

## **Review of Urban Forestry - Ensuring Value for Money for Tree Maintenance Services**

**Date:** April 26, 2019  
**To:** Audit Committee  
**From:** Auditor General  
**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

---

The Auditor General has completed her audit of Urban Forestry and provided two audit reports. The first audit report was issued in June 2018 relating to the permit issuance and tree by-law enforcement function. This second audit report focuses on the tree planting and maintenance services.

The key findings from the audit report are:

Urban Forestry requires each contractor and City crew to complete a daily log detailing the maintenance work performed and all other work-related activities within their eight-hour shift. The daily logs serve as the proof of work performed by the crews, and Urban Forestry pays the contractors according to work hours reported in their daily logs. Part of our audit included a comparison of the daily logs with the contractor crews' vehicle Global Positioning System (GPS) reports. We could not conduct the same comparative analysis for City crews because Urban Forestry's vehicles are not equipped with a GPS system.

We compared a sample of 45 contractor crews' daily logs with their vehicle GPS records and noted 28 of them contain one or both of the following issues:

- Crews' vehicles did not stop near the tree service locations.
- Vehicles went to locations that were not related to the assigned tree service locations (e.g., coffee shops, plazas, residential houses, streets with no trees), and these locations were not noted in their daily logs. The total time spent at these locations far exceeded the allowable 60 minutes for lunch and breaks.

This could mean that part of the 8-hour work paid by the City was not spent on City work related activities. The estimated potential loss in productivity is approximately \$2.6 million per year.

Also, if an inaccurate maintenance record is created for a tree in Urban Forestry's system, this could have adverse long-term effects because it may be at least another seven years before the tree receives the next scheduled maintenance.

After deducting the average time spent on supporting activities, the on-site tree maintenance time for the 28 contractor crews' daily logs averaged 4.5 hours, of which 1.7 reported work hours were not supported by the GPS reports, leaving only 2.8 hours for tree maintenance work for the City.

We reviewed a sample of 139 daily logs from the City and contractor crews and noted 57 logs (41 per cent) have missing data or contain entries that should have been questioned. While some of these entries might be valid, none of them were identified by the Foreperson's review.

This report provides 10 recommendations to help Urban Forestry improve its contract management, customer service and operational efficiency for its tree planting and maintenance programs.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

---

The Auditor General recommends that:

1. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to take the necessary steps to ensure the City only pays for legitimate tree maintenance work that has been performed by contractor crews in accordance with the contractual terms. Such steps should include, but not be limited to, a regular review of a sample of contractor crews' Daily Work Activity Reports (daily logs) with the Global Positioning System (GPS) reports to:

- a. identify questionable records
- b. follow up on the discrepancies
- c. identify high-risk crews for further review and follow-up.

2. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to consider installing a Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking system on the vehicles used by Urban Forestry staff for tree maintenance activities.

3. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to require supervisory staff to conduct thorough reviews of Daily Work Activity Report (daily logs) from both City crews and contractor crews to identify duplicated and questionable tree maintenance activities.

4. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to improve the effectiveness of on-site and quality control inspections for monitoring daily tree maintenance work by City and contractor crews by:

- a. ensuring compliance with the required minimum inspection numbers in all regional offices
- b. ensuring inspections are conducted by staff on a surprise basis
- c. performing random on-site inspections at different times of a work day.

5. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to review the time spent by tree maintenance crews on supporting activities with a view to maximizing the actual onsite tree maintenance time. Consideration should be given to:

- a. undertaking steps to reduce time spent on moving or towing parked vehicles on streets obstructing the scheduled tree maintenance activities
- b. assessing the feasibility of installing a woodchip compound in more City yards to reduce driving time for wood disposal
- c. assessing ways to reduce wait time for crews at the City yards, particularly at the end of each shift.

6. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to assess whether the new system procedure is effective in minimizing unnecessary maintenance work performed by City and contractor crews on trees that are still under warranty.

7. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to further improve the compliance levels with tree planting and maintenance service standards. Steps to be taken should include regular review of exception reports by management to identify the outstanding service requests and requests that remain open near the end of the service standard period.

8. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to systematically and accurately track all necessary service request data for the arterial road and park tree planting programs, including recording of all incoming requests and request dates, and analyze the data to accurately assess compliance with the service standards.

9. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to take the necessary steps to ensure City trees removed by Urban Forestry are replanted where suitable. Such steps should include, but not be limited to:

a. periodic reviews of tree removal records in conjunction with tree planting records to identify missed tree replacements

b. ensuring that the new Work Management System has the ability to automatically generate a planting service request or at least flag a planting opportunity when a City tree has been removed.

10. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to further expand its efforts to coordinate and consolidate tree planting activities and contracts with other divisions and agencies and corporations, where feasible.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

---

The implementation of recommendations in this report will help Urban Forestry improve its contract management, customer services and operational efficiency, which will likely result in savings from its tree maintenance services. The precise financial impacts from implementing the recommendations in this report are not determinable at this time.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

---

The Auditor General included an audit of the Urban Forestry in her 2017 Audit Work Plan. The first part of the audit was issued in June 2018 and it focused on permit issuance and tree by-law enforcement function:

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/au/bgrd/backgroundfile-117956.pdf>

The objective of this second part of the audit was to assess whether Urban Forestry has adequate systems and procedures in place to plant and maintain trees effectively and efficiently.

## **COMMENTS**

---

A high level summary of the key audit findings are provided in the one-page Audit at a Glance.

The attached audit report provides the Audit Committee and members of Council with the detailed audit results and recommendations together with management's response. Management has agreed to all 10 recommendations.

## **CONTACT**

---

Jane Ying, Assistant Auditor General, Auditor General's Office

Tel: 416-392-8480, Fax 416-392-3754. E-mail: [Jane.Ying@toronto.ca](mailto:Jane.Ying@toronto.ca)

Celia Yeung, Senior Audit Manager, Auditor General's Office

Tel: 416-392-8462, Fax 416-392-3754. E-mail: [Celia.Yeung@toronto.ca](mailto:Celia.Yeung@toronto.ca)

## **SIGNATURE**

---

Beverly Romeo-Beehler  
Auditor General

## **ATTACHMENT**

---

Attachment 1: Review of Urban Forestry - Ensuring Value for Money for Tree Maintenance Services