require significantly more planting in future years. Efforts to date coupled with sustained funding for this important work are imperative to achieve increased canopy. Excellent progress has been made since 2000 when the major tree planting initiatives were started.

3. New Policy Initiatives

The City's Interest in Protecting and Preserving Large-Growing, Mature Trees:

With the adoption of a harmonized city-wide Private Tree By-Law, City Council made a progressive and proactive decision to help ensure that the City of Toronto retains its reputation as being the "City of Trees" that it is known for throughout the world. Experiences at recent OMB hearings have demonstrated that statements regarding trees and the urban forest that are contained in the Environmental Plan and the new Official Plan, together with the Private Tree By-Law, have been beneficial in demonstrating the importance of trees to the City's natural and built environments and City Council's desire to protect trees in general. However, a clear policy statement adopted by City Council relative to its interest in protecting and preserving large, mature trees would be a significant added benefit in underscoring the City's interest with respect to significant trees. It is therefore recommended that the following policy statement be endorsed.

"The City of Toronto has implemented by-laws to protect trees on both public and private lands in recognition of the multitude of social, economic and environmental benefits trees provide and as a means of protecting and enhancing the City's natural heritage. Through its Official Plan policies and various tree protection by-laws, the City of Toronto has demonstrated its desire and

intent to protect healthy trees. In particular, the City recognizes that long-lived, large-growing, tree species are an important component of a healthy, diverse urban forest. These trees are therefore regarded and recognized as a priority for protection and staff will work in communities to encourage responsible development that protects these and other significant trees.”

Harmonized Mechanism to Secure Additional Tree Planting on Residential Streets:

The City’s Official Plan calls for an increase in tree cover throughout the City over the next 30 years. In addition, “Our Common Grounds” proposes to increase tree canopy cover across the City from its current level of 17 per cent to 30 to 40 per cent. The Strategic Plan acknowledges that in order to achieve this, action is needed on several fronts. Among other things, the number of trees planted each year must increase, favourable conditions for tree growth to maturity must be maintained or created and residents need to be informed about what to do to protect and grow trees to maturity.

Every year thousands of trees are planted on public property in the City of Toronto. Thousands of trees are planted each year along our streets, in parks and in naturalization areas through forest management programs. The opportunity exists however to achieve increased tree planting on residential streets.

Additional tree planting can be accomplished on the public right of way through the mandatory planting of trees for infill projects. The former City of North York had a policy in place which required “that if no tree exists on the City portion of the boulevard where a new single family home is being developed, the builder/owner shall be required to provide one before the building is signed off”. Staff have taken the initiative in Scarborough District to encourage the planting of trees adjacent to properties that are the subject of Committee of Adjustment (C of A) applications. Currently, where Urban Forestry staff have the opportunity to provide comments to the C of A on a Minor Variance or Consent application, staff will include (where applicable) a request that the applicant provide payment for the planting of a new tree within the road allowance fronting the property should the C of A application be approved.

The General Manager has clear authority under *Municipal Code Chapter 813 Article II*, to plant or cause the planting of trees on City streets. The planting of street trees in residential areas has traditionally been successful where adjacent property owners have voluntarily requested the planting of a tree. Urban Forestry feels that this approach continues to be reasonable where there are existing residences and staff endeavour to increase public awareness of our residential street tree planting program. However, where new home construction is planned in existing established residential areas, and where the new home is not subject to review under the development review process, the City’s approach to achieving street tree planting needs to be more proactive. An aggressive tree planting initiative associated with residential infill development projects would be consistent with current practices associated with projects that undergo development review (i.e., Site Plan, Zoning and Official Plan Amendment applications, etc.).

Urban Forestry and C of A staff have been working together for the past several years to develop standard conditions which will assist in achieving increased tree cover through applications for Consent and Minor Variance. It is recommended that the current practice of requiring one (1) tree per new lot to be created or new dwelling to be constructed be endorsed and implemented city wide.

Harmonized Citywide Private Tree By-law:

When the harmonized citywide Private Tree By-Law was passed by City Council in September 2004, City Council requested the submission of several staff reports to address, among other matters, effectiveness of the Private Tree By-Law and related application processing performance measures; feasibility of adjusting the staffing plan so that new positions associated with the by-law would be seasonal and a rebate program for planting trees on private property. These and other matters will be the subject of a staff report to be submitted to Economic Development and Parks Committee early in the new year.

Conclusions:

Parks, Forestry and Recreation's goal is to manage the urban forest to develop a sustainable urban forest ecosystem which provides long-term environmental, social and economic benefits. The initiatives identified in this report are only some of the activities that are currently underway to protect and enhance the urban forest. Work is ongoing in many areas and opportunities for collaboration with other stakeholders who share an interest in achieving the City's greening objectives are pursued whenever possible.

This report was prepared in consultation with City Planning.

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