Urban Nature Consultants
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Dedicated to the restoration of urban vegetation

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Councillor Norm Kelly
Chair, Parks and Environment Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West, Suite C43
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

March 23, 2012

Dear Councillor Kelly:

I am writing in response to your telephone call of Saturday March 3, 2012 asking me to make a presentation to the Parks and Environment Committee for the City of Toronto. You thought that the information about the Tree Inventory Seminars we are conducting in Toronto from April 19-30, 2012 was important and should be more widely disseminated.

Tree Inventories are believed to be the cornerstone of good urban forest management plans for both maintenance and planting strategies. They are currently being undertaken and used by many municipalities in New York, Boston, and Denmark.

Let me give you just one example of why a Tree Inventory is important, using a Toronto-centric example. As you know from your last Committee meeting, the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) is forcing the removal of some 860,000 infected Ash trees from Toronto's tree canopy. Why so many? Current thinking is that many municipalities planted too many trees of the same species resulting in large areas of monocultures. In Toronto the EAB has found a suitable host in Ash trees and is decimating them. There was a similar situation with the Dutch Elm Bark Beetle some years ago that wiped out most of Toronto's Elm trees. Tree Inventories would clearly show that communities have over-planted the same species such as Norway Maple, Silver Maple or Ash trees.

With a Tree Inventory completed, the community together with the Urban Forestry Department could begin to analyse the data and strategically plan future planting plans. Each community could begin to create their own biodiverse section of our urban forest. Then if an insect or disease came through, it would only destroy a small percentage of host trees and others would be spared.

Another advantage of a Tree Inventory is that it allows communities to refine their planting plants to include native trees and/or exotics that flourish in our harsh urban conditions. Native trees, as you well know, are the ones that feed our birds and other wildlife and keep our ecosystem strong and healthy.

Tree Inventories can be carried out by volunteers organized and trained in their community. A complete inventory and the speed at which it is carried out depend on the number of volunteers signing up: we find people are only too willing to get involved. The data the volunteers collect can be used by Toronto's Urban Forestry Department to create a complete up-to-date picture of the structure of their urban forest, community by community. This would constitute a new paradigm of the city working with communities.

This type of community engagement is a model that needs to be developed as never before due to depleting resources. Members of each community have invested heavily in their neighbourhoods, and desire them to be the greenest and healthiest places in which to live, raise children and care for their elderly. The trees in our urban tree canopy increase the well-being of the people living beneath them, and can increase real estate values by as much as 15%. A Tree Inventory is a great investment in Toronto's future.

I look forward to meeting you and your Committee and making a presentation on the value of Tree Inventories to the great City of Toronto.

Yours sincerely,

Maria Muszynska
Urban Nature Consultants