



October 15, 2012

Dear Members of the Parks and Environment Committee,

The staff report "Wood Waste – Opportunities for Cost Recovery", which you have before you today, states that the city has awarded two 'offers to purchase' for wood produced by urban forest operations. The first award only generated \$70 in revenue, but saved approximately \$4,200 in tub grinding costs. Another was recently awarded, which is projected to generate \$10,000 in revenue by year end, with a corresponding reduction in tub grinding expenditure of \$5,920. Although these amounts are modest, this is still a good news story. We're starting to turn something that was previously considered expensive waste into a product with potential for cost savings and revenue generation.

Urban Forestry plans to put out more of these 'offers to purchase', but the current demand for our wood is low. There are barriers to harvesting urban wood for higher end uses. It tends to be variable in species, quality and shape, unlike wood sourced from wood lots which are designed to be harvested (one species, straight lines, straight trunks, etc.). And most mills are located far from urban centres making transportation costs high. Urban wood has not traditionally been captured and used. But times are changing and capturing this 'new' resource is something that could save municipalities millions of dollars.

Over the next 10 to 15 years it's estimated that Toronto will lose almost all of its 860,000 ash trees to Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). York Region will lose an estimated 2.8 million ash trees. Across Ontario and other provinces, there are billions more.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), which is responsible for preventing pests of quarantine significance from entering or spreading within Canada, has placed restrictions on movement of wood and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has provided some assistance for detection, research and education on EAB. However, despite repeated requests from affected municipalities, federal and provincial governments are providing no financial assistance to affected municipalities to off-set the costs of dealing with EAB.

So municipalities are left with the burden of removal and replacement of millions of dead or dying trees, scrounging around in their existing budgets to find the money to deal with this problem. In Toronto, we're facing the possibility of delaying the timeframe to reach our established tree canopy goals by seven years. The important work of protection, pro-active maintenance and planting may be put on hold. And we're even looking at the possibility of raiding other important environmental initiatives, like the Sustainable Energy Revolving Loan Fund, to pay for the increased costs of managing EAB. We shouldn't have to do this.

With every municipality in Ontario facing the challenges and costs of Emerald Ash Borer, shouldn't the provincial and federal governments be stepping up to help overcome these barriers? If we could both reduce the cost of grinding and disposing of the wood, and actually earn revenue from the sale of the wood, we could offset the cost of dealing with EAB. And we could capture and better use a valuable wood resource that would otherwise be wasted. Imagine if, in the process, we could support local business development, provide training and



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employment experience for young people and produce local wood products. This is an economic development opportunity and it's NOT one that will disappear after EAB has passed through. We will continue to have a supply of urban wood and wouldn't it make economic sense to create a market for that product, recouping some of the costs of protecting, maintaining and growing our urban forest?

I urge this committee to ask Toronto City Council to join with other municipalities and the provincial and federal governments to find creative ways to capture and use the valuable product of urban wood. If direct funding to deal with EAB is not forthcoming from higher levels of government, then perhaps other creative partnerships could be forged. Federal and provincial funding programs do exist for business development, innovation and training. Shouldn't some of that money be directed toward urban wood recovery programs? Are there opportunities to incent more local milling and woodworking operations, increasing the demand for urban wood? Can all three levels of government work together to turn the crisis of EAB into an opportunity? If funding and/or subsidies were available, there would be interest from the private sector, education/training institutions, community economic development groups and environmental organizations.

I realize that making this happen will take a group of strong advocates leading the effort. I don't have the answer as to how to make it happen, but I do have some ideas on where to start. Joining with other municipalities will make for a much stronger voice. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario could be a powerful lobbying body. The Green Municipal Fund of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities could be approached. Perhaps some provincial champions could be found in Brad Duguid, Minister of Economic Development and Innovation (Scarborough Centre), Kathleen Wynne, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (North Toronto) and Glen Murray, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities (Toronto Centre). The provincial ministries of Environment and Energy and the federal ministries of Industry, Natural Resources and Environment should also play a role.

Over the next 15 years we will be faced with a massive volume of harvested urban wood. The vast majority of that will be considered waste and will cost taxpayers millions of dollars for disposal. I'm urging this committee to identify innovate partnerships that will not only reduce costs and generate revenue for city budgets, but will also create programs for urban wood capture that will turn this EAB crisis into an innovative economic development opportunity for our city and our province.

Sincerely,

Janet McKay  
Executive Director